

Little Pink Book

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CHAPTER ONE

Amelia sneaked a peek at Matt strolling into the commons. His dark hair was a little spiked on top, and his dark jeans hugged his thighs, but weren't tight. He was flanked by Scott, whose exaggerated swagger and drooping denim made him look like a gangsta-in-training. Existing at opposite ends of the teen boy spectrum, between the two of them, they'd captured the fantasies of just about every girl at Granby High..

See, Matt Curnal was absolutely THE hottest boy at Granby High, in Amelia's estimation, as well as a good proportion of the rest of the female student body. Her own plainness was a heavy burden in light of the perfect example of athletic teen male. Amelia sighed. Talking to Matt was out of the question; outside the very realm of normalcy. Even though they shared a couple of classes, he didn't know she existed.

"Hey, Amelia." He waved and grinned, his voice carrying across the long tables of students drinking coffee and eating breakfast.

Stomach churning, cheeks turning what she knew was a violent maroon hue, Amelia's feet rooted to the floor. Her vocal chords froze, her lungs sealing so she couldn't breathe. The only sound she could manage was a grunt reminiscent of a pig's snort.

So she just smiled—keeping her lips closed to cover her crooked front tooth—and started scrounging through her messenger bag for her history notes, hoping her bowed head would hide her blush.

Feet unrooting, Amelia shuffled away from the column, head still down. Papers in hand, she crashed into something. Bags hit the tile floor, books and papers sliding everywhere across the slick, polished squares.

Ooh. Not something—*someone*.

"What the hell?!" Everything and everyone came to a stunned halt. Even the teachers stopped to stare.

Kneeling down, Amelia gathered her books into a pile to put back into her bag. "I'm sorry."

"You ran into me." The girl's voice dripped icicles.

It was Samantha—THE Samantha. Svelte, poised, immaculate—Granby High's version of the IT girl.

Groaning from her crouched position on the floor, Amelia pushed an escaped bundle of frizzy hair behind one ear, the backs of her thighs clenching into cramps. It was not a flattering position, squatted so her knees jutted, and her butt probably looked wider than a Navy carrier. Thank god no one was allowed a working cell phone inside the school, though that was not a guarantee there wasn't someone taking a wide-

shot photo. She could just see the image pasted all over the internet. Her humiliation would be worse than anything her younger twin brothers could dish out. "I didn't see you."

Oh, god. Matt had probably seen her plow into the other girl, and was probably laughing and trading snide remarks with Scott about the size of her ass. Amelia groaned, and the mottled purple flush flared again.

Samantha looked down the length of her nose, her shining blonde hair falling forward, framing an unblemished heart-shaped face. She was not even trying to gather her belongings.

"You didn't see me? How could *you* not see *me*?" Disbelief coated the words.

Amelia sighed and looked up, brushing hair out of her eyes. "No, Samantha, I didn't see you. I was looking at my history notes—in my hand. I have a quiz today." She glanced to the clock on the wall above the intramural sports display. "I have to get going—"

"THE Samantha."

"- or I'm going to be late for class."

Amelia didn't respond to the correction. instead holding out a pile of loose papers. Her eyes watered and she blinked away the wet; the papers smelled strongly of licorice and something else. She held them far away. "Here's your stuff."

Samantha only stared at the papers in the outstretched hand, her face puckerred like she smelled something foul.

Shoving her own books and papers into her bag with her other hand, Amelia lost her balance stretching too far for a loose sheet of paper and cracked one knee against the hard floor, jarring the arm and shoulder she used to catch herself from falling completely.

Someone tittered, the sound muffled by what was probably a hand. Someone else guffawed, not even bothering to smother it.

"Ow." She paused, catching a curse in her throat. She'd be hobbling the rest of the day. The stairs would be hell.

And Matt had seen it all.

Samantha snatched the papers up with a wrinkled nose and shoved them roughly back into the designer bag, once again slung over one shoulder. She didn't bother to look down or say thank you but just sniffed, stuck her nose in the air, and walked away. Her voice carried back over her shoulder. "You need to be more careful. You'll regret running into me."

Her heels clicked in rhythm across the tiles, a fading staccato down the hall, punctuated by the exaggerated sway of her hips.

The world reduced to slo-mo. The football team stopped tossing milk cartons across the table, their eyes following the blonde, their heads turned. The nerds, huddled over their textbooks, raised their heads, pushed their glasses up and patted down their hair. The cheer squad, standing to one side, practicing their latest dance moves, stopped and

looked at Samantha like she was a piece of chocolate and they were on a starvation diet.

Conversation drained away, leaving a void of sound, that if she wasn't used to by now, Amelia might have thought she'd gone deaf. She twisted to sit on the floor, gathering what was left of her papers and dignity close.

Samantha was one of THE girls—a set of five, always air-brushed to within an inch of perfection, who seemed joined at their low-rise hipsters. They would enter school five abreast, walking in tandem, students scattering like mice before the proud, prowling cat.

Surprised to see her without the other four, Amelia expected them to waltz in, glaring down their own perfectly unblemished noses at her.

Sure enough, there was Terry, tall like Samantha, but more boyish, with just a smattering of freckles revealing her Irish roots, her deep auburn ringlets resting on her shoulders. She was followed by Jessika, who was only a little shorter than Samantha, with skin that reminded Amelia of caramel. Her hair was a glossy mass of tiny black curls, tight to the sleek Egyptian curve of her head. Then came Cheryl, prettier than a cheerleader, with her bleached blond ponytail that never showed dark roots, its glimmer accenting her tanning-booth California hue. Last, there was petite Mindy, with her olive complexion and her straight, thick blue-black hair, short in back and angled down at her chin.

Everyone watched their entrance, and the four girls followed Samantha down the hall, narrowed eyes daring anyone to speak, to move—to breathe.

Once THE girls were out of sight, small sounds started back up: a nervous giggle, the snap of a door closing down the administration hallway, the squeak of sneakers on tile.

Under a small, crinkled mound of math worksheets Amelia wished she had lost for good, she found a book. It looked like a journal, painted pink and covered in glitter, like a middle school art project gone mad. She turned to call after Samantha, but all THE girls were gone.

The normal, animal-like cacophony resumed, rising steadily until Amelia couldn't hear her own thoughts; blaring music and a teacher yelling at someone to turn it down; laughter when that someone ignored the teacher and turned it up even louder.

Amelia shrugged and tossed the book into her own bag. She'd just give it to Samantha during AP English Lit, the class they shared after second lunch bell. Right now, she had to hurry to history; she was already late, and there was that quiz first thing.

Limping as fast as she could to the hall and the end stairwell, Amelia chanced a glance at Matt, checking to see if he had seen the debacle that was her morning.

Yup. He was watching her, a half smile settled on his face.

Her blush returned full force, spreading down her neck and chest. *Damn.*