



Excerpt from:

Zeta or Omega?

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Lora-Leigh thought she was going to sweat to death or melt into a puddle on the ground from the frickin' heat as she and the rest of Group 7 stood in front of the Alpha Sigma Gamma house on Sorority Row. They were awaiting the official start of recruitment with the traditional southern Ice Water Teas.

She thought of the contradiction of ice water and hot tea. Apparently, back in the olden days, they actually served tea, but nowadays, they served Rushees water in a tea cup or something like that. Hopefully someone would offer finger sandwiches or a chicken wing or something. Her stomach was growling fiercely.

A sigh escaped from deep within her chest. She honestly didn't want to be here. But she knew it was easier to do what her mother wanted than to have to hear about it the rest of her life. *"If you'd just gone out for a sorority, Lora-Leigh . . ."*

Roni and Jenna were cut out for this, she thought. Typical teens, fresh-faced girls, neither from here. Lora-Leigh sensed she'd run into way too many former Latimer High people who would skip over her in favor of girls from other towns and states.

She'd already run into Justine Thornton from LHS who'd pledged Eta Lambda Nu last year. Now, she was a Rho Gamma and Lora-Leigh had to act like she didn't know her . . . or her sorority affiliation. Again, the trappings of a university town.

"Are you nervous?" Roni asked for the third time.

Lora-Leigh shrugged. She supposed she should be, but honestly, she couldn't care less. This was more of a formality than anything. Besides, once all of the WASP-ish Buffys in these houses took one look at her eclectic designs and nine hoop earrings, they were likely to drop back five yards and punt her. Which would be fine with her. It would give her time to finish a couple of outfits before the first football game.

"No, I'm not nervous."

"How can you not be?"

Lora-Leigh knew she shouldn't be such a pessimist—or bust Boston's chops too much—but she couldn't help herself. After all the build up and talk and pretending she could enjoy this, she snapped. "Because, Boston, they're just trying to make you think they like you when really they're all cardboard cut outs of each other."

Roni stared at her in horrified shock. "Then what are you doing here?"

"Same thing as about half of these girls, I bet," Lora-Leigh snarked. "Doing it because my mother is making me."

"Mine too," another girl chimed in.

Other girls around them snickered. Apparently, Lora-Leigh was absolutely right.

Roni's bottom lip quivered and Lora-Leigh felt like a royal shit. "Look, I'm sorry, Boston. You'll have fun and you'll do great. We're just here for different reasons, that's all. Nothing wrong with that."

For a moment, Lora-Leigh wished her new roommate was here with her. Virginia—from Virginia, no less—was an aspiring Goth chick. Virginia had no interest in joining the Greek system, thinking it was nothing but a bunch of clones that made you conform to their rules and ways.

That would be Mom's Tri-Omegas.

Jenna was obviously trying to ease the tension and couldn't stop chattering. "Amber tells me the Alpha Sigs are a real party house."

"They all enjoy a good party," a blonde girl said. "It's a rite of passage."

An Asian girl spoke up. "I'm ready to get through here and get to the Zeta Zeta Tau house."

Lora-Leigh glanced down the street to where she knew the ZZT house to be. Then she looked up at the Greek letters over the door of the huge house before her: Alpha Sigma Gamma. The houses here had to be massive to hold so many girls. The antebellum, Tara-like design in front of her certainly stood out on the street where there were a couple of modern day mansions and a house that even looked like a New Orleans French Quarter home with wrought-iron balconies. And, of course, there was the uniquely-shaped Tri-Omega house.

"I heard the Alpha Sigs do a credit check on your parents," one girl said.

"No," another piped up. "That's the Tri-Omegas who do that."

Lora-Leigh liked the Tri-Omegas less and less the more she heard about them.

"That's not true, is it?" Roni asked with wide eyes.

"Don't worry, Boston. You'll pass." Crap, there she went again, taking a swipe at Roni. She didn't mean to do it. It was simply that Roni reeked of what Tri-Omega was looking for. Maybe in a small way, Lora-Leigh was jealous she didn't have the same thing to offer. That way, her mother wouldn't be as disappointed in her.

"Why is this taking so long?" Jenna asked, impatiently. She glanced at her watch and said, "I have that it's after six."

"They go by the official Rho Gamma clock," another girl said.

So they stood there on the porch of the Alpha Sigma Gamma house, waiting to see what would happen next. Summer gnats swarmed around in the Florida heat, aggravating the waiting Rushees. Lora-Leigh desperately hoped her deodorant and body spray held up in this weather.

Quite frankly, she wanted to be done with all of this nonsense so she could go back to the dorm and take a long, cold shower. And order a grilled chicken salad from the dive Bash Riprock's on The Strip—they delivered! Oh yeah, and finish the boyfriend pants she'd started last night.

Unexpectedly, there was a flurry up and down the street.

"What's going on?" Jenna and Roni asked together.

Another Recruitment Group stood behind them at the Pi Epsilon Chi house and one more next door at Beta Xi. All around Sorority Row, potential sorority girls gathered around . . . waiting for *something* to happen. No one knew what. Lora-Leigh had an idea, based on what her mother had told her, but it had sounded so brainless. Surely they'd updated recruitment in the gazillion years since her mom was in college.

Looking around, Lora-Leigh saw the Rho Gammas were strategically placed by the front doors of the houses up and down the street. For some reason, Lora-Leigh's heartbeat sped up and she was suddenly very aware of everything going on around her.

“Something’s about to happen,” Roni muttered. Then, she reached for Lora-Leigh’s hand and squeezed tight. Lora-Leigh expected to want to pull back; instead, she held on.

A loud police whistle cracked through the air—scaring the shit out of her.

Darcy, their Rho Gamma, knocked hard on the double-door and then got out of the way.

Lora-Leigh, Roni, and Jenna jumped back when the door of the Alpha Sigma Gamma house flew open, revealing tons of girls in matching yellow dresses piled up together in the doorway. They started clapping, screaming and . . . singing.

Singing? You’ve got to be kidding me.

Then, the same loud noise came from behind them and next door and down the street and over on the other side of the street. Voices, some shouting, some singing, sounded out over Sorority Row, blending together and trying to outdo each other.

It was chaos! It was madness!

Jenna was smiling like a goofball. Roni looked totally jazzed. Lora-Leigh tried hard not to laugh.

The girls in front of her stopped singing and began chanting out their welcome in a cheer worthy of any rowdy Red Raiders football game: “Alpha Sigma Gamma, it’s the place to be! Alpha Sigma Gamma, it’s the place for me! Ain’t nobody finer than the sisters here. Join us if you wanna, you will be a dear. Those Alpha Sigs are the best! The best of all the rest! Alpha Sigma Gamma, it’s second to none. Alpha Sigma Gamma, we think you’re the one!”

“Oh my God,” Lora-Leigh exclaimed.

“I think I’m going to pass out,” Jenna said.

Roni said, “Here we go. Everyone ready?”

Lora-Leigh grimaced, supposing she had no other choice. “Whatever.”

The Rho Gammas guided them into the opening of the house as the Alpha Sigs crowded around. Lora-Leigh felt an extremely welcome gush of air conditioning from inside. The girls moved into the tiled foyer and one by one, were paired-up with a sorority sister and guided deeper into the house. Quickly, she lost sight of Roni and Jenna in the sea of brunettes, blondes and a few red heads.

“Hi! What’s your name?” a bubbly brunette Alpha Sig asked.

“I’m Lora-Leigh.”

“I’m Astor! Welcome to my house.”

“Thanks for having me,” Lora-Leigh said with a smile, not knowing what else to say.

“Do you mind if I guide you through the party?”

Lora-Leigh furrowed her brows. Oh right, some people preferred not to be touched. “Sure.”

Astor beamed a smile at her. “I can’t wait to introduce you to all of my sisters! We’re going to meet them all!”

“Okay,” she said. Did she really have a choice? This Astor chick could use a high dose of Ritalin to calm her the hell down.

And with that, Astor tugged Lora-Leigh into what appeared to be a large dining room that was completely bare of furniture except for an expansive table in the back with a punch bowl. It was so loud in the room that Lora-Leigh thought her ears were going to burst. Nothing her mother had told her could have prepared her for the actual frenzied pace of this event. Sisters of Alpha Sigma Gamma had each paired with a potential new member and were hastily steering her around the room.

This is nuts! This is no way to meet people.

“Let’s get you some ice water,” Astor said, pushing Lora-Leigh through the crowd.

At the “punch bowl” an older woman—probably an alum—ladled ice water into a cup and passed it over. Lora-Leigh downed it like it was a Red Bull, giving her energy and quenching her thirst all at once. Another older woman zipped by and took the cup from her and then she and Astor were on their way to the middle of the room.

Lora-Leigh got the feeling she was in a computerized video game with people coming at her from all directions, smiling and shouting. There was Jenna over in the corner and Roni in the middle of a group. The room was full of nothing but hands and arms, hair and smiles. *And those butt-ugly yellow dresses.* There was no way on God’s green earth she’d ever remember anyone’s name or face. But Astor powered her through the room, circling and pushing and introducing her, moving in and out, dashing over there to catch a new face.

People yelled out their name as Astor shouted Lora-Leigh’s. There was no time to really answer or even start a conversation because she was herked and jerked to the next person. So much for the gentle guiding from Astor.

Lora-Leigh’s head was abuzz. Ice Water Tea made her feel exactly the same way she felt when she hung out with her friends and got a good beer-buzz, only with her blood NASCAR-ing underneath her skin. And around again they went, twisting and turning in and out among the bodies as the air conditioning tickled her bare arms.

The lights in the dining room flickered and there was a collective “awwww . . .” as the Alpha Sig sisters began corralling them back through the front hall and out the door.

Was that really only fifteen minutes?

“It’s over? That was quick.”

Lora-Leigh was belched out of the house with the rest of the girls as the sisters inside waved goodbye and thanked them for coming. Like that, it was over.

“That was crazy!” an exasperated Jenna said as they walked down the path and followed their Rho Gammas to the next house. Jenna ran ahead and caught up to Darcy to walk with her.

Roni flipped her hair and fanned her face. “That was a complete high! I’ve never experienced anything like that before. So, come on Lora-Leigh, what did you *really* think?”

Lora-Leigh shrugged, unimpressed. “Bring on the other nine houses.”

Three hours later, Lora-Leigh thought this night would *never* end. They were nearing their last house, though. *The home stretch.*

“It’s amazing how different houses try to get you to remember them,” she said to Roni while they walked.

“What do you mean?”

Lora-Leigh ticked off points on her fingers. “The Delta Kappas served slices of lime in their waters; the O Chi O’s served sparkling water. The Alpha Sigma Gammas chilled their house so much that you could hang meat in there while the Beta Xis had no air conditioning on at all.”

Jenna rejoined them. “You’re right. I’ll never forget the Beta Xis because they smelled!”

“You guys!” Roni giggled.

As their group rounded the bend of Sorority Row, Lora-Leigh looked up at the last house on their card. The warm yellowy stucco design and red tile roof made the Zeta Zeta Tau house look quite homey and inviting. Like they weren’t trying too hard to be different . . . just doing it in an elegant, Old World way.

“I don’t think I can smile anymore,” Jenna said.

“Only one more house, Jenna,” Darcy said and then patted her on the back.

“I’m superjuiced for this,” Roni said. She was as fresh as she’d been at the first house hours ago. Hair in place, makeup perfect. Lora-Leigh wanted to hate her.

When the whistle blew and the door flew open, the ZZTs silly door song—that sang out of “everyone belonging . . . the home you’ve been longing”—actually made Lora-Leigh *feel* welcomed. Maybe she was merely exhausted and hallucinating.

A cute, thin black girl latched on to her the minute she stepped into the house. “Hi Lora-Leigh!” she said, looking at the nametag. “I’m Camille.”

“Hey there!” Lora-Leigh dashed her eyes over the girl in front of her. Camille had a sense of style about her with a flowing summer skirt and navy blue tank that showed off her caramel-colored skin. Lora-Leigh was relieved to see the girls in this house dressed their own way instead of wearing matching outfits like some of the other houses. Okay, so they were sort of color-coordinated, but she wouldn’t hold that against them.

“I see you’re from Latimer. That’s great!”

“Where are you from?” Lora-Leigh said, playing the same game she’d played nine other times tonight.

“Miami.” Camille leaned close and shouted above the noise, “I have to tell you, I just *looooooove* your whole outfit. So hot! Where did you get it?”

Lora-Leigh beamed up at her over the compliment of her chiffon layered top paired with the hot pants. “I made it. I design my own clothes.”

“Shut up! You do not?”

Lora-Leigh’s chest filled with pride. “I do!”

Camille’s mouth dropped. “Honey, you can design my clothes any day. That’s fantastic.”

“Thanks,” she said, although her natural instinct was to wonder at Camille’s sincerity. Lora-Leigh had seen the looks at a couple of houses over her fashion sense.

“You have the perfect figure to wear hot pants.”

“Thanks, Camille. What can I say? I’m a junkie for anything to do with fashion.”

“One of our philanthropy projects last year was donating clothes to a battered women’s shelter and then going to help the women with makeover tips. It was such a satisfying experience.”

Lora-Leigh cocked her head a little, letting Camille’s words sink in. She was moved by their charitable efforts, but they—all of the sororities—had a lot of convincing to do.

Camille whizzed her into the living room, cleared of furniture everyone could move about. While there was still the normal “hello my name is” and quick pace, Lora-Leigh noticed these girls more. The one with the long red hair had a cool set of dangle earrings like ones Lora-Leigh had seen at a downtown thrift store a couple of weekends ago. Another girl had a small diamond stud in her nose. They didn’t seem pretentious or judgmental.

Being steered around by Camille, Lora-Leigh met a Megan, a Sarah, an Amy, an Erin and two Nicoles. Girls were all over the room, weaving in and out, shouting louder and louder. Lora-Leigh’s heart pounded to the cadence of the room and the kinetic energy being generated. Out of the corner of her eye, she caught glimpses of Jenna and Roni, both seemingly enjoying themselves.

All right, I admit it . . . this is a bit of a rush!

The lights started flickering, just like they had in the previous houses. Only this time, Lora-Leigh wasn’t as anxious to leave. She wanted to stay longer. Hang out with Camille and get to know her better.

Camille leaned in. “You did a great job, Lora-Leigh! I think we met everyone twice. I *really* hope to see you again!”

“Thanks Camille. Great meeting you!”

And then Lora-Leigh did the last thing she expected herself to do. She turned and squeezed Camille's hand.

"Good luck," the ZZT whispered.

Lora-Leigh was surprised to find herself hoping that the sisters genuinely liked her and that she'd be asked back. Deep down, she knew she *would* see Camille and the sisters of ZZT again.