

**A FIRST  
TIME FOR**  
*Everything*

ISABEL MORIN

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*embrace*

The first time I saw Casey Grant he stood on the quad with a crowd of girls around him, all of them smiling at him like he was the second coming. I was a newbie freshman still trying to find my way around campus, but I knew he lived in a world that didn't include me.

Until it did.

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The sun beats down on my head as I smile and say hi to a few other seniors I recognize, all of whom look shocked at the change in my appearance. We don't have time for chitchat, though, not with the steady column of students and parents going in and out of the dorm with awkward, heavy belongings.

It's a tradition at Carlyle University for seniors to help freshmen move in, a way to welcome the new class the way we were welcomed four years ago. Unfortunately, it's a hot day and huffing up and down the stairs for the last four hours has left me sweaty and exhausted. My shift is almost over, though. After I move Sophie in, I'll be done.

I grab a box of books from Sophie before it pitches to the asphalt. She's standing in front of the family car like she's frozen in place, her expression one of expectant terror. A bit like what you see on people creaking up a steep roller coaster. They paid to be there, they want to be there, but all the same they're probably going to scream.

Her mother gives me a grateful "thank you" and sets a lighter box in her daughter's arms.

Being here today takes me back to my own freshman move-in day. It's funny, because you work so hard to get into Carlyle—it's as competitive as any Ivy League school— and then you freak out when you finally arrive. The whole car ride here my stomach roiled with nausea. Not that I was reluctant to come. I spent my high school years dreaming about college, but even getting what you wish for can be terrifying. But that's just the freshman jitters.

They go away. Mostly.

I head up the stairs with one last load, Sophie and her parents trailing behind me. Just as I reach the fourth-floor landing, the side of the box I'm carrying splits and books start to push through, unbalancing my load and threatening to topple. I can't even readjust, since I also have Sophie's stuffed backpack strapped to my back and a garbage bag of clothes in one hand.

If I was sweating before, now I'm drenched, and my arms are shaking from the strain. Behind me the stairs are crowded with students and parents lugging their own belongings. I'm staring down at the box, willing the books back in, when Casey Grant comes down the stairs.

"Hey, Hannah. Need a hand?" he asks, taking the box from me like it's packed with tissue paper instead of fifty pounds of textbooks or who knows what. He holds it so that the split end points toward the ceiling and smiles his lazy smile. "Lead the way."

The smile itself is more than enough to throw me off, but even more shocking is the fact that he knows my name. We both lived in Taylor last year, and he's never done more than give me a "hey" and flash his patented Casey smile in the hall. He gives that same smile to everyone. It doesn't mean anything, but it's hard to remember that when it's directed at you.

Casey drops back to let me, Sophie, and her parents go ahead of him, and I see Sophie's mouth fall open at her first good look at one of the campus hotties.

Another one bites the dust.

I turn to him as soon as we've set our burdens down in Sophie's room. "Thanks for the help. That was a close call."

"No problem."

He stands there, his hair and skin a palette of golds. I'm surprised tulips and wildflowers aren't growing at his feet. His eyes are very blue, and I think they may actually be twinkling at me.

Sophie is still staring at Casey, but as soon as he smiles at her she blushes furiously and looks at the floor.

She reminds me of me on my first day—shy, unable to look anything male in the eye. She's thin the way girls sometimes still are around eighteen—the way I was—but she has only a scattering of acne on her forehead and cheeks. A far cry from the cystic acne I had to live with. Maybe she won't have as much trouble as I did.

The worst part back then was that I expected Carlyle to be different from high school. I had this ridiculous fantasy that the guys would be so much more mature. But the very next day I was in my room and I heard guys coming down the hall. From the sound of it they were stopping at every door, and when they got to the room next to mine, I heard them invite the girl who lived there to a party.

My door was open and I was sitting on my bed, a book open on my lap, and my heart beat like crazy as I waited for them to get to me. A few seconds later two guys appeared in the doorway and invited me, too. I was thrilled—for about twenty seconds.

"She'd be cute if it wasn't for those insane zits," one of them said as soon as they were out of sight.

So yeah, it was kind of rough. I didn't go to a single party that year, and every time I started to think a guy might like me, I remembered that comment and realized it was my imagination.

But this year's going to be different.

I smile at Sophie, willing good things for her, and tell her she's going to love it here. Her parents thank Casey and me and we head out, leaving them to deal with the chaos of moving their daughter into a suite with three other girls.

"Was that your last one?" he asks as we head down the stairs.

"Yes, thank goodness."

We weave our way between parents and students and into the blinding sun and humid air. It's got to be at least eighty degrees, which isn't all that strange for late August in New York's Hudson Valley. I swipe at the damp strands of hair that escaped my ponytail and tell myself I don't care that I'm a mess. I may be hot and sweaty, but so is everyone else around here.

This time last year I would have been mortified to talk to Casey on a day like this. To talk to anyone. My makeup would have been smeared, my acne pulsing and red. I would have worn my long brown hair loose so I could hide behind it, no matter how hot it was. And let's not kid ourselves. I'd have been hiding in my dorm rather than out helping people.

But not anymore. It's a new me, and I can talk to Casey like a normal person. I'm trying to, anyway. I've never been great at small talk.

Casey's sweating, but instead of looking unsightly he's glowing, a beacon of health and vitality. And hotness. I won't deny that.

He embodies the term golden boy. First of all, he's got this wavy dark gold hair that always looks like he just woke up—or had crazy hot sex—and he's tall, about six feet, all of him lean

muscle, and he's tanned a warm golden hue. He's wearing a pair of khaki cargo shorts that hang low on his lean hips, sneakers, and a blue checked short-sleeved button-down shirt. He could be an Abercrombie and Fitch model, right down to the glint of scruff on his jaw.

People want to get near him, sleep with him, talk to him. Be him.

I may be the only straight girl at Carlyle not in love with Casey Grant. He cruises along on his good looks and charm, partying and sleeping with whichever girl is available. There's no depth to him, and that's why he leaves me cold.

But it's not like he's ever done anything to me, and it's impossible not to return his smile, which is surprisingly warm and genuine.

"You still in Taylor?" he asks as we cut across the green, avoiding the chaos of people still moving.

"Yes, fourth floor this time."

"Same here. I got a single, so I'm pretty stoked."

We lived on different floors last year, but even so it was hard to miss him coming and going with different girls. Even now he says hi to about a dozen people on the short walk to the dorm.

A couple of them look at me funny, like they're trying to decide if they know me.

A blast of cool air hits us as we enter Taylor, and I let out a huge sigh. Just four more flights and I can collapse on my bed.

I should make some effort at conversation, so I cast around for something interesting to say. I come up with the fascinating "How was your summer?" as we mount the stairs.

The twinkle in his eye blinks out, and his smile fades away. “The usual. Worked for my dad’s company.”

I could have guessed that. It’s common knowledge that his dad started Fortify, a cyber security company in San Francisco, and Casey will work there as soon as he graduates. It’s no wonder he floats through college having a blast. He doesn’t have to worry about what’s going to happen to him when he leaves here.

“What about you?” he asks.

“I volunteered at a hospital in Haiti.”

“Sounds intense.”

“It was amazing, though. I got to see all kinds of treatments, and there was so much to do there, I felt like I was really helping. The medical staff was from all over the world, and I even assisted with a birth.”

I stop talking, partly because I’m out of breath as we approach the fourth floor, partly because I’m embarrassed to have gone on like that. What does Casey care about what I did? He is just being polite.

“So I guess you’re heading to med school when you get out of here?”

“If I get in. Which I’d better, since there’s no plan B.”

“You won’t need a plan B.”

He sounds pretty certain for someone who doesn’t know me at all. We reach the top of the stairs and push through the heavy door to the hallway.

“This is me,” he says, stopping outside the third room down on the left.



I'm still trying to think what to say when his phone rings. He pulls it out of his back pocket and smiles at the name on the screen.

"I'd better get this. Catch you later."

"Thanks again for your help," I say, but he's already got the phone pressed to his ear, and I hear him give a low, dirty laugh as he heads into his room.