



on the brink



#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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So I was sitting here, innocently eating my falafel with tahini, when Ling Su sat down across from me, and went, “Mia. How are you?” with her eyes all big and sympathetic.

I went, “Um. Fine.”

Then Perin sat down next to me and was like, “Mia. We heard. Are you okay?”

God. News travels fast around this school.

“I’m fine,” I said, trying to smile bravely. Which is no joke when you’ve got a big wad of falafel in your mouth.

“I can’t believe it,” Shameeka said. She doesn’t even normally EAT at our table, since she’s usually too busy spying for us over at the Jock/Cheerleader table. But all of a sudden, she’d put her tray down next to Perin’s. “Is he really moving to JAPAN?”

“Looks like it,” I said. It’s funny, but every time I hear the word Japan now, my heart does this funny twisty thing. The way it used to do when I heard the word Buffy, back when the TV show Buffy the Vampire Slayer was ending.

“You should dump him,” Boris said, after joining us.

“BORIS!” Tina looked shocked. “Mia, ignore him. He doesn’t know what he’s talking about.”

“Yes, I do,” Boris said. “I know exactly what I’m talking about. This happens in orchestras all the time. Two musicians fall in love, then one gets a better paying job at another rival orchestra in another city, or even another country. They always try to make it work—the long-distance thing—but it never does. Sooner or later one of them always falls in love with a clarinetist, and that’s it. Long distance relationships never work. You should dump him now, so it’s a nice clean break, and move

on. End of story.”

Tina was staring at her boyfriend in shock. “Boris! That’s the most horrible thing to say! How could you say that?”

Boris didn’t get it, though. He just shrugged and went, “What? It’s the truth. Everyone knows it.”

“My brother isn’t going to fall in love with someone else,” Lilly said, in a bored voice, from where she sat down the table, across from J.P.. “Okay? He’s completely besotted with Mia.”

“Ha,” Tina said, giving Boris a poke with her straw. “See?”

“I am only telling it the way I’ve experienced it,” Boris said. “Maybe Michael won’t fall in love with a clarinetist. But Mia will.”

“BORIS!” Tina looked outraged. “What on

EARTH would make you say that???"

"Yeah, Boris," Lilly said, looking at him like he was a bug she'd found in her humus.

"What's this thing you've apparently got for clarinetists? I thought you considered woodwinds to be beneath you."

"I am merely stating a fact," Boris said, putting down his fork with a bang to illustrate his seriousness. "Mia is only sixteen years old. And they aren't married. Michael shouldn't think that he can just go off to a foreign country and that she is going to wait for him. It isn't fair to her. She should be allowed to move on with her life, date other people, and have fun, not sit in her room every Saturday night for a year until he gets back."

I saw Shameeka and Ling Su exchange glances. Ling Su even made an "Oops, he might actually be right" face.

Tina didn't think he was right, though.

“Are you saying that if you got a job as first violin with the London Philharmonic, you wouldn't want me to wait for you?” she asked her boyfriend.

“Of course I would want you to wait,” Boris explained. “But I wouldn't ASK you to. It wouldn't be fair. But I know you WOULD wait, anyway, because that's the kind of girl you are.”

“Mia's that kind of girl, too!” Tina said, decidedly.

“No,” Boris said, gravely shaking his head. “I don't think so.”

“That's okay, Boris,” I said, quickly, before Tina's head exploded. “I WANT to sit in my room every Saturday night until Michael gets back.”

Boris looked at me like I was nuts. “You DO?”

“Yes,” I said. “I do. Because I love Michael and if I can’t be with him, I’d rather not be with any boy.”

Boris just shook his head sadly.

“That’s what all the couples in my orchestra say,” he said. “And eventually, one of them gets tired of sitting in their room. Next thing you know, they’ve hooked up with a clarinetist. There’s always a clarinetist.”

This was very disconcerting. I was sitting there, feeling the same panic rising I feel every time I think of Michael’s leaving—just three more days! Three more days until he’s gone—when I happened to notice that J.P. was looking at me.

And then when I met his gaze, he smiled at me. And rolled his eyes. As if to say, “Listen to the crazy Russian violinist! Isn’t he silly?”

And suddenly, the panic disappeared, and I felt all right again.

I smiled back and, reaching for my falafel, said, “I think Michael and I will be okay, Boris.”

“Of course they will,” Tina said. And then Boris yelped. It was clear Tina had kicked him from beneath the table.

I hope she left a bruise.