

Promises

Book Chapter ~ Braden Reese de Leon

s y n o p s i s

Life's not easy and being a Christian in a sinful world isn't either. Taylor Harte was under the impression that her best-friend, Daniel Strone, was a boy who loved the Lord because he's been going to church for a long time, and she never heard a complaint. That changed when his parents left to go on a business trip, and he spilled that he wasn't a Christian during breakfast with the Harte family. Taylor works to provide reasonable explanations of the Bible as she struggles through losing her best-friend and being judged by all her classmates. She still doesn't give up and pursues her objective to have Daniel believe. With her determination, Daniel slowly begins to see things differently. He accepts God in his heart, and he works to fix the broken bond between him and Taylor.

one | truth

There are many ways to wake someone up in the morning. When I asked my twin brother to wake me up, having cold water splashed on me and my bed sheets is not what I had in mind.

"Terrance! I'm sure you don't want this to be like Cain and Abel because I assure you, you're not Cain!" I warned, slipping out of my bed and chasing him down the stairs and into the kitchen. His laugh echoed off the walls. Being high-school seniors, you would expect us to be more mature, but not these set of twins – at home at least.

"You're not that athletic compared to this guy," Terrance teased, gesturing to himself. I knew he was right; I was more brains rather than muscle. We passed our mother as she made breakfast, and she simply laughed in amusement as she shook her head in mirth.

"You two will never change," she mused, flipping a pancake.

Terrance and I paused and smiled at her before simultaneously saying, "No, we won't, but good morning!" Shortly after, the chase resumed, but it resulted in me hopping on his back, an attempt to tackle him, and getting a piggyback ride instead.

"Get your father and the other two!" I heard our mom call out. 'The other

two' as in Jace, our fourteen year-old brother, and Jessica, our six year-old sister. I exchange a glance with Terrance as he looks over his shoulder to peek at me. He gives a small nod before hiking up the stairs and managing not to drop me.

"Dad!" I call out, rapping at his office door. "Breakfast!" I hear a muffled murmur of a reply before Terrance makes his way to Jace's room and I repeat the same thing for him and Jessica.

About five minutes later, everyone is at the table. We gather hands to pray until our mother cuts us off. "Wait!" she exclaims, her eyes wide in panic. We all give her puzzled looks, and she shakes her head in disappointment. "Daniel is joining us for breakfast, remember?"

Shoot. Daniel Burgos, my best-friend since forever, is supposed to eat all meals with us while his parents are out on a business trip for a month. It's when my mother mentions this that I notice an extra place setting beside me.

"Taylor, go get him. He's your best-friend," my father told me with his usual bright smile. I don't hesitate at all and get up from my seat to head to Daniel's house next door. The last thing I hear before the back door closes entirely is Terrance's teasing about Daniel being my boyfriend. Typical.

After using the key under the doormat to enter, I make my way up the stairs to Daniel's room. An odor hits me, and I look over to my right to see a pile of clothes lying on the floor. Automatically, my eyes roll as I nudge the pile closer to the wall with my foot before deciding to pick it up and place it in the laundry basket instead. Glad to be leaving the clothes, I saunter over to Daniel's

bed where he's fast asleep.

"Danny boy," I say in a singsong voice, knowing he highly dislikes that nickname. In response, I only hear incoherent murmurs that I roll my eyes at.

"Daniel, it's breakfast time," I tell him. More murmurs. "You know the Bible says that your laziness is going to kill you if you don't work."

"I'm suddenly awake," he replies, sitting up groggily. I notice his tousled blonde-hair making him appear more attractive, and before his eyes focus on me, he has to blink a few times. "Do you always have to recite your Bible verses with me?"

"I'm just telling you what it says." I shrug, and he still has a bored expression on his face. I couldn't tell whether he was uninterested or tired. "and you're a Christian so it's okay," I add, ignoring the reluctance in his voice when he hums in reply.

We remain still for awhile as I wait for him to do something, but he just stares at me. "Well?" he finally asks, looking at me with a hint of amusement. I furrow my eyebrows in confusion as I try to make sense of his words.

"Well what?" His lips twitch into a half smirk before he replies.

"I need to change," he states nonchalantly, letting out a laugh when my eyes widen in surprise. "But if you want to watch and admire my muscles then—" He pauses when he sees me glaring daggers in his direction.

"Don't you dare finish that sentence! Just change in the closet or something!" I exclaim in panic. I cover my ears and close my eyes despite the

fact that I knew he wouldn't finish his sentence or change in front of me. He chuckles lowly as he slips out of his bed and heads to the closet. It doesn't occur to me, until he's about to close the door, that he wasn't wearing a shirt. That's good, I guess. At least I don't have my head in the gutter.

He walks out with new clothes and heads to the bathroom to brush his teeth and fix his hair. After a few minutes, we begin heading back to my house. He locks the door behind us and trails after me as we head over to my house. The sweet aroma of pancakes and syrup fill the air upon our entrance. "Woah, it smells great. What is that?" Daniel asks from behind me.

"Diffusion," I reply before pausing and furrowing my eyebrows at my own response. Daniel pauses at the doorway to give me a questioning look before letting out a laugh.

"Nerd," he whispers to me when he passes. I roll my eyes for the umpteenth time and take my seat beside him. His eyes light up at the sight of food while he reaches out his hand to get some, but I stop him by smacking him. "Hey!" he whisper-yells, holding his hand close to him and cradling it after my hit.

"Prayer," I remind him. He seems hesitant as he lifts his hand and takes mine and my father's. I listen as my dad prays about the food and how thankful he is, but I could feel Daniel tensing even though I was just holding his hand. After the prayer, everyone simultaneously says, 'Amen' as usual, except Daniel's is a bit delayed. "Are you alright?" I ask quietly, noticing how he's now

awkwardly shifting his weight side to side as he sits in his seat.

"No," he replies, not keeping his voice low the way I did. "I'm not really into the Christian stuff," he says bluntly. There's a clatter of utensils and silence falls upon the table. My dad's grin falters, but he tries to hide it, my mom is giving us a curious glance wondering what happened, Terrance's eyes widen fractionally, and Jace and Jennifer look incredulous, not believing anything Daniel said.

I can now see my hand shaking slightly, and I know that only happens when I'm nervous. My biggest fear just played out in my house, and I can't believe it. I don't believe it at all, so I do what any disbelieving person would do: I laugh. Rather loudly as well, but my laughter fades as I catch Daniel's eyes. "No," I say, looking at him unsurely. "You're not being serious," I add, but it sounds like I'm convincing myself.

He scratches the back of his head sheepishly, not knowing what to do with the awkward situation he landed himself in. With the silence that greets me, I know he's telling the truth, which makes this all the more difficult. My family doesn't have much of a problem with non-believers, but Daniel has been attending church with his family ever since he was born.

"Okay," I say, my voice surprisingly steady and not shaky. My whole family looks at me wondering how I'll handle the situation because they know that I'm not going to brush this off. I exchange an assuring look with them, and all my siblings resume eating while my parents continue to look at me reluctantly.

"It's okay," I repeat, finally getting them to drop the subject and eat.

"It's okay?" Daniel asks me, sounding scared to acknowledge me but glad that I got him out of that situation.

"Yeah," I reply nodding. "What's your view on Christianity anyway?" He lets out a laugh, probably already expecting me to ask a question like that.

"I don't know." He throws his arms up slightly in frustration. "I just feel like people are pushing others too much when it's just a belief. Like how do they know if it's a real thing?" My lip surreptitiously twitches up in a smile at his answer because I now know what to do, so I simply nod my head and continue eating.

After breakfast, Daniel is outside helping my mom in the garden, and I'm in the kitchen doing the dishes while my brother is cleaning the table. "So whatcha gonna do?" Terrance asks, causing me to slightly jump at the abrupt sound. I compose myself and continue the dishes before I answer.

"I'm planning on taking my time and giving him facts to show that Christianity is reasonable and not just some made up fairytale. Like he said, he feels like some Christians are too pushy, and I agree, so I'll do it one day at a time," I tell him simply, not addressing the complications that I could come across.

"But what if he stops being your friend? What if your friendship ends because of this? Are you really willing to drop all those years of friendship for that?" he asks. I pause for a moment, thinking about his words. I don't want to

lose Daniel as my best friend. I sigh, turning off the faucet and facing my brother.

"If no longer being best-friends, or friends at all, with Daniel is what it takes to get him to be a real Christian and to have a relationship with God, then yes. I would risk that because I trust the Lord. I may not know what he's doing, but I'll understand when the time comes." Terrance engulfs me in a hug, and I blink back tears, not realizing there were any in the first place.

If only I knew what was in store for me.