

Big Screen

Book Chapter ~ Braden Reese de Leon

s y n o p s i s

Lights. Camera. Action. Dalton Lake is the son of the famous Christopher and Rosaline Lake. Because they were always busy, the time they did not spend with him was repaid in giving him everything he ever wanted. As a result, he became very arrogant. Now, he is in his late teens, and despite being loaded, and being the heartthrob of the nation, he still feels—*empty*. Enter Paige Winfrey, the girl handing out church flyers *and* the girl he runs into. She apologizes and proceeds to hand him a flyer, to which he rudely rejects but surreptitiously stuffs into his pocket out of curiosity. He meets her again when he attends a service, and his interest in Christianity slowly begins to expand. Through many tough obstacles, Dalton finally finds the missing puzzle piece in Christ.

01 | hope

Lights.

Blinding lights flashed as a camera was being adjusted. Dalton squirmed in his seat as the interviewer smiled brightly at him, her pearly whites glinting. He forced a small smile in return before looking off to the side to glance at his manager, Jared. The latter was a thin-framed guy and was having a discussion with a member of the camera crew as he adjusted his glasses and pointed to something on his clipboard. Jared was only a few years older than Dalton. It was his parents' attempt at making sure he got along with his manager.

Camera.

Dalton continued to scan his surroundings, running a hand through his tousled brown hair. He had been dealing with the limelight since his heart first began to beat. Eighteen years of being in the spotlight was tiring for him, and through it all, he still felt unsatisfied. He refused to admit that out loud.

"Jane, you're on in five!" a man in a black hat called, holding up his fingers and having them correspond to whatever number he called out. The composed lady nodded as she muttered a quick prayer under her breath.

Action.

The cameras began rolling, the curtains were drawn, and Jane plastered a smile on her face. "Hello all! I'm Jane Amaris here with the

handsome Dalton Lake! I hope you all are having a blessed day!" she greeted, exaggerating the compliment. *What's the point of praying?* Dalton looked off to the side to where all the food was located; he had to skip breakfast.

"Dalton?" The voice drew him out of his thoughts.

He blinked, furrowing his eyebrows and focusing his eyes back on Jane. He dragged his gaze over to the people seated in the audience and intentionally scratched the back of his head sheepishly. "I'm sorry, what?" he asked, his British accent seeping through. He developed it from his mother's side.

The room filled with laughter and excited shouts. "Isn't he adorable?" Jane asked the audience, receiving more screams. "How are you, Dalton?" she questioned, turning to him. A silence fell upon the room as everyone waited for his response. Knowing what everyone was expecting, he turned to the fans and gave them his signature smile, like he always did.

After the show, he went back to the car and Jared opened the door for him before slipping in and closing it. Dalton's parents were waiting inside, but they were both occupied with their phones. "Hey, mum. Dad," he greeted, giving them a cordial dip of the head. No reply. "Did I do well?" he tried. Nothing. He sighed and rolled his eyes, chancing a glance at Jared who gave him a sympathetic look in return. "I was thinking of eating out. I'm a bit peckish."

That got their attention. His mother, Rosaline, slowly lowered her phone and his father, Christopher, nearly spit out his drink. Dalton watched in amusement as his father reached for a napkin and dabbed at the droplets of water that leaked from his mouth. Rosaline let out an incredulous laugh. "Honey, you know you can't eat out."

Dalton shrugged and leaned back, bringing his dirty shoes on the leather seat. He folded his arms behind his head before murmuring, "I don't see the problem with it." He smirked in satisfaction when he heard Rosaline gasp and when his father began coughing harshly. His mother kicked his legs so that they were back on the floor.

"Dalton Peter Lake!" Christopher scolded. The use of his full name did not faze him at all. He was content knowing that they were paying attention to him.

His right shoulder rose slightly, a mere attempt at a shrug, before he finally met their eyes. "Just confirming that my parents aren't zombies," he mused. Rosaline narrowed her eyes at him, but she simply hit the back of his head then returned to whatever she was doing on her phone.

The rest of the ride home was silent, save for the noise in the street and the soft music playing in the car. Once the car stopped in front of their home, Rosaline and Christopher filed out of the vehicle and made their way to their offices, leaving Dalton in the car with Jared.

Watching his parents walk away, Dalton sighed. "I'm going for a walk. See ya."

Jared's eyes widened in panic. "But, sir, you have a—"

"Bye, Jared," Dalton said in a singsong voice as he slipped out of the car. He went to his room, changed, and pulled on a sweatshirt before going back outside for his walk. Five minutes into his stroll, he gave in and fished out his phone to call Jared. His parents would get mad if he skipped any event on his schedule. Jared picked up in a matter of milliseconds. Perhaps it was because he feared getting fired, but Dalton liked to think that it was because he actually cared.

"Uh, sir?" the other line questioned.

Dalton sighed and rolled his eyes slightly. "Jared, you're five years older. Stop calling me that." There was a surprised silence from the other end. "This doesn't make us friends. Just call me Dalton or Dalt."

"Dalt? I've never heard anyone call you that—"

"Did you cancel the meet and greet?" he immediately asked, effectively changing the subject. If Jared noticed the change in mood, he certainly didn't question it.

"No," Jared responded, a little reluctant to answer.

"Fantastic! I'm at the plaza. Meet me there."

“Alright, Dalt. See ya.” Dalton hummed in response and hung up. He did not notice his arrival at the front of the food court. Pulling down his hood, he rushed through crowds of people, making sure not to bump into people.

He has never been a fan of physical contact, so the moment someone’s shoulder brushed his, he scowled. Dalton narrowed his eyes at the man as he continued making his way to where the meet and greet was being held. He did not watch where he was walking and was soon crashing to the ground with the scent of a floral perfume surrounding him.

“Ow,” an unfamiliar female voice commented. Dalton scrambled away from her and pulled his hood over his head again. He did not bother apologizing because that simply was not the person he was, so he waited for the other person to. “Uh..are you alright?” the girl finally asked. Dalton chanced a glance at her and had to blink to make sure he was seeing her correctly.

The girl had wavy blonde hair that made her hazel-brown eyes stand out and freckles dotting her nose and cheeks. She looked his age, had a perfect complexion, and had the basic-girl body type.

“Hello?” She waved her hand in front of his face. He stopped observing her and gave her his charming smile with his blue eyes glinting under the lighting.

“Why hello there.” Of all the ways she could have reacted, Dalton never would have guessed that she would roll her eyes. She turned away and began

to pick up the scattered papers on the ground, and Dalton watched as the people mindlessly stepped on them.

“A little help down here please,” she called out to him. He quirked an eyebrow in amusement and ignored her wish. He was not a slave after all. As she picked up the last pages she stood back up and inhaled sharply. “Thank you so much for all your help.”

Dalton smiled back at her. “You're welcome, pretty lady,” he replied, not realizing she was being sarcastic. She rolled her eyes once more.

“You're ridiculous” she remarked.

“I'm waiting for an apology,” Dalton told her. “You rudely bumped into me,” he added after a moment of thought. She whirled around with an incredulous look on her face.

“I bumped into you?” she repeated, cocking an eyebrow at him. Dalton knew it was his fault, but he was definitely not going to apologize.

“Yes,” he returned. “Go on now. Get down and apologize.” She didn't have to get down and kneel, but Dalton thought it would be more amusing.

She let out a disbelieving scoff and remained where she stood. “The audacity!”

He blinked in confusion. “I don't know what that means.. All good things I hope!” he piped. He watched as the girl shook her head and inhaled sharply. After a moment of silence between them, the blonde girl sighed in resignation.

She held out a piece of paper. "Peace offering. I'm sorry for running into you." She waited for him to take the flyer before continuing. "My church is just around the corner, and we'd really love to have some new people," she stated with a soft smile. *Another Christian.*

"Do you know who I am?" Dalton asked. The girl furrowed her eyebrows, and that was all the indication he needed. "Good." He crumpled the piece of paper, dropped it on the ground, and kicked it away. "See ya," he called over his shoulder as he walked away.

"Hope to see you there! My name is Paige! Paige Winfrey!" she shouted. He turned around to face her as he backed away.

He had a smirk plastered on his face as he called out his next words. "My name's Dalton! Dalton Lake!" A few girls looked up at the sound of his name, and he quickly realized his slip. He hid under his hood and scurried away, not looking back.

As he rounded the corner, he ran into someone else. "Sorry! Oh, hey, Dalt," Jared greeted. Dalton let out a breath of relief at the sight of his manager.

"Oh my God, what impeccable timing you have," Dalton mused, letting out a laugh. He noticed Jared's eyes narrow, and he tilted his head to the side. "What's wrong?"

"Can you not use God's name in vain like that?" Jared asked. He appeared serious that Dalton had to fight the urge to laugh again.

“Uh..sure,” Dalton replied unsurely.

“Great! Now come, you're running late already,” Jared informed him, turning on his heels and walking away.

Dalton made a move to follow him but noticed a crumpled piece of paper at the corner of his eye. When he looked over his shoulder, he realized it was the same paper he kicked away earlier. *Would church fill the empty void?*

“Lake! Let's go! You have a hoard of girls waiting for you!” Jared yelled from the other side of the escalator.

Dalton looked at the ball of paper one last time. “Yeah, give me a moment!” he replied. Finally making up his mind, he walked over to the paper, picked it up, and stuffed it into his pocket. Looking up and searching for Jared, he called out, “Wait *up!*”