

## ONLY A BREATHE APART EXCERPT

~SCARLETT~

A scraping of a chair, a tray full of food and I glance over with my practiced smile in welcome. It's not Camila, Evangeline, or anyone else from the group. It's green eyes, red hair, a familiar mischievous smile that used to be reserved only for me, and my blood pounds with excitement as if someone lit a sparkler in my chest. Then I frown because I'm not supposed to feel this way. Not with him. Not with anyone.

Jesse Lachlin winks at me as he sits across from me like no time has passed from when we climbed trees together. "What's up, Tink?"

Another thrill runs through me but then my muscles tighten. Stupid, antiquated reaction belonging to a dead past. "What are you doing here?"

Jesse pops a fry into his mouth, chews, then picks up another as if he has no intention of answering. I scan the cafeteria. Several people are watching us, curious as to why Jesse Lachlin is sitting with me, or is even at lunch, or even at school.

From the lunch line, Camila's and Evangeline's eyes are bugging out of their heads.

*What is going on?* Camila mouths.

I raise my eyebrows to inform her I have no idea. Jesse digs into his corn with his fork and that's crossing a line. "Maybe you didn't hear me, but I asked what you're doing here."

He lifts his eyes to meet mine and there's a glimmer in them that causes my lips to flatten. Fantastic. He's here to make my life a living hell.

"It seems obvious," he says.

If he remembers anything about me, he should recall I was never known for my patience and that he should be speaking, and speaking soon. "Just answer the question."

"I'm eating lunch."

I honest to God groan in frustration. "There's no room at the inn."

He surveys the table, takes in the empty seats, my books, and then gives me a good look. A slow look. As if he's trying to memorize every inch he's drinking in. My cheeks redden because that somehow feels a little too intimate for lunch. Feels a little too intimate for someone I'm no longer friends with. It feels too intimate if we *were* friends.

I glance away, but I sense him still staring at me. God help me, I want to stare back.