

I Never Promised...
An Original Novel by Dana Carlisle

Chapter One

“Why me?” Tori muttered to herself as she entered the classroom and saw the halo of beautiful white blond hair. She tried to duck into a seat near the back of the classroom so he wouldn’t see her, but just then he turned, his beautiful ocean eyes locking with her emerald ones.

A grin broke out on his face. “Tori! I’m glad you’re in this class! Sit by me.” He called across the room. Tori smiled and said nothing, but crossed the room to sit next to him. She knew that the eyes of all of the other girls were on her, most were even envious, wishing he had invited them to sit with him. Tori wished he had invited them and not her, too.

Matt Bonaventure was one of the most popular seniors in the school: his perfectly styled blond hair, deep blue eyes, athletic body, and winning smile made him one of the best looking guys in his class, and his outgoing attitude and place as captain of the varsity hockey team assured him status at Parkway Central.

Tori sat down behind him and tried to make conversation. “How was your summer, Matt?”

“It was fabulous! I had the summer of a lifetime as a lifeguard at the pool. I must have met a hundred girls!” Tori smiled ruefully at his comments. Translation: he had had a fabulous time with the hundred girls whose vocabulary did not include the word no. That was what his goal had been from the beginning. She had been warned. Tori Chancellor just didn’t like to listen.

While she was remembering their past, Tori had no idea that Matt was in the meantime re-evaluating her. Had her eyes always been that shade of emerald? Her long auburn hair fell in waves to her shoulders, and even in the tacky fluorescent lighting he could see the red-gold highlights the summer sun had brought out. Her normally ivory skin was tanned from countless hours outdoors. Matt also seemed to notice her perfectly chiseled features for the first time. When had she acquired this beauty? Or had he been blind last spring?

Matt realized he was staring and quickly tried to think of a suitable topic of conversation, but the bell rang before he could gather his thoughts. His senior year at Parkway Central was officially convening.

As the teacher droned on about his requirements and expectations, Tori took a few vague notes at the beginning, but her mind soon drifted off to another time. A time last spring when she actually thought she was in love for the first time in her life. It had been so intense that she should have known it wouldn’t last.

The bell sounded again, jerking her out of her reverie. Startled, Tori tried to get her bearings as she gathered her books together. She looked at Matt, sitting in front of her, books in hand, patiently waiting. “Is class over already?” she said to make conversation.

Matt looked amused. “Yeah. Where were you all hour?”

Victoria Chancellor was not about to let him know what she had really been thinking of, so she covered quickly. “I guess I was daydreaming about this summer.”

The two walked to the classroom door and entered the hall. Matt walked with Tori to her locker, making idle chat. “Well, I guess I’d better get to my next class, Tori,” he said, looking deep into her eyes. “It was really good seeing you again.”

“Yeah, you two,” Tori said vaguely as her brother, Corey, strode up to the locker next to hers. Matt turned and left, not missing the look of hatred that Corey threw his way.

“Why are you talking to that creep?” Tori’s brother instantly demanded. Corey was very protective of his sister, even if she was only six minutes younger.

“By some strange twist of fate he’s in my government class,” Tori explained as she threw books into her locker and pulled out other ones. “He walked me here to be nice I guess.”

“Well, I don’t want you to have anything to do with that jerk. If he so much as even looks at you ever again and I see it, I’m going to deck him.”

Tori closed her locker and sighed exasperatedly. “Corey, I can take care of myself you know. I appreciate the sentiment, but I don’t need protecting from Matt. It just doesn’t matter.”

Corey stared at his sister in disbelief. “How can you say that after what he did to you?” he demanded.

“It takes two to tango,” she said as she turned and left for her next class without a backwards glance at her twin. Honestly! She was flattered, and sometimes grateful, that her brother was so protective of her, but it was getting to be a bit much. She was, after all, now a senior.

The rest of her day passed uneventfully. She had barely seen her best friend, Kaitlin, all day, but they were supposed to meet up after last period. As she approached her locker, Tori saw Kaitlin and Corey waiting for her. The locker gods had not smiled on her best friend and Kaitlin’s locker was in a distant hall behind the band room. Since Tori’s locker was centrally located, she was sharing it with Kaiti this year.

Tori giggled to herself as she watched two underclassman girls walk by and stare longingly at Corey. Although he was her twin, Corey looked nothing like Tori. Her coloring was their mother’s, but Corey had inherited their father’s blond hair and athletic build. But both twins had their mother’s emerald eyes.

Kaitlin Waverly turned just then and saw her friend. “Tori!” she yelled with her usual overabundant exuberance. “We made it through our first day of our senior year! I can’t wait to hear about your day but I’m off to cheerleading practice.”

Tori smiled at her friend as she grabbed some books she needed from the bottom of their already messy locker. “That’s okay, Kates, I need to hit the books anyway.”

“Oh Tori!” Kaitlin exclaimed in mock frustration. “You’re a senior now – live a little! Your grades have practically guaranteed you entrance to one of those Ivy League schools you’re always lusting after.”

Tori stood up after retrieving the necessary books. “Practically isn’t good enough. Besides, I’m also thinking about Annapolis.” Tori referred to the U.S. Naval Academy by its location in Maryland.

Both Corey and Kaitlin looked at her, surprised. “Since when?”

“I don’t know. Dad’s prior Navy so I just thought maybe I’d try for an appointment.” Tori was in several advanced placement classes which would allow her college credit. She had been on the accelerated track since the third grade and had a nearly perfect record of straight A’s. Kaitlin and Corey also did well in their classes, but their drives were elsewhere. Corey was a star soccer player and hoped to attend college on a soccer scholarship. Kaitlin was a co-captain of Parkway Central’s championship cheerleading squad. “And,” Tori continued, “if I go home and study now, we can get together after dinner and gab about our day.”

“Sounds cool!” Kaitlin squealed. She turned to Tori’s brother. “Corey?”

“Sounds good to me, but I am about to be late for soccer practice.” He turned to Tori. “Pick me up at five, sis?”

“That’s fine,” Tori agreed. “I’ll see you two later.”

Her brother and her friend headed toward the locker rooms together, while she headed for the student parking lot. Tori reflected on her friend’s exuberance as she made her way to her car. Kaitlin was so full of energy and fire that she made a great cheerleader. Her long black hair, porcelain skin, and china blue eyes made her look like the heroine of a romantic novel personified. She looked great leading the cheers in front of Parkway Central’s crowded football and basketball games.

Just as she was getting into her car, Tori heard someone calling her name. She turned and saw the source of the masculine voice: Matt Bonaventure.

“Tori!” Matt called again and started in a graceful run across the parking lot. “My sister left without me. Can I get a ride?”

Tori nodded, although Matt lived in the opposite direction as her, his house was close to the school. The hockey player walked to the passenger side of the black Mustang GT, looking it over. “Nice car. Birthday present?”

“Yep, just got it two weeks ago. Corey and I are sharing it, so we’ll see how many fights break out!” She laughed.

Matt shook his head in all seriousness. “Nah, you and Corey are too close to fight over something stupid like a car.”

Tori looked at him briefly as she guided the car out of the parking lot. “What do you mean?”

“I know that you and Corey are really close. I mean, he’s always looking out for you. Take Kyle for instance,” Matt started.

Tori’s jaw clenched. “Let’s not take Kyle for instance.”

“Still a sore subject with you, huh?”

“Listen, Bonaventure, I know you’re friends with that jerk, and I know you have a jaded view of what happened. I also know that I never should have trusted anybody who is a friend of his, but let me get something straight with you. I am not just sore over ‘something that happened.’ I know you think you know all of the details, but I guarantee Kyle didn’t bother to share them all, so if you ever mention it again, I will not hesitate to come after you.” Tori turned onto Matt’s street, her eyes blazing. “And neither will my brother,” she added for good measure.

“I’m sorry, Tori.” Matt said as they pulled into his driveway. “I had no idea you were still so sensitive and maybe I don’t know all of the details, but don’t ever threaten me again.” Matt exited the car and slammed the door.

White hot rage flooded through Victoria, but by the time she had driven half a mile, the rage gave in to a flood of memories. She was soon sobbing so hard she had to pull back in the school lot on the way back to her house. She knew she risked being seen but she was definitely crying too hard to safely drive. Fortunately, the cheerleading squad and the soccer team were practicing nowhere near the parking lot. After a few minutes, Tori was able to calm herself down and go home. Once home and seated at her desk, she tried desperately to banish thoughts of Kyle as she tried to make her way through her calculus problems. She was only halfway through them when she realized it was time to go pick up Kaitlin and Corey from practice.

After picking them up, Tori turned to Kaiti. “Kates, I’m sorry but I didn’t get as much homework done as I needed to. Do you mind if I beg off tonight?”

“Of course I do, but I’ll let you off the hook just this once.” Kaitlin looked closely at her friend. “Do you mind if I come over for a while though? I need to talk to you.”

“Of course, that’s fine,” Tori agreed.

When the girls were safely ensconced in Tori’s room with sodas and chips, Kaitlin whirled on her friend. “Okay, I want the truth. What happened? And don’t lie and say nothing. You’re damn upset and I’d like to know why.”

Victoria sighed, knowing there was no way she could get away without telling Kaiti. “I gave Matt a ride home and he started in on me about Kyle. We got in a fight, I got upset, I started remembering things I didn’t want to remember and that’s that.”

Kaiti looked furious. “I’m going to kill him! I’m sorry I ever played matchmaker with you two! But you were two of my best friends and I thought you would be great together. I’m sorry he turned out to be such a jerk!”

“It’s not your fault, Kates. Please don’t worry about it,” Tori tried to placate her friend. “I don’t care anyway.”

Kaitlin looked at her skeptically. “Are you telling me that you don’t have feelings for Matt Bonaventure? Don’t bother, because I won’t believe you.”

“All I know is that I thought we had something special and it ended very abruptly with no explanation. I guess when things end that way, there are bound to be unresolved feelings,” Tori hedged.

Kaitlin looked at her friend knowingly. “Especially now that you have first period with him every day for the next semester.”

“Hey, in a school with over 2,000 students, you’re bound to end up in class with your ex-boyfriend,” Tori said sarcastically.

Kaiti laughed. “Just keep your chin up. I’ll talk to him very discreetly.”

Tori looked at her friend and knew that she couldn’t stop her once Kaiti got something into her head, but Tori had a bad feeling about this.

Victoria stared out of her bedroom window and into the small churchyard beyond her backyard. Her house in Alexandria, Virginia was old, but the church was even older. Sometimes Tori liked to walk over and sit on the stone benches and just think, but today it happened to be raining. Tori loved living in Alexandria. She was glad when her dad got stationed here when she and Corey were just entering junior high. She had been ecstatic when he decided to retire four years later, just before she entered her junior year at Parkway Central. Out of all of the places she and her family had lived, this was her favorite, and she hadn’t wanted to move in the middle of high school.

Tori’s mind wandered to its usual topic of late: Matt Bonaventure. Last spring had been wonderful. Two glorious months of Matt, friendship, caring, sharing, and what she thought was love. Until, without warning, it was suddenly over, leaving Tori confused and heartbroken and angry. The worst part was that Tori still had no idea why Matt had ended things when they were going so well. Matt had fed her some line about needing his freedom for the summer before his senior year, but Tori knew it was just that – a line. She was still furious that he didn’t have the guts to tell her the truth behind their break-up.

She stared into the distance unseeingly as a vision of her favorite memory with Matt floated before her eyes. They had been driving around all night, just cruising, when they had decided to go to one of the cliffs overlooking the Potomac. Tori smiled as she recalled walking

hand-in-hand with him through the woods. Running, laughing, as he chased her, until he caught her and pinned her under him. Suddenly, they were kissing, soft and sweet.

As Tori and Matt stared into each other's eyes, Tori found herself becoming hypnotized by the depths of blue. The kisses became passionate and demanding, their hands exploring each other's bodies. Memories flooded Tori's brain. Matt murmuring soft words in her ear. The fire in her body intense that she knew she needed to quench it or go insane. Becoming one with Matt, giving herself to him, letting him love all of her.

Three days later it was over.

Tori realized that she had tears running down her cheeks and that infuriated her. She hurled the stuffed animal she hadn't even realized she had grabbed and hurled it across the room. "Forget about him!" Sobs wracked her body as she threw herself down on her bed. "FORGET ABOUT HIM!"

Corey burst into the room then. "Tori, are you all right?" He hurried over to the bed and held her. "Tor, what's the matter?"

"I hate Matt. I hate him so much! Why? What did I do to make him leave me?" Tori wanted to know.

Corey rocked his sister until her sobs subsided. He had never liked Matt because he thought he dated too many girls. He was afraid that Tori would end up as just another conquest, and he had been sorry to have been proven right. He was there for Tori when the relationship ended, and he shared her pain, but as the summer wore on, she began to snap out of her depression and become the old Tori he knew and loved. School had ended a week after she and Matt broke up, so she was able to escape the painful reminders. Until that day a month ago when she had walked into her government class to find Matt sitting there. "Has he done anything to you?"

Tori shook her head. "No, he basically acts as if I don't exist. He won't talk to me, he won't look at me, nothing. We were actually getting along pretty well at the beginning of the school year, despite a rocky start, but all of a sudden he decided he wanted nothing to do with me. Sound familiar?"

"Tor, he's always been a snob. You're just now noticing it because now he's snubbing you. I know it's hard, but pretend like he doesn't exist," Corey admonished.

"I thought I could, 'til I got stuck in government class with him." Tori contemplated whether or not to tell her brother the piece of information she had found out today. "I did find out that Kyle is the reason that suddenly Matt wants nothing to do with me."

"Kyle? What does that ass have to do with this?" Corey demanded, his green eyes hardening with anger.

"Kaitlin, as you know, has been friends with Kyle and Matt practically since birth. Anyway, Matt told her that Kyle has been talking about me. And he's listening."

Corey's eyes were smoldering. "I knew that I should have killed Kyle when I had the chance."

"Corey, please don't go after him again," Tori begged. "You'll just make a bigger mess out of things and that's the last thing I need these days."

"I have to look out for my little sister," Corey stated defiantly.

"Six minutes doesn't count as 'little,' Corey," Tori pointed out. "Besides, I have to fight my own battles. Are you going to trudge all the way from California to New York next year to fight my battles?" Corey had accepted a soccer scholarship to the University of Southern California and Tori had been accepted to Columbia.

“No, but let me at least talk to Kyle,” Corey coaxed.

“No! the last time you ‘talked’ to him he ended up with a black eye and a bloody lip,” Tori argued.

“As far as I am concerned, Kyle Donovan deserved to be hospitalized after what he did to you,” Corey stated unequivocally.

Tori agreed, but said nothing. Kyle was the last person she wanted to think of. The memory of that night still made her feel ill.

Chapter Two

A few days later, Kaitlin and Tori decided to take advantage of their off-campus lunch privileges and went to a fast food restaurant near the high school. Tori munched on a burger while Kaiti recapped her trip to the mall the previous night.

“So when I stood up this absolutely gorgeous guy was standing next to me holding a pair of earrings. When he asked me what I thought of them, I told him it depended on his girlfriend’s taste. He smiled and said that he didn’t have a girlfriend, they were for his mother’s birthday. So I helped him pick out some earrings and then we had a Coke in the food court,” Kaiti flashed me a mischievous grin. “We’re going out on Friday.”

Tori was always amazed at her friend’s ability to pick up guys at the drop of a hat. One smile from Kaiti and they were lining up to take her out, but Kaitlin never attached herself to one guy, preferring to play the field. Until last spring, Tori had privately thought this philosophy ridiculous, but now no strings didn’t sound so bad. No strings meant no heartache, right?

“So what’s his name?” Tori asked as she took a sip of her Coke.

“David Claybourne. I’m taking him to Whitney’s party. Are you going?”

“I don’t know. Hadn’t really thought about it. I don’t want to be a third wheel but I don’t have a date,” Tori confessed.

“That’s your fault! There are a ton of guys at Parkway Central who would kill to take you out,” Kaitlin scolded.

Tori rolled her eyes and laughed. “Yeah? Like who?”

“Jeff Deighton.”

“Dumb jock.”

“Alex Stevens.”

“Dumb jock.”

Kaiti was starting to get frustrated. “Jim Davert, Matt Harlow, Rob Jordan.”

“All brawn and no brain football players. Thanks, but no thanks, Kaiti.”

Kaitlin stared at her friend. “You are stereotyping, Victoria. Just because they’re football players doesn’t mean they’re dumb jocks.”

Tori rolled her eyes. “Not in this case. Alex and Jim put together don’t have half a brain between the two of them.” Tori wasn’t interested in being head cheerleader or dating the captain of the football team. She wanted someone of substance. Not that Kaiti was into the package only or anything, but sometimes Tori felt that her friend spent too much time studying the social strata at Parkway Central.

Kaiti was looking at her friend with a contemplative look. Tori knew it meant that Kaitlin was deciding whether or not to divulge confidential information. Tori knew better than to ask; Kaiti would tell her in good time.

“Look, Kaiti, we need to be back on campus in five minutes. We’re late,” Tori said as she gathered up the trash and headed to a nearby container.

As they were pulling out of the parking lot in the Mustang, Kaitlin turned to face Tori. “I know someone who wants to go out with you.”

“Another football player?” Tori’s voice showed her exasperation. She didn’t really care who it was; she never wanted to be hurt by another guy again. Matt and Kyle had been more than enough.

“No, it’s not a football player. It’s someone I know you’ll approve of.”

“Who?” Despite herself, Tori’s curiosity was piqued.

“He’s on the soccer team with Corey.”

Now Tori was just plain confused. The soccer players were like brothers to her and they tended to treat her like their little sister. She couldn’t imagine one of them being attracted to her. “Someone Corey hangs around with?”

“No,” Kaitlin answered carefully. After all, this was only a hunch.

“Who?” Tori demanded.

Kaiti took a deep breath, not sure if she should open this can of worms or not, but she did want to see Tori happy. This could be it. She took the plunge. “He’s tall, has wavy chestnut brown hair, and warm brown eyes that make you melt when you look into them.”

There was only one person Tori knew who fit that description; she had looked into those eyes a thousand times. He, Tori, and Corey had been the Three Musketeers in junior high. But then came high school and the end of a beautiful friendship. Kaiti could only be referring to Jordan. Jordan Lockridge.

Kaitlin knew Tori had guessed who she was talking about. She saw her friend grip the steering wheel tighter and her lips part. She took a deep breath and a faraway look came into her eyes. She didn’t speak again until she had parked the car and turned off the engine.

Kaiti watched her friend and saw how this news affected her. Kaitlin knew that the three had been inseparable before they started at Parkway Central. In junior high, being in the limelight had kept the three together; in high school, it had driven them apart. All three became extremely popular, extremely fast. Jordan enjoyed the popularity and became a different person. Suddenly, school, soccer, and his friends came in a distant second to being the Big Man on Campus, at least to the freshman class. Tori had already set her sights on the Ivy League and had made school her number one priority, not even bothering to try out for the girls’ soccer team, thinking it would take time away from her studies. Corey, always passionate about soccer, found his niche on the soccer team and decided that he wanted to keep playing soccer even after high school. None of the three saw it coming, but these three very different priorities were enough to drive them apart.

Jordan became superficial, Corey, a jock, Tori, and honor student. None of the three wanted to compromise their values and the friendship dissolved as a result. Even the two Chancellors had been somewhat at odds until their junior year.

But what Kaitlin didn’t know. What only Jordan and Tori knew, was that Jordan had given Tori her first kiss. And Tori had given Jordan his.

And now Kaiti was telling her that Jordan was interested in her after all this time? “How do you know?” She demanded, sitting in the car, not caring that she was late for her fourth hour. “Did he tell you? I didn’t realize you even knew each other.”

“I don’t know him at all.” Kaiti stated simply.

“Then how do you know? Who told you?” Tori knew she sounded desperate, but Kaiti had no clue just how much she missed Jordan’s friendship.

“I know because I watch him watching you while you’re at our locker. I see him staring when you pick Corey and I up from practice. I see it when his face lights up when he sees you coming down the hall. Have you ever noticed the inside of his locker?” Tori shook her head, dumbfounded, and Kaiti went on. “He has a single picture hanging in his locker. It’s of you and him. You both look really young and have these goofy Mickey Mouse ears on.”

Tori took the keys out of the ignition and stepped out of the car, but did not respond. She knew the picture well; she kept her own copy in the nightstand drawer next to her bed. It had been taken on the eighth grade class trip to Disney World. That picture had been taken the same day she received her first and last kiss from Jordan Lockridge.

Kaiti followed Tori into school. Neither girl said a word.

Tori swore as she dug deep into the bottom of her locker for her calculus book. Sharing a locker with the less-than-neat Kaiti was not always a picnic.

“Hey, watch the language!” A male voice chuckled from above her. She turned and saw Matt staring down at her, a playful smile on his handsome face. Tori felt a warmth spread through her as she realized that Matt was acknowledging her again. Then Tori scolded herself. Matt was stuck-up and rude and she shouldn’t feel any happiness that he was speaking to her again.

The smile faded from her face and she stood up, textbook in hand.

“Tori?” Matt looked confused as he looked at Tori’s now angry expression. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong. I was just wondering why you were wasting your precious time talking to the likes of me. And in public!” Tori said, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You know what it means, Bonaventure,” Corey said as he approached the lockers. “Now get the hell away from my sister.”

Shane turned to Corey. “Well, it’s Mr. Soccer himself. See you around, Tori.” Matt strode off without a backward glance. *Damn!* He swore to himself. He knew he hadn’t been treating Tori well lately and, realizing how dumb he was being, he wanted to try to make amends. But that brother of hers had to interfere. Oh well. There was always government class the next morning. He’d ask her to Whitney’s party then.

As soon as her ex-boyfriend was out of earshot, Tori whirled on her brother. She wasn’t really mad at him but after the emotional news Kaiti had given her and the shock of Matt’s locker visit, her emotions were swirling and he was as good a dumping post as any. “Thanks a lot, big brother. I can take care of myself!” She slammed her locker door and turned to leave, but blinded by anger, didn’t watch where she was going. The next thing Tori knew, books were flying everywhere.

Victoria stood perfectly still and closed her eyes, trying to regain her composure. When she was calm she bent down to help the person retrieving the books and to apologize. “I’m sorry, I…” her voice trailed off as she stared into warm brown eyes. *Warm brown eyes that made you want to melt*, a voice whispered inside her head.

“Hi, Tori, you sure know how to greet an old friend,” Jordan laughed, trying to keep the situation light.

Tori was so shaken that she didn't reply. She just hurriedly gathered up her books and hurried to her calculus class. Kaiti, standing at ground zero, watched the pain and confusion on Jordan's face as he gathered the rest of his books. As he stood up and stared at Tori's disappearing form, the pain and disappointment on his face was palpable. As Jordan continued on his way, his eyes cast downward, Kaiti vowed to kill her best friend.

"Victoria Chancellor! What the hell was that display in the hall today?" Kaitlin yelled into the phone. "I told you Jordan was crazy for you and you treat him like a dog! You should have seen the look on his face after you blew out of there."

"Listen, Waverly, I will not discuss this."

Kaiti heard the dangerous edge to Tori's voice, but she refused to back down on this. "This? Can't you even say his name?"

"Don't you understand English? I said I don't want to discuss it."

"Tough cookies, hon. I thought that you would be happy to hear about Jordan. I know you were close to him." Kaiti paused and decided to take a gamble. "I know you still love him."

Tori hung up the phone. When it promptly rang a minute later she ignored it. Jordan Lockridge was not a topic open for discussion.

Chapter Three

The next morning Matt sat down next to Tori before the bell rang. She looked at him with expectation, since it was not his assigned seat. "What's up, Matt?" she affected a bored tone.

"Are you going to Whitney's party tonight?"

"I haven't decided yet. Why?" Tori wondered what this was leading to.

"You wanna go with me?"

Tori looked at him, stunned. She hated herself for it, but the seeds of excitement were growing. "Is this a joke?" she managed to say.

"No," Matt sighed. "I know I've been a real jerk lately and I apologize. Friends?"

Tori smiled at him. "I should hate you forever, but I guess I'll forgive you this time."

"Does that mean you'll go with me to Whitney's party?" Matt sounded hopeful.

"Yes, I will. Do you want to go with Kaiti and her date?" Tori panicked at the sudden thought of being alone with him for the first time in months.

"That sounds good. Is Corey going to be there?"

Tori laughed. "No way! He has a soccer game tonight. And I'd rather he didn't know about this. I'd like to be spared the brotherly lecture."

Matt joined in her laughter. "Nor do I need my ass kicked!"

The girl whose seat Matt was occupying entered the room, so Matt stood up. "I'll call you after school to finalize things," he said and Tori nodded in agreement.

At lunch, Tori told Kaitlin of the latest development. "What do you think?"

"I think it's cool. I told you he'd come around. Watch out for Kyle, though," Kaiti warned.

Tori grunted. "Yeah, I know to watch out for him."

Kaiti was thoughtful for a few moments. "You know I've known Matt practically since birth and I think I might have figured things out." Tori motioned her friend to continue. "I think Matt's found himself in love for the first time and he is scared to death."

Tori looked at Kaiti incredulously. “Are you saying that Matt is in love with me, realized it, and got cold feet?”

Kaitlin shrugged and bit into her apple. “It makes sense. And then with Kyle filling his head with garbage, he’s really confused. It’s the only thing I can think of to explain his irrational, and uncharacteristic, behavior.”

Tori sighed. She didn’t need this. “I just remembered I promised to stop by Mr. Blunt’s office on my lunch hour, I gotta cruise.” She got up to leave but knew that Kaiti would have to have the last word.

“Is it so hard to believe that Matt is afraid of his feelings? You are,” Kaiti stated bluntly.

“Good-bye, Kaitlin,” Tori said as she left the table.

And that's all she wrote...