

harsh pink

color me burned

melody carlson



Sample from *Harsh Pink* / ISBN 1576839524

Copyright © 2006 NavPress Publishing. All rights reserved. To order copies of this resource, come back to www.navpress.com.

© 2007 by Melody Carlson

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without written permission from NavPress, P.O. Box 35001, Colorado Springs, CO 80935.
www.navpress.com

THINK Books is an imprint of NavPress. THINK is a registered trademark of NavPress. Absence of ® in connection with marks of NavPress or other parties does not indicate an absence of registration of those marks.

ISBN-10: 1-57683-952-4

ISBN-13: 978-1-57683-952-2

Cover design by studiogearbox.com

Cover photo by Masterfile

Creative Team: Nicci Hubert, Erin Healy, Arvid Wallen, Kathy Mosier, Darla Hightower, Pat Reinheimer

This is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents, and dialogues are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Published in association with the literary agency of Sara A. Fortenberry.

Carlson, Melody.

Harsh pink : color me burned / Melody Carlson.

p. cm. -- (Truecolors series)

Summary: Reagan Mercer is just trying to fit in at her new high school when she bumps one of the most popular girls there from the cheerleading squad, but when she eventually becomes part of the in-crowd, she finds their behavior--and hers--disturbing. Includes discussion questions.

ISBN 978-1-57683-952-2 (alk. paper)

[1. Popularity--Fiction. 2. Cheerleading--Fiction. 3. Conduct of life--Fiction. 4. High schools--Fiction. 5. Schools--Fiction. 6.

Christian life--Fiction. 7. Moving, Household--Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.C216637Har 2007

[Fic]--dc22

2007009513

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 / 10 09 08 07

FOR A FREE CATALOG OF NAVPRESS BOOKS & BIBLE STUDIES,
CALL 1-800-366-7788 (USA) OR 1-800-839-4769 (CANADA).

Sample from *Harsh Pink* / ISBN 1576839524

Copyright © 2006 NavPress Publishing. All rights reserved. To order copies of this resource, come back to www.navpress.com.

Other Books by Melody Carlson

Moon White (NavPress)

Bright Purple (NavPress)

Faded Denim (NavPress)

Bitter Rose (NavPress)

Blade Silver (NavPress)

Fool's Gold (NavPress)

Burnt Orange (NavPress)

Pitch Black (NavPress)

Torch Red (NavPress)

Deep Green (NavPress)

Dark Blue (NavPress)

DIARY OF A TEENAGE GIRL series (Multnomah)

DEGREES series (Tyndale)

Crystal Lies (WaterBrook)

Finding Alice (WaterBrook)

Three Days (Baker)

On This Day (WaterBrook)

Dedicated to the memory of Kimber Wilson
www.8thdayfoundation.org

one

A PRETTY BLONDE GIRL SAUNTERS OVER TO WHERE I'M SEATED ON A CEMENT bench in the courtyard. It's a warm September day and I've been reading a book and basically minding my own business, waiting for the lunch break to end so I can go to class. I continue looking down at my book, pretending I haven't noticed this girl, pretending I couldn't care less that she's staring at me. I don't actually *know* this girl, although I've seen her around. And I definitely know her type. In some ways I *am* her type.

For starters, she's the kind of girl who wears the right designer and wears it well. Not in the flashy, overdone Paris Hilton sort of way, but in a way that shows she has a good sense of style and class. She keeps her makeup impeccable without looking cheap and her highlights appear totally natural. She's looking at me with an expression of superiority mixed with boredom, as if I'm not really worthy of her attention, but for some reason she has set her sights on me. She places one hand on her hip, striking a pose I'm sure is for the benefit of her friends who are packed together, whispering, about twenty feet away. Her upper lip curls ever so slightly, as if she's just gotten a whiff of something that smells bad. And then she speaks. "So *you're* the one."

I close my paperback and study her carefully, taking my time

to respond, waiting just long enough to make her a little uneasy, or so I hope. “The one *what?*” I keep my tone even. No way do I want her to know she’s making me uncomfortable. The first step toward losing power is to let them see you squirm. I know this because I know how to make others squirm. Sometimes it’s necessary.

“The one who *somehow* made it onto the varsity cheerleading squad.” Now she’s actually looking down her nose at me. And that’s when I notice there’s a slight ball on the tip of her nose and, from my angle, it’s just a bit reminiscent of Miss Piggy. Enough so that it makes me actually smile. So she’s not so perfect after all.

“What’s so funny?”

I just shrug as I slip my book into the oversized Burberry bag that I snagged from my mom’s closet last weekend. “So, I assume you stopped by to offer me your hearty congratulations.” I make sure she can hear the sarcasm in my voice, then I slowly stand. Of course, I wonder why I bothered, since she’s at least six inches taller than me and I’m still looking up at her. My five-foot stature has some perks, like when it comes to gymnastics or being tossed high in an exuberant cheerleading stunt, but it gives me a definite disadvantage in power struggles like this.

“Who *are* you anyway?” she asks as if she’s the reigning queen of Belmont High. And maybe she is.

“Reagan Mercer,” I say lightly. “Pleased to make your acquaintance, uh, whoever *you* are.”

“Everyone *knows* who *I* am.” She glances toward her friends, who are slowly meandering over as if on cue. Now I notice they are some of the same girls who tried out yesterday. “I’m Kendra Farnsworth,” she continues in that smug, superior tone, “the girl you *barely* beat out for varsity squad. In fact, I’m first alternate. Not that I care.” She looks as if she’s about to yawn. Perhaps she’s boring herself as much

as she's boring me. But she's not finished. "I've been cheering since middle school and I was on varsity last year and if you hadn't dropped in, like out of nowhere, well, I'd still be on varsity right now. Not that I care so much, since I think I've outgrown that whole scene."

Suddenly I remember this girl with clarity. As usual, I had tried not to watch as the other girls did their routines during tryouts. It's just my way. I figure if they do really well, I'll get discouraged and lose my competitive edge. Or if they totally flop, I'll get overly confident and not give it my best shot. For me, it's better to just not watch. But I remember this girl and exactly what went wrong. She started out fine, but then she forgot the second half of the long routine. Oh, she did it with a fair amount of grace and style and actually laughed at herself, then did a couple of really good jumps that made the crowd cheer. Still, to forget that much of the routine—well, it didn't look too promising to me. And apparently it had cost her a position on the squad. Like that's my fault.

The list was posted just this morning, and since the other names are still unfamiliar to me, I only looked at it to make sure my name was on it. Despite knowing I'd performed a flawless routine and even thrown in a couple of back handsprings that seemed to impress the crowd, you can never be sure. So when I read my name on the list, I just sort of nodded, did a silent internal cheer, then went on my way. I'm fully aware that I need to play this out carefully. Being the new girl comes with all kinds of challenges and liabilities. Obviously Kendra Farnsworth is one of them.

"Sorry about that," I say in a voice that I mean to sound genuine. "That's a tough break."

She rolls her eyes, then studies a perfectly shaped fingernail. "Tell me about it."

I look at her French manicure with those white tips that never

look quite real. I'm surprised she hasn't heard that French is out, or maybe she doesn't care. "I forgot part of a routine once," I say offhandedly. "It was in a state competition." Okay, that is a total lie, but I need to get her to trust me by appearing to be transparent. The truth is, I had been really worried that I'd forget our hardest routine when we competed at state last year, but it never actually happened. I made sure it didn't. But my "confession" does the trick. It causes Kendra to smile, ever so slightly, and I think maybe the ice is breaking or maybe just thawing a little. She gives a nod over to where her friends are standing and, as if given permission, they come over and begin talking to me, introducing themselves and cautiously congratulating me for making the squad. Apparently some of them made it too.

"Where are you from anyway?" asks a petite brunette named Sally.

Now, this is one of those questions that can easily be taken wrong. Sometimes people ask me where I'm from as in, "What's your ethnic background?" Because of my Asian features I've even had people assume I can't speak English—which can be either amusing or irritating, depending on my mood. Under these circumstances, I decide to give Sally the benefit of the doubt.

"We moved here from Boston last summer," I explain. "I'd been a cheerleader at my old high school since freshman year." This I say for Kendra's benefit, although my eyes are still on Sally. "And I cheered in middle school before that." I shrug. "Between gymnastics and cheerleading, it seems like I've spent most of my life bouncing around." I sort of laugh.

"Well, you were really good yesterday," says a skinny blonde as she pokes Kendra in the arm. "I mean you totally rocked Kendra's world."

“Shut up, Meredith,” snaps Kendra.

“Hey, it’s your own dumb fault,” says Meredith. “We told you to practice, but you were like all, ‘No, I don’t need to.’”

“Whatever.” Kendra narrows her eyes and adjusts the strap of her Fendi bag. “Like I told Reagan, I’ve decided that cheering is juvenile anyway. This is my senior year and I’ve got better things to do.”

“Yeah, like what?” challenges Meredith.

“Like Logan Worthington,” Kendra says with a sly expression. “I wouldn’t mind doing that boy this year.”

Sally laughs. “He’s about the only one you haven’t done.”

“What is this?” says Kendra with a wounded expression. “Bash Kendra Day? It isn’t bad enough that I didn’t make the squad, so all my friends have to turn on me too?”

Of course, this plea for mercy changes everything. And suddenly these girls are apologizing, offering condolences, and practically offering to carry her books. Not that she has any. Kendra just smiles, a glimmer of triumph in her eyes. “That’s better.” Then it’s time to head back to class.

“Nice meeting you guys,” I say as I head off toward the English department. They call out similar pleasantries, but I can tell this isn’t over. I know enough about girls to know that it’s never really over. And I suspect Kendra isn’t ready to let this go yet. The question is, how far will she take it?

It’s times like this when you need a good friend by your side. I think about my best friend, Geneva, back in Boston. Man, do I wish she were here now. Not only is Geneva gorgeous and intelligent and lots of fun, but she can easily hold her own against girls like Kendra. In fact, Geneva and I made a pretty daunting pair. I doubt I’ll ever have anyone quite like her again. That makes me sad. Good friends aren’t that easy to come by.

Geneva and I developed our own classification system for friends. We ranked them as class A, B, or C. Naturally, Geneva was a class A. Actually, she was an *A-plus*. I'm sure she felt the same about me. My second best friend, Bethany, was more like a class B, but she was better than nothing if Geneva was unavailable.

Class-C friends are more a matter of convenience . . . or desperation. Like if you're late to lunch and have to stand by yourself in line and don't want to look pathetic, you talk to someone you'd normally just ignore. That's a class C. Geneva and I had our own private joke. We'd say, "Isn't Jessica class C?" And naturally, Jessica, who would be listening, would assume we'd said *classy*, and she would feel special. Then when she turned away, Geneva and I would exchange a knowing sort of smile. I miss that.

Then Mom got transferred to what feels like about a million miles away from Boston, and now I have to start over. I don't even have a class-C friend anymore. Oh, I hung with one for a few weeks during the summer, when I was so bored I wanted to slit my throat. My grandma thought I should meet a girl in our neighborhood, and for Nana's sake, I tried to be nice to Geek Girl, although it concerned me that someone influential might see me with her and I'd be classified as a loser even before school started. Fortunately, it seems that didn't happen. But the sad truth is that poor Andrea Lynch was definitely a class-C friend—more like a C-minus. Although to be fair, she might've made it to a plus if I'd stuck with her.

After a couple of weeks, I'd trained her to quit laughing through her nose, curing her of this totally gross grunting noise. Then, after I introduced her to a proper skin-care regimen, her complexion actually started to clear up. And I have to admit that she actually did have this quirky sense of humor and we even had some good laughs. But a few days before school started, I dumped Geek Girl so

fast that I'm sure her head is still spinning. I've been utilizing my caller ID to avoid taking her phone calls, and I even went so far as to block her e-mails. We're talking cold turkey here. I'm fully aware that was pretty heartless on my part. But when you're the new girl in town, you have to fend for yourself. And I'm smart enough to know that friends like Andrea Lynch are not an asset.

Even when I saw Geek Girl in school during those first few days less than a week ago, I pretended not to know her. I actually ignored her when she called out my name a couple of times, playing blind, deaf, and dumb. The only alternative would've been to set her straight, and that's pretty harsh. Anyway, I think she got the hint. Does that make me a mean girl? No, I reassure myself as I walk into my lit class, taking a seat in the second row. It simply means I'm a survivor.