

UNWRITTEN MELODY by Tessa Emily Hall – Excerpt

© Published 2016 by Clean Reads – All Rights Reserved

You'll notice that the red, bolded sentences are details that came from my array of "paint" in my writer's palette.

I slam the door to Shelby's car and hold my hand above my eyes to shield the orange sunbeams. **The smell of cheeseburgers** intensifies when a man walks through the front doors of the restaurant then keeps it open for Shelby.

"Why are you walking so fast?" My words escape between heavy breaths from jogging.

I should probably consider lengthening my morning runs.

Uttering a "thank you" to the man, Shelby takes his place at the door and waits for me. A breeze sweeps a strand of wavy hair across her face. "You didn't think we'd come all the way to Columbia just to catch a movie, did you?"

My stomach drops, the way I'd imagine it'd feel if I jumped off an airplane. Which would almost be as big of a risk as rebelling against Grandma.

I should be mad at Shelby, but I can't seem to muster those emotions, not when this is yet another opportunity I should take advantage of, an opportunity to live the life of an average teen.

Inside, we're greeted by a **commotion of utensils scraping against plates and the sound of basketball playing on nearby TVs**. Shelby strides toward two hostesses—girls who appear to be our age and wear shirts and skirts that show off their skinny figures. Outfits I'd never be allowed to leave the house in.

"Table for two, please." Shelby holds her head high—the confidence of someone who doesn't have an ounce of timidity. "Near the stage."

The redheaded hostess nods and takes two menus. "Right this way."

I lean toward Shelby. "Near the stage?"

Her glossy lips remain in a straight line; she doesn't even acknowledge my question.

My stomach growls as we pass tables filled with every variety of food. Chicken fingers, steaks, and cheeseburgers are everywhere. I can't remember the last time I've been to a restaurant other than the diners and cafés and greasy spoon spots in Willow Creek.

The hostess heads toward a bar, where men yell at the basketball game that plays on TV. The stench of alcohol reminds me of a distant relative's wedding a few years back. The closer we get to the bar, the bigger the lump swells in my throat.

Shelby isn't bringing me to a bar, is she?

The hostess turns a corner, and I release a breath I didn't realize I'd been holding.

Finally, inside what appears to be a room reserved for parties, the hostess places our menus at a small, square table in front of a platform. **On the wall behind the stage is a poster that advertises brands of beers.**

Then I see it: a keyboard. It's the one James had in his music room.

I turn back to Shelby, unable to wipe away the smile that tugs at my lips.

She holds the menu before her, exposing her bubble-gum-pink nails. Her face is solemn, as if nothing out of the ordinary is happening.

"Shelby."

She lifts her head without a flinch in her expression. "Yes?"

"Did you bring me to a James Russo concert?"

The sound of squeals coming from a nearby table of middle-school-aged girls prevents her from responding.

James appears from a door in the corner, wearing a shirt that matches his

eyes and a gray vest on top. He steps to the center of the platform and grips the microphone. "Hi, everybody."

Butterflies dance around in my stomach. I jerk my head back to Shelby. "You did this?" But my words are swept away by more high-pitch screams and cheers.

"You can thank me later."

"Thanks everyone for coming out tonight." James's words echo through the mic. He paces the stage, back and forth, charming the audience by explaining why he loves living in South Carolina. The entire room grows silent. His personality is magnetic; one can't help but become drawn to him.

I nibble on my lower lip, feeling my cheeks become hot. Even though I already knew he was famous, it's weird seeing this side of him, especially witnessing so many girls go crazy at the sight of him.

"Hope you guys don't mind if I play some songs tonight."

James sits at his keyboard bench, adjusts the microphone so it meets his mouth, and rests his hands on the keys. Groups of girls of all ages have formed a huddle in front of the platform, recording videos and snapping pictures with their smartphones, mesmerized as he begins to play.

I'm not sure I'll ever be able to pay Shelby back for this. She knows I wouldn't have taken this risk—and yet I have a feeling it'll be worth it. This night may become a treasured memory I can look back on the night of my high school graduation.

A jolt of giddiness flashes through my veins at the possibility. I rest my head against my hand, unable to peel my gaze from James.

I'm about to hear him sing for the first time.