

# Till I Kissed You

by

Linda McGinnis

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*Just as the tree grows on the vine, I choose you for a friend of mine  
I choose you out of all the rest, simply because I love you best.*

*Cecilia*

1906 autograph book.

## Chapter 1

“Emma?”

“Emma!”

Her mother’s voice pulled Emma out of her new, inside-self and back to the room. “You don’t have to yell,” she said.

“I’m sorry, sweetheart, but you were miles away.”

Emma Chandler shrugged. She and her parents had just finished carrying the last load of her belongings from their car in the parking lot up to room 208 in Rose Hall, her new dorm at Willette College.

“Would you rather be alone?” Abigail Chandler said, her voice sounding hurt.

“She’s excited about school,” Arthur Chandler reassured his wife. He put his arm around her and said softly, “Time to let go, dear.”

Abigail smiled at him and Emma saw, in their eyes, the secret pact she’d always felt. A very secret pact, she now knew.

“I think I should get my stuff put away,” Emma said, doing her best to sound normal.

“We could help,” her mother offered.

“Abby,” Art said gently, “we should get going.”

Emma felt an unfamiliar stiffness when her mother hugged her.

Abby looked at her daughter closely. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I’m fine, Mom,” she said, the word sticking to her tongue like a dry stamp.

“We’ll call you later,” Abby said.

Art smiled down at his wife. “No, we won’t.” He looked at Emma. “You call *us* if you have time this weekend. That is, unless you need something sooner.”

Emma walked downstairs and out to the car with them. The parking lot across the street from Rose Hall was crowded with other families unloading boxes from overstuffed cars. Brothers and sisters of Emma’s fellow freshmen were weighed down like pack mules carrying their heavy burdens to the dorms.

“I wish we could have met your roommate,” Abby said.

“Next time, dear,” Art assured her.

“Maybe you could bring her home for a weekend,” Abby suggested.

“I don’t know,” Emma began, but her father interrupted her.

“Come home whenever you want,” he said, “but don’t feel obligated. Let us know if you forgot anything. We’re only two hours away.”

“Thank you, Dad.”

She hugged them both and watched with mixed emotions as they drove off. Her emotions would have been conflicted under normal circumstances, but after what she'd discovered the day before, they were utterly chaotic.

For a long time she sat on one of the twin beds in the room, staring out the window toward the tree-lined Quad. She'd decided she should wait until her new roommate arrived to determine who would get which bed and desk.

"Emma?"

She looked up. "Yes."

A petite young woman stood in the doorway with a grin as wide as her tiny face. "Hi, I'm Beth Ferber. This is my dad," she said, nodding toward the man standing behind her. "Sorry I'm so late. My little sister was sick so we had to rearrange our plans."

"That's okay. Hello, Mr. Ferber. It's nice to meet you both."

"You too, Emma," Beth's father said.

"Can I help?" Emma offered.

"That would be great," Beth said. "Thanks." She glanced around the room. "Which bed is mine?"

Emma shrugged. "Which one do you want?"

"That one?" she asked, pointing to the one Emma had not been sitting on.

"That's fine with me."

The three unloaded Beth's things from the car and lugged them up the stairs.

When everything had been brought in, Mr. Ferber gave his daughter a warm hug. "I've got to get going, honey. I've got a six hour trip ahead of me."

She nodded. "Thanks, Daddy. Call me when you get home, okay?"

"Of course."

"You've got the number?"

"Right here," he said, tapping the pocket of his shirt.

As Beth left to walk her father down to the car, Emma surveyed the room. It looked like the closet had exploded. It looked like she felt—as if everything she'd had inside had blown up and was strewn across the landscape of her mind.

She began putting her clothes into her dresser and was almost finished when Beth returned.

"Wow! You're fast," Beth said.

"I didn't bring all that much. We live a lot closer than you do. And, my mother would like nothing better than an excuse to bring me something I forgot."

Beth laughed. "I'm pretty sure I won't see my folks again before Thanksgiving." She began to put clothes into her dresser. "We live in Sacramento."

"That's what I thought. We're in San Diego," Emma told her.

Beth went on. "I'm the oldest of five. I have three sisters and a brother. My dad is a real estate agent. My mom helps him out whenever she has time."

Beth paused and Emma asked her, "Do you have any hobbies?"

"Reading, I guess."

"Sports?"

Beth shook her head.

"Me neither," Emma said.

"What about you? Brothers or sisters?"

"No, I'm an only child."

"Any hobbies?"

"I play the violin."

"Really? For a long time?"

"Yes, since I was seven."

"You must be good!"

“I hope I’m good enough to get into orchestra. They have quite a reputation, and I’ve heard that freshmen aren’t often accepted.”

“I’d like to hear you play.”

“You will. But not right now. I need to go and take a shower and get out of these clothes. I’m all sweaty. It’s so blasted hot today!”

Beth laughed. “It’s just like home.”

“Not for me,” Emma complained. “This is awful!”

She got out fresh clothes and her cosmetic bag. She took one of the clean towels that had been left with the sheets on the desk, and walked down the hall to the bathroom. She glanced in the mirror as she pulled the plastic shower cap over her thick, shoulder-length blond hair. She’d avoided looking at herself since the morning before, when she’d gone into her parents’ strong box searching for her Social Security card.

The card had been in an envelope near the top of the stack of papers, but for some strange reason, she began opening and looking at everything in the box. At the very bottom she found a letter from an attorney that shocked her to the core: a notice of finalization of adoption. *Her* adoption. She’d been adopted!

Since that moment, she’d been in a peculiar fog. She looked at herself now, her deep blue eyes so like her mother’s.

*Who are you?*

She felt as though her feet weren’t connected to the earth...somehow she was tethered, but floating loose above the ground.

She hadn’t asked her parents. She couldn’t find the words. She kept looking at them...as if they were strangers who had picked her up from a bus stop that morning.

*Who was she?*

*Who were they?*

How could she ask the questions? They obviously hadn’t wanted her to know. She was eighteen years old, and they’d never told her she was adopted! Why?

She hadn’t cried. She wasn’t sad. At least she didn’t think she was sad. She was confused. And completely uncertain of what she should do...of what to say or ask. Who were her real parents? The ones who had created her? Were they bad people? What was wrong with her that they had given her away?

She set the water temperature as cool as she could tolerate and let the water beat down on her back. The questions would not stop; they crowded her head, her thoughts, her heart. She wished the water could wash them all away.

“Done already?” Beth asked when she returned to the room.

“Yes.” Emma felt herself slipping away from the strange, new twin, back into the real world. The twin—another self—not identical and not fraternal—born at a different time, yet looking exactly the same. After that...completely different.

“One of the girls from Dorm Council came by to welcome us while you were in the shower. She wanted to remind us to be ready for the Matriculation Ceremony at five o’clock.” Beth put her book down reluctantly. “I suppose I should go take a shower, too.”

“There’s nobody in there right now. I’m sure it’ll get crowded before long.”

Beth slipped off the bed. “I’m on my way.”

The massive carved doors of Millicent Library swung open to the line of waiting freshmen women, and Emma caught a refreshing waft of cool air that escaped from the dark interior. She could see to the far end of the high, arched hall to the stunning stained glass window, its bright reds and blues glistening in the late afternoon light.

“I’m so excited,” Beth said quietly.

Emma nodded in agreement. She looked at the program in her hand and read the library inscription aloud. "Enter here with reverence and humility." She looked down the line of students. "I wonder how many hours we'll spend *here* over the next four years."

Beth smiled and nodded as the line continued to move forward.

The huge front doors to the library at Willette College were unlocked only two days of the year: the first, the day entering freshmen matriculated; the second, on graduation day, when gown-clad seniors marched out to the strains of *Pomp and Circumstance*. The rest of the year the doors were closed tightly and students entered the library by way of the side doors.

"I wonder if anyone has ever gone out these doors any other time," Beth whispered.

"The library was built in nineteen twenty-five. It's nineteen fifty-seven. I'm sure someone has managed it sometime during the past thirty-two years." She paused and then she added, "But it's such a wonderful tradition, who'd want to spoil it?"

When they reached the doors, they smiled at each other.

"You first," Beth said. "Chandler before Ferber."

Emma stepped into the library where the school's President Davidson greeted her with a handshake. "Good luck on your sojourn here. Your success at Willette is entirely in your hands. The harder you work, the more possibilities you'll create for your future. I hope you'll do well."

"Thank you," Emma said solemnly.

Then she shook hands with the Dean of Students, and then Millicent's Head Librarian, who handed her a beautiful, green fountain pen.

"Please sign the book," she said, indicating a large, hand bound volume that lay on a wooden lectern.

Every woman in every class signed the book during the matriculation ceremony. The volume contained the names of all those with hopes and dreams just like Emma's: academic sisters who had entered this same portal before her with an equal amount of bright anticipation.

She exited through the side door where she would access the library for the remainder of her time at Willette, and waited for Beth.

"Nice pen," Beth said. She held up the gift and looked at it closely. "It's a Scheffers!" Then she glanced at Emma's. "How will we ever tell them apart?"

Emma chuckled. "I'm going to put mine away and not use it again until I graduate."

Beth smiled. "Perfect. Then if you find one in our room, you'll know it's mine."

"Or one of a dozen others from someone in the hall."

They joined the other young women who were gathered on the lawn in Willette Quad in front of the library. White, open-sided tents dotted the area, giving the tables and chairs protection from the unrelenting sun. Even at six o'clock in the afternoon, the southern California weather could be brutally hot at the end of September.

A string quartet was playing on a small stage in front of the library.

"What do you think of the quartet?" Beth asked Emma.

"They're pretty good."

"Do you know the music?"

"Yes. It's Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*."

If she were asked, Emma would have to admit that she was a talented, though not passionate, musician. In truth, she would just as soon listen to music as perform, but her parents had encouraged her to continue her studies based on her teachers' assessments of a rare, natural ability. Emma felt the burden of so many only children who carried the expectations of their parents alone on slender shoulders.

"What do *you* think of them?"

Beth tipped her head and listened. "I like the song, if that means anything."

"It's a start," her roommate said with an indulgent smile.

When all the students had finished signing the great book in Millicent, President Davidson invited them to join him for dinner and the buffet line began. The young women chatted easily and laughed

readily. Several of Emma's high school friends had questioned her decision to attend an all-female college, but the ease and comfort she felt at this first gathering reinforced her choice.

"How's this?" Beth asked, indicating a table in full shade.

"Perfect," Emma said, putting down her plate. "It's so hot," she said. She took a large rubber band out of her purse and quickly pulled her hair into a ponytail. Two of the distinct advantages of being among a group of women such as this was the lack of preening, and an emphasis on comfort rather than looks.

They seated themselves and were soon joined by four other women from Rose Hall.

Emma smiled at them. "I'm really sorry, but I inherited my grandfather's memory, which means I forget just about everything. Will you tell me your names again?"

They all laughed.

"I'm Nancy Graham," the girl next to Beth said. "And I'm glad you asked, because I'm really bad at remembering names." She giggled and pushed the cat-eye glasses up on her nose. Her short, bleached blond hair was blunt cut and framed her thin, pale face. "But I promise to know them all by graduation day."

The girl on the other side of Nancy smiled indulgently. "I'm Juanita Perez. We're right next door to you in two-o-seven. My memory is pretty good, so I'll help my roomie here with names if she'll help me with science." Her coarse brown hair swung loosely as she turned from one side to another. "Deal?"

The two smiled at each other.

"Kathleen O'Brien," the next girl said. With her bright red curls, freckles, and green eyes, Emma could almost hear her ancestors' Irish brogue. "I've got a memory like an elephant, and I just hope I don't look like one some day!" She laughed. "Isn't that why they're so big? You know, so they can carry around all those memories?"

"And why they're called pack-yderms?" Nancy asked.

Emma shook her head. "Puns already?"

"I can't help myself," Nancy said. "I love words and I love playing with them." She shrugged. "You'll have to accept it, or I'll drive you nuts."

Emma looked at the beautiful girl next to Kathleen and smiled. "And you?"

"I'm Kathleen's roommate, Carolyn Winthrop."

Emma thought her voice sounded almost regal. She had wavy, auburn hair and blue eyes that matched exactly the blue silk sheath she wore. Emma sensed a reticence in her demeanor but wasn't sure whether she was shy or aloof.

"I'm Beth Ferber," Beth said. "Emma Chandler, here," she nodded toward Emma, "is my roommate. She plays the violin. I haven't heard her yet, but I have a feeling she's great." Beth's sweet smile lit up her face. Her pixie haircut and glasses gave her a scholarly appearance, but the brown eyes behind the lenses twinkled with a promise of mischief.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," Emma said. She was glad that Beth had introduced her...she wasn't sure *who* she was any more. She looked quickly around the table...*Nancy and Juanita next door; Kathleen and Carolyn down the hall. I should be able to remember that.*

"This certainly is a beautiful setting," Carolyn said. She looked around the Quad. "It's clearly the ideal spot for both matriculation and graduation." Emma couldn't help thinking she sounded as if she'd chosen it herself. The campus was quiet, save for their group. Freshmen arrived four days earlier than the rest of the student body each fall. Orientation was an elaborate event for new students.

It *was* beautiful. The campus had been designed around the tree-lined Quad. Emma remembered reading that the classical architecture had been fashioned after the University of Virginia, which Thomas Jefferson had designed in the early eighteen hundreds. She'd fallen in love with the campus the first time she'd visited, and although she'd applied to several schools, Willette was where she'd truly longed to go.

President Davidson tapped gently on a glass to get their attention. "Once again, I want to wish each and every one of you the best of luck during your time here at Willette. The French say, *bonne chance*, and I think that phrase is fitting here. Because what you have before you is a chance: a chance to

set the course of your life in the best possible direction. And, in that sense, it isn't luck but hard work that will ensure that you reach your goals."

When he'd finished, Nancy slowly looked around the entire group under the tents. "There are fifty-eight of us in all. I wonder how many of us will still be here on graduation day."

"If I'm not here, I'd better be dead," Juanita said. "Because if I don't graduate, my father will kill me."

"There's an incentive I hadn't heard of before," Nancy said. "Any special reason?"

"Yes. Both of my sisters graduated from Willette, and he thinks his life won't be complete until I do the same."

"Is that what *you* want?" Emma asked.

"Actually, I wanted to go to UCLA, but the one time I mentioned it he had apoplexy, so I never brought it up again."

"My dad didn't think there was any reason for me to go to college at all," Kathleen said. "He thinks a college education for a woman is a waste of money."

"Why?" Nancy asked, sounding indignant.

"He says I'll never use it. I'll just get married and have kids, and he will have flushed a fortune down the drain."

"Wow!" Beth said.

"Actually," Nancy chimed in, "the average annual fee for tuition plus room and board at a private school is roughly two thousand dollars. If you graduate in four years, it's only eight thousand. That's not much of a fortune." She chuckled. "You can tell him that on your wedding day."

Kathleen laughed.

The musicians began playing again, and servers brought bowls of Neapolitan ice cream to the tables. The dessert had already started to melt into a tri-colored soup.

"I wonder which girls are in which halls," Juanita said. "I only recognize a couple from Rose." The college had four dormitories: Victoria, Aurora, Grace, and Rose. "I wish we'd gotten into Grace," she said not as loudly. "I think overall, it's the best dorm."

"They're all classic," Carolyn said, "but I agree with you. Grace is the most beautiful."

"I heard that Aurora Hall is haunted," Nancy said.

"You're kidding," Kathleen said, leaning toward her.

"No. One of the girls told me that there is a blood stain on the rug in the sitting room; that there's a rocking chair that starts moving for no reason, and sometimes in the night, it sounds like someone is playing the piano in the living room."

"And you believe that?" Carolyn asked.

Nancy shrugged. "I'm open to the possibility."

"It sounds like nonsense to me," Carolyn said, barely attempting to cover her disdain. "After all, why in the world would they leave a blood stain on a rug?" She shook her head.

"What's a college campus without a little mystery?" Juanita asked.

"That's not the only mystery," Nancy said.

Emma noticed that Carolyn looked suddenly bored.

"What else?" Kathleen encouraged her.

"Have you all seen the big tree just outside Victoria Hall?"

"Do you mean that huge, lop-sided oak?"

"That's the one. Well, I heard that during the war, one of the students hanged herself there. She'd told people her fiancé had been killed in France."

"How gruesome," Beth said.

"That's a mystery?" Carolyn asked. Her voice clearly said it was not.

"Where *is* the mystery?" Emma asked.

Nancy leaned forward. "It turns out her fiancé *didn't* die. So, who was worth dying for?"

The girls all looked at each other.

“They say she comes back and wanders around the campus on the anniversary of her death,” Nancy added with a shiver.

Carolyn cleared her throat. “I think I’m going to go finish unpacking.” She looked at Kathleen. “You?”

Kathleen looked uncertain. “I guess so,” she said finally and stood. “See you all later.”

As the two headed for the dorm, Nancy said quietly, “You can see who wears the pants in that family.”

“I don’t think Carolyn likes mysteries,” Juanita said.

“Maybe she doesn’t like heat. It’s brutal out here.”

“Too bad the dorms don’t have air conditioning,” Juanita said. “It’s only going to be worse back in our rooms.”

“I’d go swimming if I could, but the pool isn’t open yet,” Nancy said.

“If I went swimming, I’d have to completely redo my hair. Doesn’t the water ruin your hair?” Juanita asked her.

“This mop? It’s wash and wear, if you know what I mean. Besides, there aren’t any guys around so who cares anyway?”

“Wesley Men’s College is right next door,” Emma said. “I’m sure there will be plenty of guys around.”

Wesley and Willette were companion schools built in 1922. They were named after fraternal twins born to an exceptionally wealthy family in 1915. The parents were devastated when both babies died during the flu epidemic of 1918. The couple had no other children and decided to memorialize the two little ones by creating a college in each of their names. The colleges were mirror images of each other, separate but sharing major facilities. The Commons and the Performance Hall were located between the two schools and used by all. The Commons housed the bookstore, a ballroom, meeting rooms, an art gallery, and a cafeteria. Many of the classes were open to students from either school provided they qualified, and both libraries were available to all.

“I’ve read about studies that show women do better at schools where there are no men in their classes. They are less passive, take more risks, and assume more leadership roles,” Juanita said.

“That makes sense,” Emma said. “I wonder if we also become more competitive.”

A silence followed.

“I’m sure that by the end of the year we’ll have our own opinions about all of that,” Beth said.

“Men or no men, I just can’t imagine that the competition would be as stiff at a liberal arts college like Willette as it would be at a technical school like Cal Tech or MIT,” Juanita said.

“Do you think the curriculum here isn’t as rigorous?” Emma asked.

“No. I just think that our aspirations are different. Training to become a scientist or an engineer is quite different from getting an education in liberal arts,” Juanita said.

“Do you think liberal arts is a frivolous choice?” Beth asked.

“I wouldn’t be here if I did,” Juanita told her. “But I’ll wager that at least some of the women here are really just looking for a husband.”

“Is that so bad?” Beth asked.

“Not at all.”

“I agree with Juanita about curriculum,” Beth said. “You’ll have to admit that the preparation you need to build rockets is more demanding than what you need to get married.”

“That depends on who you marry,” Emma said quickly.

“Right,” Nancy agreed. “Take Eleanor Roosevelt as an example: liberal arts education and the wife of a president.”

“Wasn’t she just voted the most admired woman in America?” Beth asked.

“Yes,” Nancy said. “For something like the tenth consecutive year!”

Some of the other students began returning to their dorms.

“Do you want to go back?” Beth asked Emma.

“Not really. Our room is going to be roasting. I’d much rather stay outside.”

The clean-up crew had started clearing the tables, and the musicians were packing up their instruments.

"I think they want us to leave," Juanita said. "I'm not ready to face the heat in our room. Does anybody want to go for a walk?"

"Sure, as long as we head for the shade," Nancy said.

"I'm in," Emma added.

"Isn't there a café nearby where we could get a Coke?" Juanita asked.

"Are you still hungry?" Nancy asked in surprise.

"Not at all. But the place might be air conditioned."

"Great idea!" Emma said. "Let's go exploring."

They walked over to the small downtown area and found a homey diner where they each ordered a Coke. There was only one other group in the entire place.

"Gosh, it's dinner time and the place is empty. How do you suppose they can stay in business?" Nancy asked quietly.

"I'll bet as soon as classes start they're swamped," Emma said. "It's close to campus, and the prices are really reasonable," she added, having read the menu.

Nancy nodded. "You're right, of course. In two weeks it will probably be SRO."

Juanita frowned. "What's SRO?"

"Standing room only."

"Ah," Juanita said, nodding.

The door to the café opened, and a group of noisy young men came in. Emma counted eight of them, though they made enough racket for twice that many.

Nancy leaned toward the middle of the table. "Wesley men, I'll bet," she said quietly, although with all the noise she hardly needed to bother whispering.

The group split in half and took over two tables next to each other. Emma noticed they were watching her and the other three girls.

The waitress brought their Cokes and set menus on the other tables. "Let me know when you're ready to order."

"We're ready," a blond boy spoke up. "We all want burgers, fries, and Cokes." He smiled winningly at Emma and then added, "Cheeseburgers."

The others confirmed his order with assorted nods and grunts.

"So," the blond said, "you girls from Willette?"

The four looked at each other, but only Nancy answered, "Yes."

"Freshmen," he said with a tone that denoted amusement.

"Something wrong with that?" Nancy asked.

"Nothing that a couple of years of liberal education can't cure," a dark-haired companion laughed.

"There's *no* cure for rudeness," Nancy snapped back.

"Don't get huffy," the blond said. "We're just teasing."

"I'm not," the other one said. "I think Willies are funny."

"Really?" Nancy challenged. "In what way?"

"How are they funny, let me count the ways," he said, twisting Shakespeare's famous line.

His companions all laughed.

"Very amusing," Nancy said. "Are you all together because none of you could get a date?"

"None of our girlfriends are back on campus yet," the blond said. "While the cat's away..." he added with a chuckle.

Emma felt her stomach tense.

"Yeah," another one said. "What they don't know won't hurt them."

Emma shook her head. She didn't want any part of this. She took money out of her purse and put it on the table. "I'll see you later," she said quietly to Beth, and she left.



*What they didn't know might be the worst sort of hurt. One thing Emma knew for a certainty: deception was painful!*

Beth was still asleep when Emma got up the next morning. She dressed quietly and went downstairs to the dining room which, not surprisingly, was empty. She grabbed a banana from a bowl on the counter and left the dorm. The morning was still cool, which was what she'd counted on. She wanted to walk around both campuses and get acclimated before classes started the following week. Of course, the first year she wouldn't have much reason to visit Wesley, but she wanted to be familiar with it anyway.

She walked down College Avenue to the furthest edge of the Wesley Campus, whose grounds were lush and full. There was something to be said for age when it came to trees. Like Willette, the center of the campus was a huge green lawn. Emma had seen university campuses on the east coast where her mother had grown up, and Wesley and Willette reminded her of those beautiful, traditional schools.

She had a small map with her but she didn't really need it. She'd studied it all summer and knew exactly what the buildings were. She wound through the campus and eventually came to the auditorium. On the front door was a sign-up sheet for auditions for the orchestra. She wrote her name at the bottom of the list with a degree of dread. She hated auditions. The sooner she got that unpleasant experience behind her, the better she would feel.

Willette and Wesley had their own music programs and they each had a chorale. But the orchestra was a combined group with both female and male members. Emma had played first violin in her high school orchestra and felt hopeful about being accepted here. Still, she had always detested auditioning.

Emma had planned to go into the bookstore and was disappointed that it wasn't yet open. But the architect had anticipated such an eventuality and the low, concrete walls in front provided the perfect place to stop and sit. She took out a copy of the Willette Bulletin she'd stuck in her purse and began reading it. However, thoughts of her unexpected discovery invaded her mind and drew her into the confused place within. She was completely engrossed when she heard an unfamiliar voice.

"You didn't have to leave."

She looked around but there was only one other person there—a tall, dark-haired young man stood not far from her.

"Excuse me?"

"You shouldn't have left."

"Left?"

"Last night. You should have stayed."

"You were there?"

He nodded.

She didn't recognize him, but he'd obviously been with the group of eight. She wasn't sure what to say...or do.

"They were only kidding around."

"I thought they were rude."

"You missed a good time. We got to know Beth and Juanita and Nancy. They're nice girls. Leaving made you look like a snob."

"Me? It made *me* look bad?" She stood up.

"Hold on," he said gently. "Let's not have a replay. I was just trying to give you some friendly advice." His slow smile bloomed like a light turned on in a dark room. "If you're quick to judge, you're going to miss out on a lot of fun in life."

"I didn't come here for fun. I came here for an education. A *liberal* education as your friend said with such disdain."

"The two aren't mutually exclusive."

She wished he'd quit smiling at her. It made it hard for her to maintain her indignation. And he was so tall! She was getting a crick in her neck looking up at him.

"Thanks for the advice," she said, perhaps a little too sarcastically. "I need to go."

He looked confused. "I thought we were going for coffee," he said with a chuckle.

"Not today," she said, and she walked off.

"Let's get together again soon," he called after her. "My name is Paul."

His voice held no hint of sarcasm; only amusement. She was *almost* tempted to go back and take him up on his offer. But she knew better. She knew what kind of heartache you faced with boys like that...like Keith...the ones who thought that what their girlfriends "didn't know wouldn't hurt them."

Were they all alike? Probably not. But the misery was the same. She knew she was right to leave last night, and she was certainly right leaving now. She was sure staying would only lead to unhappiness.

And then, there was that *smile*! That was exactly the kind of smile you had to watch out for!