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Opening extract from

Playlist for a Broken Heart

Written by

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Chapter One

'Here we go,' whispered Allegra.

I held my breath and waited for Mr Collins, our drama teacher, to read out who had got parts in the end-of-year play. Everyone who'd auditioned was standing near the wooden stage in the school hall. It smelt of beeswax and lavender from the polish used by the cleaners who'd started the evening clear up behind us. Please, please let me get Juliet, I prayed.

I'd been rehearsing for weeks with my friend, Allegra, reading all the other parts so I could get it just right. She's a good mate and knows that it means a lot to me. I've come so close to getting a lead role in school productions before but never quite made it – always the bridesmaid, never the bride sort of thing. I

also have an ulterior motive for wanting the lead female role this time and that is that I'm pretty sure that Alex Taylor, love of my life, though he doesn't know it yet, will probably play Romeo.

Everyone thinks it's in the bag that he'll get it because apart from being a good actor, he's classically good looking with soft brown hair that curls at his shoulder. If he gets the part, whoever plays opposite him will get to spend a lot of time with him. Normally I am not boy mad like Allegra and so many other girls my age. I think there's more to life than drooling over some stupid boy but Alex is different. He's clever and motivated and just thinking about the scenes where Romeo and Juliet have to kiss makes my toes curl. So please, please let Alex Taylor get the part of Romeo.

Mr Collins glanced over our group, all of us ready to put on a cheerful face if we didn't get a part.

'Romeo. Alex Taylor,' he read. Alex, who was standing in front of me to the right, punched the air and grinned. I felt a rush of excitement – so far so good. Allegra glanced over and gave me the thumbs up.

'Juliet. Paige Lord.'

Ohmigod. I'd got it! I felt elated and relieved at the same time. All that hard work had been worth it.

'Yay,' exclaimed Allegra and gave me a hug. I felt myself blush as everyone turned to look, even more so when Alex glanced round to see who I was. I immediately looked at the floor and cursed that I didn't have the nerve to look him in the eye and hold his gaze, the way an article about how to flirt in last week's *Teen Vogue* had advised. Make the connection, it had said. Look him in the eye that moment too long and when you feel a charge of electricity, hold it another few moments and then look away. So I've blown that, I thought.

Up until today, I don't think Alex has even noticed me despite me accidentally-on-purpose walking past him a million times in the corridor. It's the only place I see him because he's in Year Twelve and I'm in Year Ten and the sixth formers have their own common room. But all that is about to change. Now that we're playing the lead roles, he has no choice but to notice me. We'll be acting the parts of one of the most famous romantic couples in history. We'll be rehearsing together for months, up until the performance just before we break up for the summer. I call that a result with a capital R.

When Allegra and I left school later, I was on cloud nine. It had been an excellent day. Besides

hearing that I'd got the part of Juliet, some pieces from my art project had been chosen to hang in the reception hall. I'd been working on a series of portraits from some photographs I'd taken on the London streets over the Christmas holidays. On top of that, I'd got an A star for an English essay, and the cherry on the cake was that, after Mr Collins' announcement about the parts, Jason Rice, who would be Tybalt in the play, had suggested that the whole cast get together over the Easter holidays for a party at his house. My future had never looked brighter and it felt like I was about to embark on an exciting new chapter in my life.

'I knew you'd get it,' said Allegra. 'With your long dark hair and brown eyes, you have an Italian look. And you're tall like Alex so you'll look good together. Plus – don't take this the wrong way – you have a sort of innocence about you that I think worked in your favour too.'

'I have a sort of innocence about me because I am innocent! Not that I want to be. I mean, it's pathetic really. Fifteen and never had a proper boyfriend, unlike you, Miss Experienced.'

'You just haven't met the right boy. Playing opposite Romeo will be a good place to start, and for

someone who's shy like you it will be the perfect opportunity to get some confidence,' said Allegra. She was much more savvy about relationships than I was. Slim but curvy, blonde and cool, she attracted boys while I stood by, feeling tongue-tied and awkward. It was weird. I was fine if I was acting because it wasn't really me, so I didn't clam up like I did when I had to speak to boys in normal life. Acting a part in a play was like wearing a mask that I could hide behind.

'It will, won't it? It's a great chance to get in with Alex. Life would be perfect if Mum and Dad would sort out whatever it is that's been bugging them,' I said as we waited in the car park for her mum to pick us up. There had been a weird atmosphere at home lately, which of course I'd told Allegra all about because I had to talk to someone about it.

'How's that going?' Allegra asked. 'Still no idea what it's about?'

'The only thing I can think of that makes sense is that they're getting divorced,' I replied. I'd known that something was wrong with my parents for a few months though nothing had been said. Dad had been more absent than usual and then quiet when he was home, whereas Mum was acting cheerful but something about her manner didn't ring true.

'Sounds like it,' she agreed. 'Are they arguing a lot?'

'Not that I've heard. But they both go silent the minute I enter the room as if they have a secret, but not a nice one like a surprise party or holiday. Whatever. I'm not going to let them ruin my mood.'

'Good because this is your day,' said Allegra. 'It's probably nothing. You know what parents are like – there's always something stupid bugging them. They're going to be over the moon when you tell them your news.'

'They will,' I replied. I couldn't wait to get home and tell them.