



STEFANIA S.

*love me
love u me*

MAGNETIC HEARTS
BOOK ONE, PART ONE

love me
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MAGNETIC HEARTS

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MAGNETIC HEARTS

BOOK ONE, PART ONE

STEFANIA S.

Translated from the Italian by Kelsey Trotta

 by wattpad books

To my readers.

None of this would be possible without you.

1

June

“June, quit biting your nails! Your classmates will think you’re nervous.”

Grasping the steering wheel a little too tightly between her fingers, Mom glared at me.

“Spoiler alert, Mom.” I took a deep breath. “I *am* nervous.”

I collapsed into the passenger seat, but my mom showed no signs of letting up. She hounded me with even more questions, as if the first day of school wasn’t already stressful enough. “Are you sure you slept well last night, honey? You could stand to put on a bit of concealer to hide the bags under your eyes.”

Concealer? Yeah, right. Wearing makeup to school would trigger the blowup of the century.

“Mom, I can’t win with you. I’m—” I stopped myself. Curse words were strictly forbidden in the White-Lebowsky house. “Ugh, forget it.”

I let out a deep sigh and looked out the window at the Laguna Beach neighborhoods that we passed by. They all looked the same to me: neat, orderly rows of small, freshly plastered houses covered by red, Spanish-style roofs with perfectly arranged shingles and meticulously manicured gardens.

My new life seemed perfect on the outside; in reality it was anything but. It was like a book with a cheerful-looking cover hiding a tragic story in its pages.

Private school, a two-story house, and sunny, 77-degrees-Fahrenheit weather year round. Those were the exact words my mom used when she announced that she was subjecting me to another move. Last year we lived in Seattle, where it was cold and rainy most of the time.

I hadn’t even been living there long enough to get used to the weather and buy the right clothes when she told me it was time to go. She knew I wouldn’t have agreed to

move states twice in one year, so she phrased this move as the best opportunity that she'd ever been offered. She did everything she could to make it sound convincing.

"Ask someone if you don't know which classroom to go to. Don't be shy around your new classmates! I know you're not shy."

Would it kill her to not bombard me with unsolicited advice? Wasn't changing schools for the millionth time depressing enough?

My parents had divorced three years earlier. Somehow it had never occurred to me to ask myself if I would've been better off staying with my dad in Virginia. At least he wouldn't have turned my entire adolescence upside down by uprooting me from one part of the country to the other. Mom and I had moved to four different states, and I'd changed schools three times already. From here, who knows? Type A career artist April Lebowsky was on a mission to travel all over creation to exhibit her lame artwork. The only people who even liked her stuff were old, even though she'd never admit it. I'd never seen anyone younger than seventy at any of her exhibitions. Could that really be a coincidence?

"Fix your collar, honey. And why are you sitting like a man? You'll wrinkle your skirt," she scolded.

"And since when do men and women sit differently?" Patience wasn't exactly my mom's strong suit, and I took advantage of every opportunity I could to make her lose it.

"June, don't start with me. You know what I mean."

"No, Mom, I don't. And you know what else I don't get? Why you didn't sign me up for public school like you always do. I can't stand this awful uniform." I let out a heavy sigh, blowing a lock of hair away from my nose.

"It's just a uniform, June. It even looks good on you."

"Mom, it's not *just* a uniform. Its whole purpose is in its name—to make us all look uniform. The same."

I always left the house in a hoodie and shorts. I've always hated being constricted by fancy blouses. For that matter, I've always avoided skirts like the plague.

"Why can't I wear pants like the guys do?"

"Quit whining. I already told you. I made a mint off my last exhibition. St. Mary's is

the best school in LA. You're going, and that's final."

"How exciting. I could just not study while you pay an arm and a leg for the diploma you're buying me."

My mom's face suddenly looked crestfallen. "You sound just like your father when you act like that," she lamented, a slight tone of concern in her voice.

"So long as I actually graduate. But you'll probably make me transfer schools in two months anyway."

I was being particularly difficult that morning, but it was for a good reason—this was the millionth "first day." I'd already switched schools and learned the ropes of each of them so many times. By the time I felt like I was getting the hang of things and figuring out who and what to avoid, et cetera, like clockwork, it was time to move and start all over again.

"Don't keep your nails that short, June. It's unladylike."

I rolled my eyes toward the car ceiling.

"And aren't ladies also blessed with kindness and understanding in your universe of medieval stereotypes? Because you're not exactly ladylike all the time by those standards, are you?"

"June Madeline White."

She pronounced every syllable sternly. I knew I'd gone too far.

I shot her a quick "Later!" and jumped out of the car just as we arrived.

She yelled something I couldn't understand, but I wasn't paying attention. I looked up at the school and barely stopped myself from flinching. Neat rows of red shingles lined the top of the ornate Victorian-style building. Every inch of the school's façade was festooned with intricate decorative carvings. I felt like I was two inches high standing in front of the towering building. Its stately walls overlooked an expansive front yard. Inlaid gray bricks in the front of the building created an elegant color contrast.

Is this really my new school?

I turned around to see how my mom was reacting. She was peering out through the rolled-down window.

"Did you trick me into going to a convent?"

Mom smirked. "Go on, get inside. I'll see you after school."

I reluctantly took my first few steps toward the entrance, as if each one would bring me one step closer to the point of no return.

As I walked through the towering iron-and-bronze gate, my eyes were drawn to the sea of clones around me. Everyone was dressed exactly the same. Perfectly tailored jackets, white blouses, and blue skirts for the girls; cream dress shirts and dark slacks for the boys.

Welcome to the Carnival of Conformity, June.

The students all walked confidently with their heads held high, taking perfectly decisive steps. Everyone seemed so sure of themselves that I wondered if they were even human. The girls looked like cookie-cutter models. Their statuesque bodies moved lithely with effortless elegance. Their feminine faces were framed by long, dazzlingly shiny hair, with perfectly winged cat-eye liner that emphasized their eyes, and dainty noses that were accentuated by subtle, well-proportioned contouring. The guys, too, were completely different from the ones I was used to. None of them wore oversized hoodies or wrinkled jeans. They all looked like they'd just stepped off the runway. People wore pajamas to school in Seattle and every other school that I'd gone to. None of them would ever think about wearing four-inch heels. It looked like they were all about to enter a beauty contest, but the haughty glances from a few small groups of students hanging out on the stairs surprised me the most. Mom was right; I wasn't shy, but that didn't prevent me from feeling really uncomfortable.

I picked up my pace in the hopes of making it to the front door unscathed. A nagging thought became louder in my mind: I had absolutely nothing in common with these people.

"Let me guess. You're new, and you're lost."

The gloomy voice caught me so off guard that I jumped before turning around. It belonged to a tall, dark-haired guy behind me.

Was he talking to me?

"I'm not lost, I just got here," I corrected him, almost annoyed with his assumption.

"First day in hell, huh." He said this in a jokingly sarcastic tone, but he wasn't smiling. His lips remained straight, which gave him an apathetic facial expression.

My eyes were drawn to his emerald ones, which were surrounded by long black eyelashes. His jet-black hair was brushed back.

I nodded, but was soon distracted by a slim figure running toward us. Locks of straight hair were braided into thin pigtails that swung back and forth across her studded earlobes. Her face had the same catlike features as the dark-haired guy in front of me.

“What’s going on?” she said.

“Fresh meat,” he said in a monotone.

The girl smiled and introduced herself. “I’m Amelia Hood. The guy who’s messing with you is my brother, Brian.”

“I’m June White. Nice to meet you.”

Amelia gave me the same puzzled look that everyone does when I say my name. Grandma March named my mom April, and my mom thought it was a brilliant idea to continue this family tradition by naming me after another month, so June.

Their intent stares made me feel out of place. They probably weren’t used to being around somebody as generic looking as me, with my cracked lips, straw-colored hair with frizzy ends, and dark bags under my eyes.

“Eh, it’s still cute,” I heard her mutter under her breath.

Brian gazed at me intensely. “Yeah, very.”

I furrowed my brow. Even though their words sounded encouraging, I didn’t have a good feeling about them.

I was just about to say goodbye when Amelia linked her arm with mine with confidence that I wasn’t expecting.

“You a freshman, June?” she asked as the three of us walked toward the school entrance.

“Senior,” I answered quickly, irked by her statement.

Then again, how could I blame her for asking? I barely came up to her shoulder.

“So are we. Which classes do you have today?”

“Are you guys twins?” I asked, not bothering to hide my curiosity.

“Brian’s a year older than me, but he got into some trouble last year.”

“Amelia,” her brother snapped, shooting her an icy glare to shut her up.

“I have English first,” I interjected, to diffuse the tension.

“Lucky you. I have science. It’s so lame.” Amelia groaned.

Brian looked at me indifferently. “I have English too. If you want, I’ll show you

where the classroom is.”

I was just about to accept his offer when I felt Amelia’s nails dig into my arm. I shot her a look, but she was too distracted to pay attention. It was almost like she and every other student swarming the hallway had just fallen under some kind of spell. Something, or *someone*, had caught everyone’s attention.

“Oh fuck. He’s back,” I heard her murmur.

“Who? Who’s back?” I craned my neck to see what was going on.

“Hunter.” She sighed slowly. She said his name so gravely that it sent a chill down my spine.

“Who’s that?” I asked, unsure whether I should laugh or be afraid.

“Nobody. Stay away from James Hunter.” Brian narrowed his eyes, making me shiver. “Shall we get to class?” he suggested in an attempt to redirect my attention.

I shrugged. “Okay.”

But I couldn’t move. I stood in the hallway and listened to the increasingly fervent murmurs from the crowd.

“James Hunter’s back.”

It echoed across the hall as if everyone was chanting it.

Flirty remarks peppered the chatter.

“Did he go to the gym?”

“Is it me, or is he even more bangable than before?”

“Juvie must’ve been good for him,” another commented.

Annoyed by all the swooning, I followed Brian. Besides, I had no intention of getting lost on the first day of school. So I waved goodbye to Amelia and tagged along with her brother.

At some point my curiosity got the best of me, and I turned around.

Standing on my tippy-toes, I tried to identify the individual who’d captivated the entire student population.

A guy flanked by a group of friends walked down a giant staircase at the end of the hallway. His imposing stature stood out from the crowd. Maybe it was because unlike the others, he didn’t wear the uniform jacket, or maybe it was because his perfectly tailored dress shirt fit him like a glove, accentuating his broad, muscular shoulders.

His loose necktie hung over his sculpted chest, making him look effortlessly disheveled. But what stood out the most to me was how he strutted down the hall. He sauntered like a lion returning to his pride. I was astounded by how rapt the girls were as they waited for him to acknowledge them with his dazzling blue eyes. Oblivious, he passed by all of them with a small, cocky smile on his mouth.

It hit me that I'd just watched a documentary on peacocks yesterday. What a coincidence.

James Hunter swaggered through the throng of students followed by three large guys with broad shoulders, whom I didn't dare look at twice. The closer they got, the more I looked away. Suddenly, I managed to get a better look at his face. His hair was a tousled mass of chestnut locks flecked with ashy blond streaks. Lazily, he ran his ring-adorned fingers through his hair. When it fell, it framed a well-proportioned, sculpted face with a pair of full lips and a strong jawline.

He absentmindedly looked around at his classmates ogling him admiringly. The air escaped my lungs as he moved forward. My heart started racing. I was almost tempted to lower my head just he passed me by, but instead I froze and stared into his dazzling cobalt-blue eyes, which were as dark as nightfall.

Our eyes locked for a fraction of a second. I felt a rush of adrenaline pulse under my skin and course through my veins.

So, this was James Hunter.

2

Brian

I've always been a loner, someone who only looked out for number one. But it was impossible to ignore June's enchanting eyes. Her gaze from under her long blond hair was curious, and her rosy cheeks lit up every time I looked at her for even a moment too long.

After watching that moron James Hunter saunter into school, she finally decided to follow me. We walked into the classroom together. June took a few seconds to look around, but it wasn't the ample windows that lit the room that made her ocean-blue eyes light up; it was the modular desks and new mint-green seats.

I saw her look down as if she was searching for flaws in the pristine surfaces that the principal replaced every year.

"Incredible . . . not even a scratch," she exclaimed dumbfoundedly.

The desks are polished, us not so much.

"Don't be fooled, it's all for show," I said, waving at my football teammates.

I ignored the stares of a few girls who batted their eyelashes at me. My heart was taken, and I only had eyes for my girlfriend, Ari.

I sat at an empty desk and looked for her. I thought she must be absent because Ari was always one of the first ones to class, especially when it came to literature. Our English teacher was the object of every girl in school's affection. He was about fortyish with boyish good looks and physique. Maybe it was because of his tattoos or his rebelliously curly hair, but even Ari and my sister weren't immune to his charms. Did he make me jealous? A little, but he was still a teacher and therefore the least of my concerns. If I had to be worried about him, too, I wouldn't make it out alive.

Amelia and Ari were the most popular girls in school. Now that that thug was back from juvie, the only thing that gave me hope was that he'd stay away from us.

June looked small behind me. She seemed to have every intention of hiding, but no

new student is ever invisible here.

Behind me I heard a round of whispers asking, “Who is she?” interspersed with giggles.

“Is she in the right class? She looks like a freshman.”

I ignored the chatter and sat down. June stood there frozen, unsure of what to do. Almost all the seats were taken.

“Why is everyone staring at me?” she muttered under her breath before taking a few steps forward and turning a few guys’ heads. She reminded me of Ari but with a completely different physique. I wasn’t comparing them on purpose, but I instinctively caught glimpses of her curves in her tight-fitting uniform. Her thighs peeked out from under her pleated skirt while her blouse showcased her generous curves.

“I’m usually alone. You can sit here if you want,” I suggested, motioning to the chair next to me before shooting Sammy and Bonnie a look. Both were staring at me inquisitively.

The whole school knew I liked to keep to myself. I didn’t trust anyone, and I didn’t like anyone. But June seemed different from everyone else.

“Do you have your books?” I asked as she rummaged through the textbooks in her hands. None of them seemed to be the right ones.

“I can’t believe it. I brought my physics book instead of my English book,” she stammered.

“You can share with me.”

She raised an eyebrow and eagerly nodded. She approached the seat while a few students indiscreetly glanced at her.

The class’s attention was quickly directed to the door. Murmurs ricocheted throughout the room. I guessed James Hunter and his friends had just set foot in class.

I felt a surge of rage course through me and coalesce into tightly formed fists that I kept on my seat. Making eye contact with him was enough to make my jaw automatically clench.

James didn’t seem to notice. He looked down at me, almost pleased with himself at my reaction. I didn’t even know what made him so sure of himself. His family was a

disaster. His academic career? Don't even think about it. His future? He just got out of juvie; no prestigious university in their right mind would ever admit him.

Our glares intersected quickly like a whip cracking. There was definitely bad blood between us.

3

June

Anyone with eyes could tell that there was bad blood between Brian Hood and James Hunter. I looked away from James and thanked Brian for offering to share his textbook with me. James sauntered past us with his nose in the air as he looked down cockily at the girls' lovestruck expressions. The chestnut lock that fell on his forehead didn't seem to bother him. Instead, he tousled it even more with an instinctive but damningly hot swooping gesture.

I sensed Brian's rage flare up as soon as he looked up and made eye contact with Hunter, who looked down at him with a stormy glare. He walked past us and took a seat.

I suddenly felt his sharp gaze burning me. I shouldn't have, but my curiosity was eating away at me, and I turned around. James was *really* staring at me. Still. I felt my stomach turn as I looked into his overpowering gaze.

"Everything okay?" Brian asked in a friendly tone, forcing me to turn back around.

"Yeah," I responded quickly.

My mind wandered. I always complained to my mom about how awful I thought it would be to go to a private school. Now I could tell that she'd made the right decision—the two people I'd met so far seemed nice. That was already more than I'd hoped for, and . . .

"Typical dickhead Brian," a voice behind me shouted.

Uh-oh. I'd spoken too soon.

"Jackson, why the fuck are you always talking shit behind my back? Come say it to my face," Brian retorted angrily.

I heard a jarring metallic screech as Brian got up from his seat and glared at Hunter and his friends.

"Nobody's scared of a guy like you, Hood."

I turned around. A tall, heavysset guy and a guy with a bleached buzz cut were taunting Brian.

James didn't acknowledge Brian even though he was sitting right next to him. He was too caught up in flirting with a blond who was obsessively fiddling with the ends of her bob cut.

"Do you want to get hit again, Hood? Say it, and I'll gladly hit you."

Those words caught my attention. One of the two guys lurched toward Brian, and before I realized what was going on, the second guy dove in.

I'm gonna get caught in the middle of this. Calm your damn hormones, guys!

"Come on! I want to see what you two assholes can do," Brian taunted.

The guy with the buzz cut laughed while the other one glared and clenched his jaw.

But just as they were about to face off, James got up and everyone shut up immediately.

"I'm trying to talk to Sammy, can you not interrupt me for ten minutes?"

His voice was so harsh and authoritative that it made me jump.

He turned his fiery gaze to his friends and then to Brian, who reciprocated his glare. Suddenly he directed his gaze at me. His irises darkened, and he stared so intensely that I had to avert my gaze.

"What about you, Hood? Have you really stooped so low that you're diddling kids now? Don't you have any shame?"

Was that asshole really talking about me?

"Hi, guys! Sorry I'm late."

A strong British accent took me by surprise, distracting me from the scene that had just ensued.

The teacher walked into class, and everyone went back to their desks and acted as if World War Three hadn't been on the verge of erupting thirty seconds earlier.

"Hi, Mr. Beckett," a few girls in the front row greeted him with singsongy voices.

My jaw dropped.

What kind of school was I in? Students were required to cover up with outdated uniforms while teachers were allowed to show up wearing brightly colored Hawaiian shirts? Tattoo sleeves covered the ripped biceps peeking out from under his lime-

green shirt.

But my enthusiasm waned as the teacher grabbed a sheet of paper off the desk and called my name.

“June White.”

Everyone turned to me.

“June White?”

I raised my hand gingerly.

“Oh, there you are, June. I like your name.”

“Um, thanks?”

“Can you tell your classmates a little about yourself?”

My petrified stare must’ve given me away. I was too nervous to talk in front of a room full of strangers.

“Well, I . . .”

I clammed up as a few girls giggled. The teacher seemed to pick up on my discomfort and asked me to sit back down.

“Okay, June. Maybe another time?”

I nodded, and class started.

The bell rang after two hours, and my stomach growled. I was just about to get in line with the rest of the students leaving the classroom when I realized who was standing next to me.

James was towering over me. Oblivious to the fact that I’d just lowered my head, he stared at me.

He was much taller up close, and I couldn’t help but notice that his shirt reeked of strong cologne that almost made me dizzy. I stood still, clutching my books to my chest as I waited for him to go in front of me, but he didn’t move.

“After you, White.” His voice took me aback.

I walked in front of him silently and picked up my pace to get as far away from him as possible. I didn’t know what kind of look was on his face, but I was too afraid to look him in the eye and find out.

“James, you’re such a dick,” a girl’s voice chided him.

I made it to the hallway with no idea where I was going.

I leafed through the paper tucked into my physics textbook and found the

modules that the principal gave me, along with a key card. My locker number was written at the top. I walked down the hall until I reached the metal door with my number. Six. I tapped the key card on the lock, but the door didn't budge. Then I dragged it across the lock, but the door still wouldn't open. Finally, I tried swiping from the other direction. Even though the light turned green, the door still refused to open. I curled my fingers under the edge of the door to pry it open. My attempts to force the lock were all in vain. Frustrated, I banged on the door with my fist. The locker let out a metallic boom in reply. A few students turned around and gave me dirty looks, but nobody offered to help me.

"Getting a little violent, are we?" a voice inquired.

A guy looked at me, intrigued. His eyes were as gray as a winter morning and blond hair framed his face like an angelic halo.

"Do you want some help, or would you prefer beating the crap out of it a little more?"

"Would you mind helping me, please?" I grinned sheepishly.

"None of them work. Go like this: Grab the handle and tap your key card as you pull the door toward you. Try it."

His tone was extremely calm, like nothing could upset him.

As if by magic, the locker opened.

"Thanks, uh . . ."

"William," he answered, moving a step toward me.

"Thank you, William."

"You're welcome, uh . . ."

"June."

"I like it." He said this with ease, as if rescuing damsels in distress on their first day of school was something he did all the time. I stared at him, hypnotized by his delicate features and admiring his face for a few seconds too long. He didn't seem to mind. Then he disappeared as quickly as he'd appeared.

This place is really weird.

My stomach roared at me angrily. I decided not to waste any more time. I'd already ignored the hunger pangs for long enough.

I headed toward a vending machine, and saw a long line of people in front of it. I