

THAT'S

NOT

WHAT I

HEARD

STEPHANIE KATE STROHM



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Kimberly Landis-Lilley and Teddy Lin have been together since kindergarten, but then
someone starts a rumor that they have broken up, and suddenly the whole William Henry
Harrison High School is taking sides, somebody is putting up posters supporting Kim and
criticizing Teddy, there are incidents of artistic vandalism, people are talking about having
separate proms, and even teachers and parents are getting involved—and nobody is more
confused about the chaos than Kim and Teddy themselves.

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CHAPTER ONE

KIM LANDIS-LILLEY

DAY ONE

Kim had always thought that the day everything changed would be more of a Day Everything Changed, with capital letters. Like maybe there would be a blinding flash of green light in the sky, and then a bunch of dead birds would fall out of it, and before she knew it she'd be running through the woods with a bow and arrow, trying to defend her little sister from an alien invasion or a totalitarian regime or something like that.

Even though Olivia could definitely defend herself, as she was now taller, faster, and stronger than Kim, despite being four years younger. Probably, this just meant that Kim had been reading too many books from her best friend Jess's extensive dystopian collection. But anyway. She'd thought it would be more dramatic.

The day hadn't started off dramatically. It started off just like most of senior year had, which wasn't, honestly, really all that different from freshman, sophomore, or junior year. Not that Kim was complaining. She liked routine. Which was why she was sitting at the same table in the cafeteria she always sat at, with Jess and Elvis, waiting for Teddy, as she ate a turkey sandwich with lettuce, tomato, and honey mustard—the same sandwich she'd been eating every day for lunch since her moms packed her very first lunch way back on the first day of school.

(Mama K made the sandwiches back then. Mama Dawn was such a bad cook that even sandwiches, which were really more construction than cooking, somehow turned to messes in her hands.)

"I'm not gonna call you that," Jess said.

This was one routine Kim could have done without. Jess and Elvis had been having this fight every spring for the past three years. This was now year four of the fight, and it hadn't changed at all.

"Babe," Elvis said. "Babe. Come on. If you don't call me E-Rod, no one will. It takes one drop of ocean to start a tidal wave. That tidal wave starts with you."

"Tidal waves are massive forces of destruction," Jess argued. "This line of reasoning is disrespectful to people who have lost their lives in natural disasters."

"It's the last baseball season *ever*," Elvis whined. "I've spent the past four years as Elvis Rodriguez, moderately successful third baseman. But imagine if that moderately successful third baseman was transformed into . . . E-Rod. Can't you give me this? For my last season as a Mighty Flying Arrow?"

“I have zero allegiance to the Mighty Flying Arrows. And there is literally nothing you can say that would entice me to call you E-Rod.”

“Kim?” Elvis asked hopefully.

“Hey, Junior.” Kim’s boyfriend, Teddy, dropped a kiss on top of her head, barely ruffling her long brown hair, which stayed stick-straight no matter what she did to it. Teddy slid into the seat next to her, saving her from having to tell Elvis, again, that she just couldn’t call him E-Rod with a straight face. “You can’t forcefully create a nickname, Elvis,” Teddy said, turning to talk to his best friend. “It has to come up organically.”

“Like Junior?” Kim asked.

“Doesn’t count as a nickname if it’s on your birth certificate,” Teddy replied as he unpacked his lunch.

Kimberly Dawn Landis-Lilley Jr. was, in fact, her full legal name.

“God, I can’t wait until it’s warm enough to eat outside.” Jess looked longingly toward the door out of the cafeteria as she peeled a clementine. “It always smells like fish in here.”

“Spring’s just around the corner.” Elvis patted her on the back consolingly.

“It’s already spring. The weather just didn’t get the memo that it’s supposed to warm up.”

“Spring and . . . baseball season,” Elvis continued. “A season for rebirth. New beginnings. New nicknames.”

“Let it go, Elvis! Or I’ll give you a nickname you *really* don’t want!”

Teddy and Kim exchanged a look. Elvis and Jess were always fighting about *something*. Kim could count on one

hand the number of times she and Teddy had fought, and most of those weren't real fights, just disagreements. Like that time Kim's phone died and Teddy thought she was ignoring him. Or that time Teddy ate all the M&M's Kim was saving to eat on the bus after her away game. They were both, generally speaking, conflict-averse people. Natural pacifists. One of the many reasons they were meant to be together.

Teddy was her destiny. On the first day of kindergarten, they'd lined up alphabetically, and Kimberly Landis-Lilley had been right next to Teddy Lin. They'd been best friends immediately, and boyfriend and girlfriend since sixth grade.

(Technically, Teddy was still her best friend, but Jess was her *girl* best friend, and Kim found they were both essential. Just like Elvis was Teddy's *boy* best friend.)

So the fact that the alphabet had united them was totally destiny. But Teddy was doubly her destiny because Kim's parents had met *exactly the same way*. Kimberly Landis and Dawn Lilley had met at their freshman seminar in college, when the professor had taken attendance alphabetically. And maybe one day Kim and Teddy would get married—Kim Landis-Lilley-Lin was a bit of a mouthful, but she'd think of something—and then maybe *their* daughter would sit next to her soul mate on the first day of kindergarten, and it would be like a chain of destiny. Kim leaned over to kiss Teddy, because he just looked irresistible eating an apple. Most people didn't know that there was a cute way to eat an apple. But most people hadn't been eating lunch with Teddy Lin for the past twelve years.

“PDA!”

Kim and Teddy broke apart, and she looked up to see her theater teacher standing over them.

“Sorry, Mr. Rizzo,” Teddy said.

“Consider that your official PDA warning of the day.” Mr. Rizzo swirled a red coffee stirrer around in a mug that read *LIKE A BOSS, BUT WITH LESS MONEY*. “Carry on. Dustin Rothbart!” Mr. Rizzo boomed as he moved toward the table behind them. “That’s one for throwing garbage on the floor. I don’t care that you were aiming for the trash can!”

Teddy put his arm around Kim and carried on eating his apple. Kim knew it wasn’t just the alphabet that was responsible for bringing her and Teddy together—although she was totally grateful for the alphabet. It was destiny.

“Are you even coming to the game today?” Elvis wheedled.

“No way,” Jess said. “You know I have a strict no-games policy.”

“It’s senior year! There aren’t even that many games left!”

“And yet my policy remains unchanged.”

“I wish I could come to *your* game.” Teddy squeezed Kim just a little tighter.

“Me too. I hate it when we have games on the same day.”

Kim really did hate having to miss Teddy’s game because she had a game of her own. It was hard balancing both of their schedules during the spring sports season. Sort of like if Wei-Yin Chen and Monica Abbott had been dating while Chin was pitching for the Orioles and Abbott was pitching in the Olympics. Of course, this metaphor didn’t really hold up, since Wei-Yin Chen and Monica Abbott had never dated. And neither Teddy nor Kim was a pitcher, but Kim thought they looked a little bit like younger versions

of Wei-Yin Chen and Monica Abbott. Except Teddy was way cuter. Teddy was so cute in his baseball uniform, it should have been illegal. He was even cuter in his uniform than he was eating an apple.

“Baseball is the longest, slowest, most boring sport in existence,” Jess said. “It’s self-preservation. Nobody can sit through that.”

“But you go to Kim’s softball games!” Elvis protested.

“That’s different. I gotta support my girl. You know women’s sports don’t get the respect they deserve.”

Kim held up her fist for a pound, and then she and Jess exploded it, perfectly in sync.

“Great, Jess. Thanks,” Elvis said. “I feel really supported.”

“Be your own support, dude.” Jess shrugged. “That’s not my job.”

“Kind of is, though.”

And then they were off again. Kim wondered if they’d stay together through prom. She hoped so; otherwise it would make their pictures super awkward. And she’d have to redo the whole Limo Matrix, never mind the fact that she’d already put down a deposit on an MKT ten-passenger stretch limo. The fact that her best friend was dating Teddy’s best friend was definitely convenient, but sometimes Kim wasn’t sure if Jess and Elvis actually liked each other, or if they’d found themselves thrown together so often by hanging out with Kim and Teddy that they got together out of a sense of inevitability rather than genuine affection. From the way they were arguing—from the way they always argued—it sure didn’t *seem* like they liked each other.

“Fine!” Elvis exploded. “Don’t come! Just give E-Rod a chance! That’s all I’m asking!”

“You know when’s a great time to get a new nickname started? College,” Jess said. “Not right now. College.”

Kim cleared her throat warningly.

“Oh, calm down, Kim.” Jess jostled Kim’s shoulder good-naturedly. “I’m not violating any terms of the sacred Landis-Lilley-Lin Collegiate Accord. I can still *mention* the c-word.”

Kim and Teddy had made a pact not to tell each other where they were going to college. They hadn’t even talked about where they were applying. They’d agreed it was the only way they could each make sure they ended up at the best possible school for them. This way, neither one of them would be tempted to sacrifice anything for the other one. They’d choose their schools in a vacuum, and they’d work out whatever came next. Kim knew she’d love Teddy just as much whether he was right down the hall or across the country.

It was a good plan. It was a *smart* plan. It was the kind of plan that ensured their futures, that had made Mama K nod with approval when Kim had first come up with it as they scrolled through the Common App’s website together in Mama Dawn’s home office. But sometimes, Kim was so desperate to know if she’d be anywhere near Teddy she wanted to abandon the plan altogether and demand he produce a list of every single school he’d applied to, preferably organized geographically.

That was why she couldn’t even mention the c-word. Her resolve wasn’t nearly as firm as Jess thought it was.

“Want to hit up the vending machines before lunch ends?” Teddy asked as Jess and Elvis continued to bicker. “M&M’s on me.”

“I think you know the answer to that one.”

Kim loved M&M’s the way she loved Teddy. She literally could not imagine her life without them. Good thing she’d never have to.

Ready for M&M’s and ready to be done with the whole E-Rod thing, Kim finished the last bite of her turkey sandwich and zipped up her lunch bag. Jess didn’t even break stride in her argument with Elvis, but still managed to wave goodbye to Kim as she and Teddy left the table, arms wrapped around each other’s waists.

“You know Ms. Johansson’s trying to get them to take all the candy out of the vending machine,” Teddy said casually as they headed out of the cafeteria toward the gym, like that wasn’t going to totally ruin senior year.

“No way. She wouldn’t.”

“She was talking to Principal Manteghi about it outside the lounge. Healthy choices. All that stuff. But I don’t think Manteghi’d go for it. She’s got that huge jar of candy on her desk.”

“She better not go for it.”

“Don’t worry, Junior.” Teddy squeezed her hand—once, twice. Kim squeezed his hand back, just once. The three squeezes—that was their thing. One of their things, anyway. “I know the vending machine is your favorite thing at William Henry Harrison High.”

“*You’re* my favorite thing at William Henry Harrison High.”