



Shiver, Little Toy

(Whispering Ivy #1)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: My mother's last words were a riddle. Now they're my curse.

Before she died, she left me a note with an envelope full of cash. Go to Whispering Ivy. Don't trust anyone.

But nothing could have prepared me for this elite college.

Whispering Ivy is nothing like I expected. The halls are filled with secrets, the shadows seem to whisper, and the men who rule this place?

They now rule me.

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Chapter One

I hadn't even been admitted to Whispering Ivy College yet, and already I was being punished in the dean's office.

Yell at me, slap me around, bend me over the desk, and spank me. Just don't make me wait.

For the zillionth time, I checked my phone. Only two minutes had gone by since the last time I looked. An eternity because of the sense of urgency scraping like rusted nails over my skin. It was already past 9:00 p.m.

Tears burned up my throat, so hot that they tasted ashy and bitter. I swallowed those bitches back down. I could cry later. First, I'd fight.

With no warning, the thick, ornate wooden door burst open behind me.

The stiff chair underneath my thighs creaked as I whirled to look.

"Miss Dare." Xander—Dean Bennett—stood in the doorway, his fingers clenching the knob tightly.

He hadn't changed a bit since the last time I saw him. The same crisp suit and tie, chiseled nose, electric-blue eyes, neatly trimmed beard, and flawlessly tousled jet-black hair.

"My office hours ended at five. Ordinarily, I would tell you that you'd have to come

back tomorrow, but...I don't want to waste your time with another trip." Closing the door behind him, he casually asked, "Are you and your mom still in Oakwood?"

Determined not to let that punch to the gut show on my face, I riveted my gaze to him as he rounded behind his massive mahogany desk.

"No. She's in Brindle Creek now," I corrected, though that was the last town we'd lived in, not the most recent one. "I, however, am here."

After he sat, he skewered me with a long look. "I see that. So what brings you all this way? Certainly you didn't drop by for a social call."

Since we're not on fucking Bridgerton, no, I did not.

I pulled the fat, worn envelope from my pocket and slid it across his desk. "This."

He lifted the flap with one finger and peered at its contents. A frown touched his full lips, but that was all. We sat in silence for a moment, just long enough for my knee to begin to twitch.

"Do you think it wise to carry this much money around?" His electric gaze flitted back up at me, scanning my face. "You could get robbed or lose it or—"

"It's enough to cover one semester. Tuition. Books. Room and board. And no,"—I ground my back teeth together—"I didn't rob a bank."

He sat back in his chair, his perfect brow wrinkling. "I see. How's your mother these days?"

"She's fine," I lied.

“She knows about you being here?”

“Of course.”

“It was her idea for you to come here?”

“It was mine.” Another lie. “And we have the money, so why not?”

His frown deepened.

Yeah, I wouldn't believe me either if I hadn't lived through the past couple days. Mom and I barely had enough to scrape by each month, unless she used her good looks to snare a rich sugar daddy like Xander himself. When I was sixteen, we'd lived with him for two months before they broke up. Two long months, the details of which sent an unexpected tingle up my thighs, even now, two years later.

“Geulia, we don't just accept anyone here.”

Geulia, pronounced Julia, but spelled by a raccoon in the middle of a donut bender while at the bottom of a dumpster fire. And by raccoon, I meant my mom. And by donut, I meant drugs. And by dumpster, I meant a literal dumpster. As far as I know, it wasn't actually on fire, though.

“I have three letters of recommendation from my teachers, as well as my official transcript. I've had straight A's throughout high school and—”

Xander rapped his desk twice with his fist, interrupting me. “Even so, we're already a week into the semester. The dorms are all full. Beyond that, you didn't go through the application process. This isn't a fast-food restaurant. You can't just show up with a wad of cash and expect to get what you want.”

“One week is nothing. I’ll catch up. I’ll live anywhere, even here in your office.”

As soon as I said it, I regretted it, because once upon a time, I pretended it was just him and me living together. Acting on those lingering looks we always pretended not to share and playing out the dreams I had about him. I’d always felt so ashamed when I was all alone, three knuckles deep inside of me, and crying out his name at night.

He’d belonged to my mom. End of story. But the day he caught me streaking from the bathroom to the bedroom, while wearing only a towel, changed everything. The way he’d looked at me, like a hungry flame...

It was exactly like how he was looking at me now.

A familiar spark kindled deep between my legs. Now was not the time for my body to betray me, but I couldn’t help it. Not with him. Not with the way he looked, the hint of the silver fox he’d be one day already salting the shadowy beard along his jaw and chin.

He stood slowly, a tower of dominance and man. He strode over to the heavy blinds at the window and raised them. I expected to see a glimpse of the carefully manicured lawn, but no. Instead of revealing meager winter daylight, Whispering Ivy’s fluorescents slanted through from a hallway.

“Students living in the dean’s office is frowned upon,” he said.

“Then put me in a broom closet. It doesn’t matter where I stay.”

A brief smile tilted his mouth as he returned to his seat behind his desk. “I’m sure your mom would disagree.”

“All she wants is for me to get a good education.”

“Yes, she is always after you about your grades, isn’t she? Why Whispering Ivy, Geulia? Why now?” He sat back and steepled his fingers beneath his chin. “Tell me the truth.”

Even I didn’t know the truth, which was exactly why I was here. “One semester here might help me get into an Ivy League. Harvard or Yale, maybe.”

“What else?” he demanded, his voice harsher now.

“I want to go here. I want to be here with you.”

Oops. Hadn’t meant to let that last part slip out, but being here, in this small room with him... It wasn’t not true.

“Don’t be a child, Geulia,” he said with a disapproving shake of his head.

“I’m not. Back when Mom and I lived with you, I was, but I’m not anymore.” Slowly, deliberately, I inched my skirt up my thighs. “I know you thought about me then, Xan... Dean Bennett. I know you still think about me.”

Did he though? He could have anyone he wanted. He could point to a random stranger on the street and demand a fuck, and I’d bet nine times out of ten, that stranger would give him any pleasure he wanted. Right then, right there.

Hell, if he asked, I’d go down on him while crouched underneath his desk.

His chiseled jaw pulsed in time with the ticking clock on the wall. “I was with your mother. It’s not unusual for a girl as young as yourself to have feelings for an older man.”

“You’re not just any man, though. I thought about you every night. I thought about

you”—my breath hitched while I ground my thighs together—“doing things to me.”

His fist on the desk flexed tighter, the caps of his knuckles turning white. “Dreams. Fantasies. It’s not going to happen in real life.”

“But it could. I will let you do anything you want to me if you admit me into Whispering Ivy College. I won’t tell anyone...” I dug my fingernails into the skin of my upper thighs, hoping the pain would eclipse my sorrow. “Not even my mom.”

His eyes flashed a brighter, brilliant blue and flared wider. With interest, desire, or exasperation, I couldn’t tell. Probably the latter.

Shit. This wasn’t working.

“That’s not how admissions work here. That’s not how I conduct myself.” There was a gruff, brutal bite to his tone, one that hadn’t been there before.

I sank my hand between my legs, toward the slick heat that had craved his touch for two long years. “Really?”

His gaze flicked to my moving arm. He had to know what I was doing, what I was about to do. What he didn’t know was how far I would go to be admitted to this stupid fucking college.

I stared him straight in the eye as my thumb met my clit. A soft gasp escaped when I realized just how wet I was for him. And for this. Straight-up exhibitionism and bribery working in tandem with my desire for him.

It was fucking hot.

Xander squirmed in his seat. “Geulia, stop. Not here.”

“You’re the one who opened the blinds.” I slipped one finger inside myself, my hips thrusting forward to meet it. “I dare you to get up and close them. Make that student who’s watching us really wonder what we’re up to.”

Said student—a devastatingly striking one—had stopped and leaned against the wall, one eyebrow quirked as he peered in at us. The black pen in his mouth bobbed up and down with his gnashing teeth.

“Don’t do this,” Xander growled.

“If you happen to drop something and then glance under your desk, you’ll find I’m not wearing any underwear. You can watch me all you want.” I added a second finger, my inner walls already shuddering. “Watch me come just for you.”

“You are a fucking whore. Just like your goddamn mother,” he added in a rasp.

“Then admit me to Whispering Ivy. Or kick me out smelling like sex and show Ms. Tissdale outside your door and everyone watching what a huge boner you have. I can just imagine it swelling, growing too tight for your pants.” I whimpered as I sped my pace, circling my thumb in tighter, harder circles around my clit. “What do you think it would look like inside me?”

“Geulia ...” he bit out.

“Take it out. Stroke it. They won’t see you,” I taunted him, writhing against the palm of my hand. “Come with me.”

He sucked in a breath while he watched me, his hands digging into his armrests. “I. Can’t...”

“You can.” Gasping, I gripped the arm of the chair with my free hand tightly. My

back bowed off the back of the seat as I climbed higher and higher. I squirmed, almost too lost in my pleasure to care about anything else except for my body unraveling. “I’m close, Xander.”

At the sound of his first name moaning from my lips, he growled low in his throat, a warning. Maybe a promise.

“So, so close.” I began to come apart, tearing loose one snapped thread at a time.

The male student lingering outside the window slid his tongue over his bottom lip as he ogled my long legs. From his angle, could he see what I was doing between them? Could he see the orgasm barreling through me in the wild rock of my hips while I rode this high to the fucking moon?

Xander leaped out of his chair toward the window and slammed the shades closed with his palm. Then, his hands fighting with his belt and zipper, he stormed toward me and revealed his massive cock. A rock-hard thing of pure beauty and manliness.

I was still coming, my body still shuddering, when he wrenched down my top and bra with his fist. In one swift stroke, a loud, primal groan erupted from deep inside his throat. A thick, hot stream shot out of him, and he came all over my heaving chest.

My inner muscles clenched again at the sight. He wrapped one hand around my neck and squeezed hard, his touch like a thrill on my quivering skin. His other milked the rest of his orgasm with quick, brutal strokes. His gaze stayed locked on mine, bright and fevered.

Our uneven breaths mingled. The air between our lips coalesced into an intoxicating kiss that didn’t even require touching.

I could only sit there, completely stunned and gasping for air. That had been the

single most raw, erotic thing I'd ever experienced. Because it was with him. The star of my sexual fantasies.

And it had worked. The money shot, in every way possible. Cha-fucking-ching.

"Tell me you've never dreamed about cumming on my tits before." I licked my lips, my eyelids shuttered as I gazed up at him—all a distraction while I fumbled for my cell in my front shirt pocket.

"So what if I have?" He roughly pulled my shirt and bra back into place and stood up straight, tucking himself back into his pants. "You're the one who insisted on walking around my house wearing only a towel. You knew exactly what you were doing. I doubt I'm the first of your mom's boyfriends who has used you as a cum dumpster."

"Not even close," I muttered, swiping a few times across my phone.

Xander went still, likely because I couldn't help the note of bitterness in my voice.

I'd fucked plenty of Mom's boyfriends in the hopes that it would help keep them from leaving us both without a roof over our heads and food in our stomachs. Xander was the first one I'd actually wanted, but never had.

Because he'd never sneaked into my bedroom at night. Because he'd treated Mom like a queen for the two months she'd let him. Because the way he looked at me, even now, made me think I could become so much more than I was.

Gutter trash, through and through.

"So I can go to Whispering Ivy now," I told him.

He snorted, a very un-Dean Bennett sound to make. "Sorry, but mutual masturbation

with the dean doesn't admit anyone. That's not how this works. Not even for you, Geulia." With hardly a glance, he sat with finality behind his desk again and shooed me away. "Go to a public college."

"You must have misheard me. I wasn't asking. I can go to Whispering Ivy now." I couldn't keep the note of victory from my voice.

"Please." With a chuckle that didn't reach his eyes, he waved his hand in the air. "Enlighten me on why you think so."

I tapped the play button on my phone and held it up so we could both see the screen. "Prepare to be enlightened, Dean."

Sighs and groans vibrated from my phone, an echo of the ones that had just played out here in the dean's office in real time. My cheeks flushed at the sounds I made. My whole body had practically caught fire when Xander strode toward me with his big cock in his fist and spilled himself all over my chest. Heat curled between my thighs once again, both at the memory and the reminder of what I'd just done.

When the video ended, the dean sat completely immobile, his gaze stuck to my phone.

"Give it to me," he finally said, his voice a low warning.

A slow grin curled my lips as I swiped to my email app and hovered my finger over send. "You didn't say please."

"Give it to me, you little bitch," he snarled.

"One button will end you. The email is already addressed to the Whispering Ivy College board members who hired you. The video is already attached."

I steadied myself, ready for him to bolt out of his seat, to try to take my phone by force. But he didn't make a move or a sound, except for his knuckles cracking as he balled his hands into fists.

"You wouldn't."

"Try me," I told him. "Or admit me into Whispering Ivy."

"This is extortion," he hissed, finally standing and coming around his desk. "Do you even know what that is?"

"Oh, I'm aware," I said. "If you come one step closer, you can say goodbye to your career."

He paused with his hand outstretched for my phone. Then he dropped it to his side. His shoulders slumped with defeat, which I didn't buy for a second. There was an undercurrent of something unpredictable, something dangerous about him I'd never witnessed before, like if I allowed him any nearer, not only would he destroy my phone, but he'd destroy me too.

His eyes narrowed into cruel slits.

"So what's it going to be, Xander?"

His jaw pulsing in anger, he thrust his finger toward the door. "See Ms. Tissdale for the paperwork."

My lungs loosened. Could it really be this easy?

"Cool. Her muffins are so good. I ate at least four while you kept me waiting. Speaking of, I better make sure I don't have any cum—I mean, crumbs—on me, huh?"

I'm such a messy girl." I turned to leave.

"Tuesday," he bit out.

At the sound of my middle name, I stopped with my hand on the doorknob.

"If you want to be a student here, you'll go by Tuesday. That isn't a request," he added.

It was a strange demand, but I wouldn't press my luck by asking why.

I smiled sweetly over my shoulder at him. "Your wish is my command, Xander."

So maybe I'd push my luck a little.

"That's Dean Bennett to you," he snarled.

As I pushed through the door, my shirt clung to my soaked skin. The smell of him surrounded me, teased me, and summoned me back into his office so we could do everything we'd just done again, and more.

While Ms. Tissdale carefully paper-clipped all the forms I'd have to fill out, reality set in. It shook through me so hard I dug my fingernails into my leather chair's arms to keep myself inside the seat.

I was really doing this. I was really about to leap down the rabbit hole Mom had dug for me before she died.

My heart seized.

No. Correction—before I killed her.

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Chapter Two

“Where are we going to put her?” Ms. Tissdale asked over the phone to Xander.

Dean Bennett, Dean Bennett, Dean Bennett.

It would never come naturally to me, but I had to try.

Where to put me, indeed. There was a long, long response from Dean Bennett, during which I nonchalantly sniffed myself. I smelled like sex and sin, of lust and reckless abandon. Good thing this wasn't a church college, or I'd likely go up in flames.

Finally, Ms. Tissdale made a face, hung up, and shuddered her adorably wholesome cardigan open. A pretty golden broach with a pink pearl in the center cinched the high collar of her shirt together.

“Wait here, please, Miss Tuesday.” She scrunched up her delicate nose. “I'll find another student to show you to your...room.”

“Hesitation noted,” I said. “Whatever you have will be fine for gutter trash like me.”

She gasped and actually clutched the little pearl in her broach. “Well, I never.”

“Obviously.” I shooed her toward the door.

She couldn't get away from me fast enough. The poor thing probably thought I'd rub my corruption all over her.

“Another student” turned out to be the hot creeper who’d been spying on Dean Bennett and me through the office window. The one with a half-chewed pen dangling from his full lips. He stood in the doorway, a whole head taller than me. He wore combat boots, black ripped jeans, and a black hoodie. He also wore a devilish smile that turned into a scowl as one of his crafty brown eyes lingered on my cum-covered chest. The other was covered by his sandy-brown hair.

“What’s up, Trouble?” he said, his voice a honeyed, deep timbre.

I rolled my eyes. “Actually, my name’s—”

“Actually...” He popped his pen from his mouth, the slide of wet plastic along his lips making them glisten. “I was talking to Ms. Tissdale.”

He winked at her, and the resulting blush on her wrinkled cheeks kind of made me feel sick.

“Oh, you ,” she gushed.

“Got any of those muffins for me?” he asked.

A little frown puckered her mouth. She glanced at the empty basket, then back at me. “I don’t, sadly. They all seem to have disappeared.”

“Well, you’ll be sure to save one for your favorite senior next time, right, Ms. Tissdale?” the guy said.

I cleared my throat loudly to help move this fascinating discussion along.

“Of course. Anyway...” Ms. Tissdale tossed me a glare. “Could you show our newest student to her room, please, Connor?”

“Anything for you, babe,” the guy—Connor—said.

He actually pursed his lips at her in a little air kiss. Every last muffin I ate threatened to make a reappearance.

“Where is it?” he asked.

She whispered something I couldn’t hear.

Connor’s face blanked. “I need to speak with him. Now.”

So... Prince Smarmy was an entitled prick.

“He’s on a call,” Ms. Tissdale said.

Connor groaned. “I’ll be back.” Then to me, he said, “Looks like we’re roomies, new girl. At least for the time being.”

My mouth popped open to protest, but I snapped it shut again. It didn’t matter. Literal beggars couldn’t be choosers. I’d sleep standing up in a bathroom stall if I had to. Anything to find out more about Whispering Ivy and its secrets.

Find out everything you can about the Lifewell, Mom had said. Do whatever it takes. Don’t trust anyone.

“As you wish, Ms. Tissdale.” With a crooked smile that made the secretary’s flush pinker, Connor led me out into the hall. His fingers trailed over my arm when he turned to shut the door. He grabbed my elbow and squeezed painfully, leaning in. “I could smell the cum on you a full five minutes before I walked into Ms. Tissdale’s office.”

I sniffed, but all I could smell was him—smoked cedar and rain. Rugged, earthy. Sexy.

I hiked up my eyebrows. “Congratulations?”

“I saw what you were doing in the dean’s office. You gave me quite a little show.”

“It got me admitted, didn’t it?”

“You think you’re the first little slut who’s tried that with Dean Bennett?”

“Has it worked before?”

He shoved his hands into his pockets, looking every bit like a broody bad boy from a teen soap opera with his all-black ensemble. “Touché.”

A strange sense of relief washed over me. For some reason, it bothered me to think that any rando could wander into the dean’s office and bend him to their will. I just wanted it to be me. Weird, I know, but it also gave me some satisfaction that I had that kind of power over him.

We walked in silence until Connor stopped at a door to a building I assumed housed the dorms. He slid a key into the lock and turned the knob. I expected to see a lobby or common area, but no. He ushered me into a huge living room that looked like it belonged in a mansion.

Expensive-looking rugs decorated the polished black concrete floors. High, domed ceilings met floor-to-ceiling windows hidden with red velvet drapes. Everything was finished in chrome and black, accented with more pops of red here and there.

Connor eyed me closely and then snorted. “Come on, but don’t make yourself at

home.”

I took a few steps over the plush rug by the door, wondering if I should wipe my feet on it or not. “Who lives here?”

“Not you. You’re going to be in the servant’s quarters.” He led the way down a dark hallway.

Heavy grunts and moans came from inside one of the open rooms, and when we passed, I peeked inside. A completely naked guy with a great tan stood next to his bed, his powerful, bulging muscles rippling while his hips thrust forward. In front of him, another shirtless guy with a *Scream* mask on knelt on his knees, sucking him off. The tanned guy’s veiny cock glistened while Ghostface deep-throated it again and again.

There must’ve been a large hole in Ghostface’s mask; otherwise, that wouldn’t have worked. A few strands of blond curls poked out from beneath the mask’s hood while he gulped down the other man’s cock.

Impressive. And fucking hot.

I swallowed hard, the taste of their lust on my tongue.

Heat kindled in my cheeks and rushed south, curling deep between my legs. I must’ve gasped because the guy getting sucked jerked his head up and caught me staring.

His shuttered eyes widened, revealing a shocking pale gray color. A slow grin tilted his mouth as he slowed his pace to a languid, damn sexy rhythm. His whole body flowed into the other guy’s mouth like water.

“Like what you see?” His voice, which held an accent I couldn’t place, sounded raw

and gravelly, like he was desperate to come undone, but not quite yet.

His hands fisted in Ghostface's curls, eliciting a deep, cock-muffled moan.

I nodded, so turned on I couldn't do much else. Was it bad form to start humping a doorframe before you'd even been introduced to all of your roommates?

With his gaze stuck to me, he licked his lips and thrust a little faster, deeper into Ghostface's mouth. His fingers brushed Ghostface's broad shoulder in an almost loving caress.

I gripped the doorframe and ground my thighs together, not even caring that I was watching them like a creeper. Like Connor had watched me touching myself for Xander.

Dean Bennett. Dammit.

Connor snapped his fingers from the other end of the hall. "Yo, street leech, let's go!"

That ripped me out of my sex haze real quick.

"Actually, I prefer back-alley icon, Conman, and do not snap your fingers at me like I'm your well-trained labradoodle."

"What the fuck did you just say to me?" Connor demanded.

"Basically, I said I'm never going to come for you. In either context of the word."

The guy giving head turned toward me without slowing his pace, and I could feel his dirty look even through his mask. I was pissing all over their fun parade.

Reluctantly, I backed away, the ache between my legs growing teeth.

Yes, I'd just made myself orgasm in the dean's office, but my sex drive often ran me ragged, exhausted, and ready to come again in minutes. It wasn't a matter of being ready to orgasm. It was a matter of needing to.

"Don't ever call me street leech again, you hear me?" I hissed at Connor while marching toward him.

He shrugged and turned toward the rest of the hallway, which dead-ended in a solid, decadently wall-papered wall. "What else do I call you?"

"How about my name?" I fired back. "Tuesday Dare."

"Did you say Tuesday Dare?" He shot me a hard look, his eyes dark and dangerous in the dim light.

Startled by the intensity in his gaze, I nodded.

"You're serious."

"W-why would I lie about my name?"

Connor stiffened, his movements jerky, as he took several steps, like he couldn't wait to get away from me. He stopped at the end of the hallway since there was nowhere else to go.

"Eh, hello?" I moved next to him and waved a hand in front of his face.

Ignoring me, he pounded his fist against the dead-end wall twice. A three-foot-tall door popped open with a long, low creak.

A secret door? What in the escape-room hell was this place?

The seams blended in with the wallpaper so well, I never would've known it was there had Connor not forced it open. Nothing but darkness lay on the other side.

He waved vaguely inside. "Your room."

"You're serious about this?"

I would have to crawl inside on my hands and knees.

He spun on his heel and strode back down the hallway. "There's an entrance on the other side you can use to come and go. Don't come back into the apartment. We don't have any street-leach bleach."

I fisted my hands. "But..."

Not only would I have to crawl inside, I would have to fumble in the dark to find a fucking light switch?

I hated the dark and all the unknown things within that always slithered closer to me. I'd had spiders, centipedes, and especially men crawling all over me in the dark. It was why I kept the light on, to help chase away those terrors. Sometimes it even worked, but too often, it didn't.

"Hurry up." Down the hall, Connor rapped loudly on the wall next to the door I'd been all but dry-humping minutes earlier. Groans still drifted out. "We need to talk."

About what? Me? Why my name had affected him so strangely?

When Connor turned the corner at the other end, I tiptoed back down the hall. Voices

carried from the living room, tense and clipped, but I couldn't make out what they were saying. Connor was on the phone with someone. Xan...er...Dean Bennett?

Oh, fuck that nonsense. He was always gonna be Xander to me.

I slid along one wall, my back against where the groans morphed into grunts and then finally one long sigh.

“No coming until I say so, Jones, or I'll punish that mouth again,” the heavily accented voice said.

Jones—or Ghostface—swallowed loudly. “Sorry, sir. It won't happen again, sir.”

Sir ? Really? What exactly had I walked into here?

My buzzing questions had nearly ruined my libido, but I could still picture them clearly. How close they were to the door. Whether they'd see me dash past. What the cum dripping off that massive dick would look and taste like.

I stopped at the edge of the doorway, my gaze stuck to the other end of the hall. I didn't want them to see me. Otherwise, their conversation wouldn't play out naturally. I needed all the info I could get about this place and the people in it.

With a shallow, quiet breath, I darted past the open door. Straight ahead was the kitchen. Good. I could hide behind the island.

A large silhouette stepped into the hall in front of me and drew closer. I shrank back as he pulled on a pair of gray sweatpants, but he'd already noticed me. It was the muscled tan guy who'd been getting sucked off.

But how the fuck had he made it to the kitchen without me seeing if he'd been behind

me?

“Hi,” I said. “I’m Tuesday. And you are...?”

I sure as fuck wasn’t calling him sir .

“Annoyed. Are you lost?” His deep, accented voice vibrated in the space between us and sank down to tingle my toes.

The air tensed for several breathless beats. The gladiator-looking guy stared me down with his gorgeous pale-gray eyes, one eyebrow hiked while he waited for me to answer his question that I’d already forgotten. His smooth, tan skin could barely contain his muscles.

Then Connor came back into the hall and strode up next to his roommate. Two pillars of intimidation.

But I’m not that easily intimidated.

“Get back in your hole like the vermin you are,” Connor ordered, his voice low and deadly.

“No. Not until you tell me why you reacted the way you did to my name.”

He knew me. He’d heard my name before. But why?

Connor stepped forward, popping my personal bubble, and ducked down to slice me open with his glare. “We aren’t playing. Your place is back there. That’s where you stay. Go there now, or I will put you there myself.”

“Not until—”

He slapped his hand hard over my mouth, the resulting sting drawing tears.

He jerked his chin at the large, muscled guy. “Malcolm and I make the rules here, Tuesday Dare .”

The stark white around Connor’s eyes looked like panic. Maybe fear. He shoved me violently the rest of the way down the hall. My head cracked against the wall above the open servant door, streaking stars past my eyes.

Tears dashed down my cheeks as I gazed up at this vicious monster.

The joke was on him. Little did he know that I was used to being tossed around in the hopes that I would shatter. All my mom’s boyfriend’s punches created callouses. Their cruel words and wandering hands built impenetrable walls around my heart. Despite her faults, Mom had been the only person who brought down my defenses and made me feel something rather than nothing.

And now she was dead.

Connor pointed into the darkness, his mouth a cruel twist. “Inside your hole. Now. Or it will be so much worse for you in the morning.”

“Can’t wait.” I said, my tone even and strong despite the throbbing in my head.

He’d heard my name before. He knew something about me. Maybe about Mom, too?

I’d find out what. He could goddamn count on that .

Under the watchful gaze of two of my new roomies, I ducked down into my “hole,” as Connor had called it.

There was no point in arguing anymore anyway. I had a whole semester. Time enough to find out all his secrets and more.

He slammed the door shut behind me, plunging me into pitch blackness. There wasn't even a window for a sliver of moonlight to shine through.

Immediately, I switched on the flashlight app on my phone and swung it around, searching for a light switch, a pull cord, anything. I found boxes, a toilet, and a sink. The sink produced only cold water, but hey, I'd take it.

After gulping down several mouthfuls, I sank to the floor of my new living accommodations. I hadn't expected Xander to take me quite so literally when I said I'd live in a broom closet, but that's basically what this was.

Happy first night at Whispering Ivy to me.

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Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 5:22 pm

Chapter Three

If I had a dollar for every time I woke up on a strange bathroom floor, I could probably afford another semester at this godforsaken college.

When I'd found myself in this situation before, getting out as quickly as possible was usually my go-to move. On this particular morning, however, what I wanted to do more than anything was shove my hand so far up my pussy that I could tickle my tongue with my fingers.

I'd never been so desperate for relief. I needed dick, and I needed it bad.

My skirt had gotten hiked up during my fitful sleep, and the skin of my bare ass stuck to the cold, unyielding floor.

But if I looked at the bright side of there not being a light in here, I couldn't see what filth I was lying in.

I needed to change clothes and... Shit.

Shit shit, fuckity shit.

"Backpacks aren't allowed on campus," Ms. Tissdale had greeted me when I first arrived yesterday evening. "Security protocol."

"This isn't a backpack," I'd argued while she'd beckoned for it. "I mean, well, it is, obviously, but...it's my suitcase. My things. My luggage."

She'd continued beckoning while I'd continued shaking my head and throwing out synonyms that might break through her blank stare and get the point across that my backpack didn't have a gun in it with which to shoot Xander. There was no room for a weapon inside. I'd crammed it so full of all my worldly belongings that the zipper was on the verge of giving out.

Finally, she'd laid down the law. Without handing over my bag, I wouldn't be permitted to as much as get a passing glimpse at Xander.

So...all of my belongings were still with Ms. Tissdale. Unless she'd tossed them in the nearest dumpster as revenge for me going feral on her damn muffins.

I dragged myself over to the sink and splashed some water on my face. My bladder was in about the same shape as the zipper on my bag, so I squatted over the toilet and did my business.

It took for fucking ever, so I searched my phone for something I knew would give me some semblance of peace—one of Mom's voicemails.

"Geulia, do you know where I put the damn fingernail clippers? I've got a hangnail. Oh. There they are. Apparently, I just had to call you so I could see them right in front of my face. Anyway, love you most. See you when you get home."

I simultaneously smiled and fought back tears, my warring emotions stitching up my throat. God, I missed her. Even on her worst days, I still loved her with my entire bruised heart.

After I finally finished peeing and washed, I smoothed out my clothes and ran my fingers through my wig. My phone was at two percent, one of which I used to locate the other exit. It turned out there was a doorknob, high up on the wall above eye level. Fucking weird.

My muscles aching, I snuck out of my “hole,” and an unpleasant surprise slapped me in the face. I’d expected the door would spit me out onto the back lawn of the building or something, but no... I walked right out into a chaotic hallway, crowded with students.

Keeping my head down and too self-conscious to look anyone in the eye to ask how to get to the dean’s office and Ms. Tissdale, I wandered until I found it.

Ms. Tissdale printed me off my schedule, filled with classes I hadn’t enrolled in. “Sorry, but those are the only classes available. The ones you requested were all full.”

She didn’t sound very sorry, though, about the classes or about transferring my things from my backpack to a literal garbage bag.

“To check for contraband,” she said. “Damn, so I guess you confiscated my crack pipe, then.”

If she was at all amused, her disapproving glare did an excellent job of hiding it.

With a pinched expression, she gave me my meal card for the dining hall, letting me know that I could only afford the one-meal-a-day plan, and a stack of used textbooks.

My first class was Calculus 101, which according to the clock on the wall, I’d already missed. Super. The next class was Literary Traditions, which started in exactly thirty seconds.

Nice. Everything was going so great.

Carrying my garbage bag, I hoofed it through the freshly painted halls to room 208. Through the small window, it looked like class had already begun. I adjusted my wig nervously as I stepped through the door, acutely aware of my heart threatening to

burst through my ribs.

Be brave , my mom's voice echoed in my ear.

Huffing out a breath, I pushed into the classroom.

"Oh, hello," said the male professor, who looked only a few years older than me. "Ms. Tissdale told me we had a new student joining us today. You must be Tuesday."

I nodded slightly, immediately regretting the gesture as the eyes of my peers scrutinized me from my head to my feet and back again, all pausing on the garbage bag. My worst nightmare had always been standing in front of a crowded room as the center of attention.

"Tuesday Dare," I managed to whisper.

No one reacted to my name. Not a single snort or eye roll. It was almost as though they couldn't care less, which was kind of great.

"Welcome, Tuesday," the professor said warmly. "I'm Mr. Owens. You can take a seat in the back."

Odd that those were the only empty seats. In high school, it had been flipped—vacant in the front and full in the back.

"Thanks." I avoided eye contact with everyone as I made my way to a large empty table in the very back.

As I settled into my seat, I carefully observed my surroundings, taking note of the blonde with perfect, glossy ringlets doodling skulls in her notebook and the surly-looking guy in the front corner who appeared to be practicing his throwing arm with a

crumpled piece of paper into the trashcan.

"Okay, let's continue our discussion of symbolism in literature," Mr. Owens began.

I couldn't pay attention to him, not with the purple haze floating on the other side of the classroom. A hallucination or just the way the January sunlight played with the raven hair of the twins who sat close together, I couldn't tell.

The haze writhed rhythmically, the same tempo as the one twin rocking forward in her seat, over and over again. Subtle but definite. She braced an elbow on her desk and covered her mouth, her eyes slowly closing.

What the fuck? Was she getting off on the wild moors from Wuthering Heights ?

But no, she was getting some help. It was then I noticed her twin's shoulder was also moving in the same rhythm, as though she had her hand buried between her sister's legs.

The realization spread heat across my thighs and climbed it higher to the tips of my ears. No one seemed to notice what they were doing. No one else cared, but I sure as shit did.

I couldn't keep my eyes to myself as the one twin's breathing sped audibly, though she tried to contain it. Her thrusts deepened, and then a long, quaking shiver bolted down her back, making her fists clench. Hers and mine.

Immediately, they traded places, so to speak, the other getting off this time with the help of her twin's hand.

I had to be hallucinating. Around me, everyone else seemed oblivious while my blood pumped harder and my inner thighs grew slick.

I couldn't help it. It was fucking hot. They were fucking hot. And taboo. And forbidden. And god. Damn . I didn't even swing that way, but they were getting me all riled up. I laced my fingers together, my hands pressing into the wood of the tabletop, summoning all the self-restraint I had. I wriggled in my seat.

Fuck, I needed to touch myself.

How was no one else reacting?

"...Tuesday," Mr. Owens said

I snapped my head up. "Huh? What?"

My voice sounded ragged, startled, guilty, like I'd been caught shoplifting.

A couple of titters and stares.

Mr. Owens smiled kindly. "I said that's time for today, but I'll see you all on Tuesday."

"Oh." Well, at least I'd responded to my middle name without hesitation, right?

The purple haze surrounding the twins faded. They stood from their seats as though nothing had happened, and it was then that I noticed the subtle differences between them. One had a straighter nose. The other had deeper-set, darker blue eyes. Maybe they weren't sisters.

But still. What the fuck was that?

I found myself following them as they sashayed down the hallway, arm in arm. When they pushed through a set of imposing double doors, I slipped through, too.

I blinked.

What the hell was this? Some sort of labyrinth made of ancient books? Endless rows of floor-to-ceiling shelves stretched as far as I could see in every direction and...

Oh.

This must be the library, but...not the front of it, not the entrance. We were deep in the stacks.

Huh.

Damn, I'd lost them.

I blinked again. Why had I been following them anyway, like some sort of stalker?

But then I heard a giggle, and when it came to my brain's connection with my feet...well, NO SIGNAL. I crept in the direction of the sound. There they were, one with the other pressed up against a wall, staring into each other's souls like they were fucking with their eyes.

Swallowing hard, I ducked back then peered around the shelf again as they, holding hands, swept through another door.

I waited a beat, then hastened after them into...a stairwell.

Another door, high above me, closed. They must've run up the stairs.

I took the steps two at a time. It was like I was in a hypnotic trance, and I couldn't turn around and go anywhere else. I had to catch up to them.

And I did, on what must've been the third floor.

A gasp escaped my lips before I could stop it, but they didn't notice me. I doubted they would've noticed a meteor slamming into the building. A few feet away sat a large trash can, and I dove behind it. My breath heaved in my chest and my thighs quivered as I peeked around.

A man had joined them, and all three of them were naked. Naked and fucking.

I shoved my fingers into my mouth, both to keep my inevitable sounds muffled and to give myself something to suck.

The man had stark-white hair, and that's all I could tell about him because one of the twins sat on his face, facing her twin, who sat on his dick. While they bounced up and down on him, they made out. One twin held the other's face while she plundered her mouth with her tongue. The other fondled her twin's nipples into two hard points while she massaged the underside of her tits with her palms.

Holy shit. The guy had to be a faculty member. Why were the twins having a threesome with a grandpa professor in the library?

That purple haze surrounded them, undulating like a living thing, like tentacles made of shimmering mist. It drifted towards me, beckoning, drawing me in.

It's hungry for me , I thought.

Which was ridiculous, but...

A cry ripped from my throat. Before I could even process what was happening, my pussy walls began to clench. With no build-up, an orgasm blasted through me. I fell back onto my ass, my entire body rocking. My hips humped the air, my clit pulsing

like something was inside it, trying to burst free.

"Holy shit, holy shit, holy shit..." I muttered around my fingers in my mouth, drool dripping down them.

I bit down, teeth against bone, tasting my own blood.

My vision blurred as another wave of pleasure crashed over me, more intense than anything I'd ever felt before. It bordered on pain.

The purple haze enveloped me now, its tendrils roving my skin with an electric touch that sent shivers down my spine. It seeped into my very pores, filling me from the inside out. I arched my back, my body no longer under my control. My muscles spasmed and twitched, my toes curling so hard I thought they might break.

"Oh god, oh god," I moaned, my voice sounding foreign to my own ears.

When it began to subside, I lay on the floor, sweaty and spent.

Had I just been possessed or exorcised or both?

"Join us," a voice whispered.

Who was that? Had that come from inside my head or somewhere else?

With legs made of jelly, I scrambled to my feet. My vision swam, and I could barely make out the shapes of the twins and the older man. Their bodies seemed to meld together, becoming one writhing mass of flesh and ecstasy.

I tore out of the door I'd come through and tripped back down the steps. My juices dripped down my thighs, my knees, my calves. I was still gushing, still convulsing.

Like a drunk, I stumbled blindly back the way I'd come. The hallways blurred with student-shaped shadows until I wound up back in my "hole."

Apparently, it takes about an hour for a girl to fully come back down after a spontaneous orgasm high, and once I crash-landed, there were two facts I couldn't deny.

I was ravenous.

I smelled like a whorehouse operated out of a men's locker room.

I needed to eat, and I needed to wash off the sweat and sex.

My stomach rumbled. I hauled myself up and cracked open the forbidden door into the apartment. I was a little surprised Connor hadn't locked it from the other side, but the prick was obviously used to getting his way and expected me to obey his orders without question.

Holding my breath, I listened. My mom had always said I had the hearing of a dog. She—

My throat tightened, and I shoved the thought away.

No one was home.

I hurried to the kitchen where I all but inhaled an apple from the fruit bowl on the counter, then chomped down three bananas. I washed it all down with a beer because that was the only beverage in the fridge.

It was probably pushing my luck to take a shower, but fuck it. I needed one. The entirety of the human race needed me to have one.

The bathroom door didn't lock, which was unfortunate, but beggars couldn't be choosers, which was the theme for my whole life. I stripped out of my clothes and—

FUCK!

My garbage bag.

I must've left it in Mr. Owen's classroom.

I bit my lip. I should go get it right now before a janitor came along and mistook it for actual trash. But...who knew when I would get another chance to shower?

I'd make it quick and then go. But ugh, I'd have to put my nasty clothes back on. Oh well.

Turning the water on as hot as it would go, I stepped underneath the spray with a satisfied groan. I reached up to adjust the pressure to the highest setting, and my eyes drifted closed as my clit twitched. The showerhead was detachable. But first things first.

Careful not to get my wig wet, I lathered up, thankful there was an unscented bar of soap next to the different high-end men's body washes. Squeaky clean at last, I pulled the showerhead down and spread my feet wide, leaning back against the slippery tile. Aiming it with one hand, I used my free hand to spread my pussy lips and then groaned, jerking, when the stream hit the right spot.

I rocked my hips back and forth, my mind conjuring up images of the twins fucking the professor, wondering how one got an invite to that party.

My pleasure mounted higher, and higher still, when the door to the bathroom opened.

Fuck.

Someone entered and closed the door behind them. Through the steamed-up glass shower door, I could only see the shape of Ghostface's mask on top of a nude body.

I dropped the showerhead, the water going wild, as I flung my right arm across my tits and covered my crotch with my left hand.

"Occupied!" I yelled.

The shower door swung open, and the cocksucker stood there, the same guy who'd gone down on Malcolm, the gladiator. Was Jones his name? Through the large cock-shaped hole in his mask, I spied the poutiest lips I'd ever seen.

"Dude," I snapped. "As much as I'd be open to sharing a shower with a gay male bestie, you're a stranger, so—"

"I'm not gay," he said.

"Oh. I shouldn't have assumed. I didn't mean to sound biphobic, but, um... Could we actually discuss this later because... Hey!"

Before I could point out that he didn't need a shower—he smelled damn good, warm and spicy like the human equivalent of cider—he stepped into the shower with me and with his mask still on, leaving me pinned between him and the wall. Both of us naked.

Do not look down, do not look down, do not look down.

“Excuse me, Jones! Is that your name? Please—”

“Call me Kade. Kade Jones—”

“I’ll call you whatever you want as long as I can call you later !” I blurted. “I’m showering here.”

“Actually, babe, now we’re showering here. And, for the record, at WIC, everybody just kind of fucks everybody. Labels are kind of...beneath us.” He casually replaced the showerhead in its holder then twisted the controls.

Suddenly, ice-cold water blasted down.

I shrieked. He chuckled, a deep, seductive rumble.

Fucker.

He grabbed the bar of soap I’d used. “I’m doing you a favor. You obviously need to cool the fuck down. Just be glad it’s me that busted in here, not Connor or Malcolm. I’m the nice one.”

Nice being subjective in this context, I was sure.

“Could you please...” I gestured for him to move over, to let me out, but he turned around so his back was facing me.

Do not look at his ass. Do not look at his ass.

Damn.

He had a perfectly sculpted ass.

He lathered up his hands, set the soap down, and then lowered his hands to his junk. “Grab that loofah and scrub my back, huh.”

It was not a question.

“I’m not washing your back, you dick,” I hissed.

“Mmmm, yeah, speaking of...” He turned towards the water to rinse off his dick and balls. “How ‘bout a little reach-around while you do my back? Make both of those hands useful.”

I was tempted to punch him, but he chuckled again, pulled the shower door open, and stepped out. I quickly shut it behind him. I shut my eyes, too, and held my breath until the bathroom door creaked open and slammed closed.

Who the fuck only jumped in the shower to wash their junk? Obviously somebody who’d done a lot more than give head.

Exhaling, I turned off the water and stepped out onto the plush rug. When I glanced around, my eyes widened. That fuckrag had taken my clothes.

I cursed under my breath, shivering. He’d left me alone in the fogged-up bathroom, soaking wet, naked, and stranded. So far, Whispering Ivy was beating me by humiliation alone.

I snatched a towel off the rack, intending to wrap it around myself. But of course, it was a hand towel, so the best I could do was use it lengthwise and drape it down my front, leaving my backside fully exposed.

Deep breath. All I had to do was make it back to my “hole,” as Connor had called it. Then I’d figure out a game plan. I couldn’t just traipse back to Mr. Owen’s classroom

to get my things in my birthday suit, with only my nips and pubes covered. If I was quiet, and quick, maybe I could slip down the apartment hall without being seen and steal some of Kade's clothes or something.

Ugh. Since when had my luck ever been that great, though?

Steeling myself, I slipped out of the bathroom. But before I could take a step, someone snatched the towel out of my hands.

Malcolm and Connor both stood there, shirtless, leaning against the wall like they were personally responsible for holding up the damned building with their broad shoulders. But it was Malcolm who'd yanked the towel away from me and was currently twirling it in the air like a fucking lasso.

They definitely got a glimpse of the whole show before I could cover anything.

And they were definitely looking at me like they'd just found their next prey.

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Chapter Four

“Somebody needs a wax. It’s not the seventies,” Malcolm drawled in his strange accent, with a smirk as cruel as it was cocky. “Bush aside, what do you say, Con?”

I interrupted before Connor could say shit about my bush. “Oh, let me guess, you prefer bald pussies? I kind of got a pedo vibe from you—”

Malcolm clamped his huge hand around my neck, his pale-gray eyes storming with malice. “What did you say to me, bitch? Say it again, and I’ll strangle every last fucking word right out of you.”

Before he could make my eyes bulge out my head, to my pleasant surprise, Connor shoved him. Malcolm’s beefy hand released me.

“She’s not worth it,” Connor muttered around the toothpick in his mouth.

I held back a cough and forced myself to breathe evenly. I wouldn’t give Malcolm the satisfaction of knowing he’d cut off my air for even a split second.

“She’s maybe a two out of ten.” Connor shook his head with a sneer. “If I’m being generous.”

Heat rose to my face. Anger, not shame. I knew I had a good body and a nice face, because no matter what, I was still my mother’s daughter, and she’d always been drop-dead gorgeous.

“Nothing to see here,” Connor added, his toothpick bobbing. Between that and the pen he’d had in his mouth last night, I was beginning to think he had an oral fixation. “Except the gutter grime she’s dripping all over our floors. Mop that shit up, street leech.”

Malcolm pointed to the bathroom behind me, his bare, muscled arm flexing. “Who told you that you could use our shower?”

“Well, since I live in the apartment, the way I see it, I should have access to all the common areas, just like you guys.”

Connor jerked his head toward the hallway, flipping his dark hair into his eyes. “You live in that hole. Not out here. Remember what we discussed, Malcolm.”

And just like that, Connor spun on his heel and left, leaving me and Malcolm alone.

Malcolm’s gaze slid up and down my bare, dripping form. He raised an eyebrow, his lips curling into something almost amused.

“That first shower was a freebie,” he said, still leering at me. “Next one, you pay.”

“I’ll take a shower whenever I want,” I replied coolly. “And I won’t owe you a damn thing. And if you push the issue, I’ll take it up with Dean Bennett and see what he has to say about the matter.”

Malcolm laughed, a low, wicked sound that slithered under my skin. “You won’t say a damn thing to Dean Bennett about what goes on in this apartment. Nothing’s free here, Princess. And just so you know, you won’t last five minutes in this place.”

“You’ve underestimated me,” I shot back. “I can survive anywhere.”

“We’ll see about that.” He looked me up and down one more time and shook his head, laughing quietly to himself as he walked away.

Without that mountain of a man near me, the size of the apartment seemed to double.

As I headed through the living room, my pulse racing, Connor glanced up from the couch. He cocked his head, folding his arms as he narrowed his brown eyes at me.

I’d given up even trying to cover myself. I was no prude, and it’s not like they were the first guys I didn’t want to see me naked who did anyway.

Connor took his toothpick out of his mouth. “What do you think you’re doing out here?”

I was about to tell him that I was looking for Kade, when I noticed my skirt and bra crumpled on the floor next to where Connor sat. Unfortunately, Connor’s gaze followed mine, and he casually slid his leg out, his combat boot pinning my clothes to the gleaming hardwood.

Damn it.

Anger flared up inside me, sharp and hot.

“Oh, so you like looking at me naked, then?” I raised my brows.

That got an eye roll out of him, and he moved his foot. I crossed toward him and yanked my skirt up from the floor. As I did, a folded piece of paper slipped from the pocket. I lunged, but that bastard caught it midair.

“Give me that!” I demanded.

The second the words left my mouth, I sagged at my mistake. Connor's crafty eyes flicked alive with interest. He'd heard the desperation in my voice as clearly as I did.

"Get your sad little titties out of my face," he said, leaning back, evading me.

He stood, opening the note—Mom's note—and held it high out of my reach.

It had been in the envelope with the cash for tuition. It was short, cryptic as hell, and I knew it word for word.

Go to Whispering Ivy. Find out everything you can about the Lifewell. Do whatever it takes. Don't trust anyone.

Love you most.

"Give that to me, Connor," I said, blinking back the tears that threatened to fill my eyes. "Please."

I would never beg, but in this case, asking nicely was absolutely worth it to me.

His eyes widened as he read it.

"Where did you get this? Who gave you this?" His voice dropped to a whisper, each quiet word filled with venom.

"That's none of your business," I hissed back, my heart humming in my chest. "That's mine. Give it back."

He smiled, a show of surrender, and plugged his toothpick back inside his mouth.

Relieved, I exhaled and held out my hand.

Without a word, still smiling that almost sweet smile, he refolded the note and ripped it cleanly in two. Then, like he was making confetti, he shredded the halves to bits, all while I watched, frozen, paralyzed by the loss, the pain as sharp as if he'd been tearing my own skin. With dead eyes, he released the pieces, letting them flutter into my outstretched palm.

He stepped forward, closing the space between us until I could feel his cinnamon breath on my face. "If you know what's good for you, you will forget you ever heard the word Lifewell. And if I find out that you've even thought that word? I will make you fucking regret it."

I shivered. But I'd be damned if I'd let him see it.

For all intents and purposes, though I didn't know when she'd written it, that note included my mom's last words to me. Her last love you most . I'd found the note moments after I'd found her in the shed in our rental's backyard, rigor mortis already setting in.

It was just a note, though. I still had her voicemails on my phone. Pictures of her and her smile. Still, my heart squeezed.

While Connor watched, I pulled on my skirt then my bra. Who knew what Kade did with my shirt, but a bra was basically a bikini top, so hopefully I wouldn't scandalize anyone on the way to Mr. Owen's classroom.

"Where do you think you're going?" Connor asked as I turned toward the door with my chin held high.

"None of your damn business."

"I thought I made myself clear. You use the back door inside your hole."

I squared my shoulders, giving him my best “get out of my way” stare. “Sorry to disappoint, but I’ll use the front entrance whenever I want to. Like now.”

He moved to block me. “Don’t try me, street leech.”

“What are you gonna do?” I challenged, forcing my voice to remain steady. “Come up with a new and different insult? Kill me?”

“No, sweetheart. I won’t kill you.” He leaned in, closer, closer still, threatening my eyeball with the other end of his toothpick, until I flinched. “I’ll just make you wish you were dead.”

Part of me already did wish that.

Chapter Five

The next morning, I crossed campus, heading for my first class, in clean clothes. Fortunately, Mr. Owens had found my garbage bag and kept it until I came to retrieve it. Unfortunately, I only packed five or six shirts, a few skirts, and two pairs of jeans, so I would need to find out, sooner rather than later, where the laundry room was. And steal some quarters.

Whispering Ivy College was so weird. All the buildings seemed to be connected by hallways so you could go just about anywhere without having to step foot outside. But I needed the fresh air, even if the frigid January wind tore into my clothes and sank a relentless chill into my bones.

I hadn't even heard footsteps behind me before a rough grip took my arm. I yanked back, teeth bared, but didn't have a chance to protest before I was airborne and flipped upside down over a broad shoulder. Familiar combat boots hit the ground as I hung there, my face a few inches from the ass of none other than Connor.

"Are you out of your damn mind?" I fumed, pounding my fists against his back. "Put me down right now!"

"Shut it," he snapped, his grip only tightening. "Dean Bennett wants a word."

"Then he can call like a normal person. My number's on the paperwork."

Miracle of miracles, I'd found an outlet in my hole, behind a stack of boxes, and was able to charge my phone.

Connor snorted. “No reception on campus. You’ll need to walk about ten miles in either direction before you get a bar.”

Was he serious? Was this 1994 or something?

“Put. Me. Down!”

He ignored me.

The way his shoulder dug into my stomach, the possessive way he held me like I was his prize or plaything... Yeah, the anger in my veins wasn’t the only thing pumping heat through my body. But I’d rather bite my tongue off than admit it.

He carried me right through the main building and down the hall. We stopped at the reception desk outside the dean’s office, and Connor planted me firmly on my feet, gripping my shoulder for a moment before releasing me.

My heart raced, irritation and...something else...twisting together as I glared up at him. I liked how his hand felt while clamping down on me, squeezing a little too hard. I might even have liked the way his jaw worked as he chewed on the end of a straw. And don’t even get me started on the faint scent of cedar and rain and something else dangerously addictive radiating off him.

What the hell was wrong with me? My mom was dead, and it was my fault. I wasn’t at Whispering Ivy for a fuck-a-thon. Did I just have raging hormones? Or was I a legit nymphomaniac with sociopathic tendencies? Either way, I needed to focus. I had to find out about this Lifewell thing.

“Hey, Trouble.” He greeted Ms. Tissdale with a smile, and I swear I could hear her granny panties disintegrating.

Her eyes lit up. “Oh, you!” She fished a container from her drawer. “I saved these blueberry streusel muffins just for you, Connor. Couldn’t let anyone else get their hands on them, now could I?”

She glanced at me, more accusatory than necessary. Why leave a damn basket of muffins out if you didn’t want people to eat them?

Next time, put his name on them, lady.

“Mmm, you spoil me, Ms. Tissdale. You know blueberries are my weakness.” Connor picked up the container, drumming his fingers on the lid. He leaned in closer to her, lowering his voice. “Bet they’re as sweet as you are.”

She let out a soft laugh, her eyes lingering too long on him. “I’ll let you be the judge of that, honey.”

I turned away. Gross. Why did I have to hear them flirting? Any second, and my ears would start bleeding.

I wouldn’t have been surprised if she licked her lips at him, but hey, I’d fuck anything with a cock, so who was I to judge whatever they had going on?

Connor jerked his head at me. “She’s here to see the dean. She’s not to leave until I come back for her.”

My lip twitched, barely holding in my ragey response.

Ms. Tissdale’s gaze flitted to me then returned to Connor. “I’ll keep her right here, just for you.”

“Thank you, gorgeous,” he said as he strode out.

Dude definitely had some mommy issues.

“Go on in,” Ms. Tissdale said dismissively. She returned to her typing. “The dean is expecting you.”

I adjusted my skirt—thankfully, I wore panties today so I didn’t give everyone we passed a good look at my bare ass while Connor carried me over—and squared my shoulders before entering.

“Close the door,” Xander—Dean Bennett—said.

His voice was sharp, curt. It wasn’t a request.

I obeyed, wondering if I should lock it behind me, just in case.

“Have a seat, Tuesday.”

“So, what’s this all about? Missing me already?” I plastered a smirk on my face as I perched on the edge of the chair across from his desk.

The same chair I’d sat in the other night while he jerked off on me.

The faintest flicker of amusement crossed his face, but his eyes stayed impassive. “I’ll get straight to the point. I tried to reach your mother a number of times. It goes straight to voicemail.”

I kept my expression neutral, but my pulse jumped. I’d expected he might try calling her at some point, but the lie I’d come up with didn’t feel half as solid now that he was staring me down.

“Oh. Yeah.” I shrugged, giving a casual toss of my head. “She’s on a six-month

cruise with her new boyfriend. Real rich dude. Treats her like a queen.”

The skepticism in Xander’s gaze tightened around my neck like a noose.

I reached up and touched my throat. I could still feel Malcolm’s fingertips digging into my skin.

“Interesting. So there’s no way to contact her for the entire time you’re with us at Whispering Ivy? This is what you want me to believe?”

“It’s true,” I replied, keeping my expression as blank as possible. “She wanted to ‘disconnect’ from the world.”

Mom was as disconnected from the world as a person could get. That much was true. She hadn’t wanted it. She’d been doing well, and—

Damn. Now was not the time for waterworks. I reached up, rubbing my eyes as if I were tired, and faked a yawn.

He steepled his fingers, watching me intently with his electric stare. “I see. Interesting timing, wouldn’t you say?”

I met his gaze, forcing a smirk. “Not my problem if you can’t reach her. Maybe she’ll send you a postcard.”

“Cute,” he said, voice dry.

“Besides,” I went on, “the money part is all taken care of, and I’m eighteen now. A legal adult. Why do you need to speak to my mother?”

“Actually, I’m less concerned with her availability and more concerned with where

you picked up the term Lifewell.”

The word hit me like a slap, though I didn’t let my expression falter. He knew. Of course he knew.

His eyes searched my face, waiting, watching, trying to find an answer I wasn’t about to give.

Don’t trust anyone. Don’t trust anyone. Don’t trust anyone.

“What is Connor? Your fucking spy? Do you have him reporting back everything I do? Did he tell you I masturbated in the shower?”

Xander’s face colored. “No, he didn’t mention that. Where did you hear the term Lifewell, Tuesday?”

I shrugged, doing my best to seem nonchalant. “Heard it in passing. It’s a catchy name, don’t you think? Kind of like a band name.”

He cocked his head, his gaze darkening, but he didn’t press me further. Instead, he rose slowly and walked around his desk in his pristine three-piece suit, each step a controlled, deliberate movement until he stood just behind me. His hand brushed against the back of my chair as he leaned in close.

“You know, Tuesday,” he murmured, his voice a low purr, “when I was seeing your mother, I never had any...improper thoughts about you.” His voice softened, the words like silk against my skin, decadent but also slippery. He was a fucking liar. “You were just a kid.”

“Uh-huh,” I replied, because that’s the eloquence one would expect from a girl who got a perfect score on her verbal SATs, right?

There was a faint tug, a subtle shift, almost like the air itself was thickening around us, pressing against my thoughts... Molding them?

I shifted uncomfortably in my seat, trying to shake the feeling, but the sensation grew stronger, coaxing me to let down my walls and just...speak.

My mouth opened slightly, a phrase balancing on the tip of my tongue before I even knew what I was going to say. Why was I feeling like this, almost eager to tell him everything, for all my secrets to just spill out?

But then, just as suddenly, a flash of sharp resistance struck me like lightning.

No .

I pressed my lips together.

Don't trust anyone. Don't trust anyone. Don't trust anyone.

The dean leaned in slightly, his gaze fixed on me, steady and intent. Wanting. Pleading. Begging. My heartbeat thundered as I wrestled against the urge to give in to the desire so obvious in his brilliant blue eyes.

God, he wanted me.

“But you're not a kid now, are you?” His warm breath breezed against my ear. “You're an adult now, Tuesday. A grown woman.”

But he wasn't after my body. He wanted something else... Knowledge? Something he couldn't reach, no matter how hard he tried. And it sure felt like he was trying. Like he was reaching into my soul and digging for answers.

Something dangerous was happening here, a seduction that had nothing to do with sex.

“And ever since you walked into my office the other night, I can’t stop thinking about you,” he went on, his fingers trailing down the side of my neck. “Specifically, I can’t stop thinking about you on your knees.”

Okay...so maybe it did have something to do with sex.

A fiery spark shot down my spine and pooled deep in my belly.

I turned to face him, arching a brow, feigning nonchalance. “Oh? So, you’re suggesting I do what? Suck you off?”

A slow, satisfied smile spread across his handsome face. “It would be the polite thing to do, since I so generously admitted you to Whispering Ivy.”

I crossed my arms, forcing a laugh to disguise the searing heat blazing through me. “Like you had a choice in the matter. I’m here whether you want me to be or not.”

He traced his hand along my shoulder, his thumb brushing against my neck in a way that made my skin tingle all over until I couldn’t take it anymore.

I rose to my feet, took a step closer to him, and knelt.

I took my time unbuckling his belt and unbuttoning his tented pants. His breath hitched as I dragged the zipper down, tooth by agonizing tooth. His cock strained against the fabric of his boxer briefs, begging to be freed. I hooked my fingers into the waistband and tugged them down.

We both moaned as he sprang free, the swollen head already glistening with precum.

Wrapping one hand around the base, I gave him a few slow pumps, his shaft hot against my palm.

“Your mouth, Geuls,” he demanded, using the same name he’d used to ask me to pass the butter during dinner when Mom and I lived with him.

I flicked my tongue out, swirling it around the tip of him, tasting the salty bead of precum. A low groan rumbled in his throat as I took him into my mouth, inch by delicious inch. I hollowed my cheeks, sucking hard, breathing through my nose.

I found a rhythm, bobbing my head, taking as much of him as I could. He was thick and heavy against my tongue, and I wanted him to throw me to the ground, take control, and fuck my face. To finally give me a reason for it to be okay to let my tears flow freely as I choked on his cock.

As if reading my thoughts, his hips began to rock, thrusting shallowly into my mouth. I moaned around him, the vibrations making his chest heave. I reached between my own legs and rubbed myself through my panties, the damp fabric a teasing friction against my aching clit.

His movements grew erratic, his breaths coming in pants and gasps. I could tell he was close.

I took him deeper, sucked him harder. And then he flew over the edge, shooting thick ropes of cum into my mouth. Groaning, he brushed a thumb over my bottom lip, then cupped my chin, tipping my face upward as I gulped down his release. His other hand tangled in my hair.

Then he was pulling.

“FUCK!” I yelled, spewing cum all over us both as I felt the too-sharp tug against my

scalp.

He yanked again, and this time my glued-on wig came off in his hands.

My eyes smarted with tears as I struggled to my feet. “What the hell, Xander?”

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Chapter Six

“W hat the hell?” I asked again, but this time in a whisper.

I stood there, in front of Xander, in my wig cap. Tears spilled from the corners of my eyes, jizz from the corners of my mouth.

His hand flew up to cover his own mouth, his eyes wide with horror. His free hand, that is. My wig still hung from his other clenched fist like a strangled animal.

“My god. Geuls... Geulia... Tuesday,” he rasped, his words muffled by his palm. “I...”

“WHAT?” I demanded.

Though Mom and I only lived with Xander for a couple of months, I’d never, ever seen him anything other than calm, cool, collected. Composed.

But now...

Both of our chests heaved as we competed in what might have been the world’s most bizarre staring contest. Fuck if I’d be the first to blink. I had nothing to be ashamed of here. Well, the whole dribbly-jizz-mouth thing wasn’t my finest moment. But other than that...

He didn’t respond. He looked...dare I say...stunned? As if he’d pulled off my wig and found a foot-long cock had sprouted from the top of my head.

“I just... I just...”

Holy fuck. The unflappable Xander Bennett was stammering.

“I just needed to know,” he finally managed.

At last, I blinked. Quite rapidly. What. The. Fuck.

“You just needed to know what ? That I’m going gray very prematurely?” I demanded.

But he already knew that. Unless he’d forgotten. I’d gotten my first white streak, framing the right side of my face, at fourteen. At first, I thought it looked cool, edgy, and during Xander and Mom’s relationship, I hadn’t yet started hiding it.

“Here,” he said, holding out my wig, which I snatched from him.

He went to shove both his hands in his pockets, his cheeks turning bright pink, when he realized his pants were still around his thighs, his now limp dick lolling there, sad and abandoned, like the only uneaten wiener at the end of a summer barbecue.

“Why would you do that?” I asked as he redressed himself, trying to contain the tremble in my voice. “Why...?”

“Did I hurt you?” Zipping up, he took a step towards me.

I took a step back.

“The way you screamed, it sounded like you were in pain...” His words were quiet, gentle, disconcerting as hell.

“Well, the wig was glued on, you ass.”

“Um...” He pointed to a door, not the door to the reception area, but another door.

“My private restroom. Why don’t you go clean up?”

“Yes, why don’t I?” I shot him daggers with my eyes.

Shoulders back, I crossed the room, resisting the temptation to slam the bathroom door so hard it would pop off its hinges.

How fucking dare he. Why did he?

I didn’t need to look at myself in the mirror to know I was a hot mess, but I needed to study my reflection to see if he’d actually ripped skin from my hairline or if it only felt like it. A cursory inspection caused me to sigh, relieved. The edge of my wig cap was torn, but other than that, no real damage had been done.

I combed the wig with my fingers and put it back on, my belly flipping at the fact that I had no way to secure it. I hadn’t even packed shampoo, much less any of my back-up wigs or extra caps or glue.

I sighed.

By the time I turned seventeen, all of my hair had turned snow white. Silver, shimmery strands were woven in, which I actually liked, but I didn’t like the fact that I’d looked older than my own mother, a natural blonde with no grays when she died at forty.

So, I started dying it. But the next day by noon, no matter what color I chose, no matter what brand I used, my hair had faded back to white, as if my hair repelled any other color.

After that, I'd bought my first wig. I could never afford a pricey one that could pass for real hair, only the cheap ones that looked super fake. I didn't want the wigs to look like I was hiding anything. Make it obvious you have a secret, and it'll be a race of douches to be the first to expose it.

So, I scrimped and saved, and after every Halloween, when wigs went on clearance, I bought a few. Now I had a small collection in different hues and styles to match my outfits, making it seem like a fashion statement, an intentional choice.

Here in Xander's bathroom, I also chose to give myself one minute to weep. For my natural raven locks, for my mom, for the life I'd always complained about but now desperately wanted back.

I splashed some water on my face and scrubbed the drying cum from the corners of my lips. My eyes looked bloodshot as hell, but there was nothing I could do about that. With a deep breath, I strode back into Xander's office.

"You've been crying," he said as if there was a neon sign above my head announcing it.

He came toward me and reached out, like he was going to offer some comfort, a hug, or maybe to brush the tears from the corners of my eyes with the pads of his thumbs. Out of all the sins I'd committed, almost letting him do just that was the one I didn't think I'd ever forgive myself for.

I stepped back.

"I haven't been crying," I lied. "I took a direct hit of sperm to the eye. That should really be a cautionary tale in all sex-ed curriculums."

"Tuesday, I..." He searched my face with his bright-blue eyes. "I am unspeakably

sorry.”

I shook my head. “I don’t want your apologies, Xander. I want an explanation. Why did you want to see what was underneath my wig?”

He remained silent as he blanked his expression.

“Why did my mom want me to go here?” I blurted.

His brows arched.

In the beat of silence that followed, I realized my mistake. Shit .

His eyes narrowed into suspicious slits. “You said it was your decision to come to Whispering Ivy.”

Yep, I did say that.

“Ultimately, it was my decision,” I fudged. “But she...supported it. She might’ve suggested it.” To put it mildly. “And other than you, neither of us had— have —a connection to Whispering Ivy, so I suspect you know why I’m here.”

After a moment’s hesitation, he shrugged. “What your mother and I had was brief. Mostly physical. We didn’t really have...deep conversations about the future. Hers, yours, or mine.”

Liar .

The thought came out of nowhere, but I was certain, as certain as my own heart thudding in my chest, that he was lying. But why?

He cleared his throat. “And for the record, pulling off your wig was an accident. In the heat of the moment, at the peak of my passion... It wasn’t intentional. But I do apologize.”

Fucking liar.

I just needed to know, he’d said.

His yanking off my wig was as intentional as it would be if I kneed him in the balls right now.

Also...at the peak of his passion? Who the fuck talked like that?

I turned to leave. “Well, the peak of your passion is leaving a bad taste in my mouth. So, if we’re done with this little tête-à-tête, I’ll just see myself—”

Again, I felt that faint tug, the thickening of the air around us...

“Geulia.”

The edge to his voice stopped me in my tracks. Rooted me to the spot. Froze my arms and legs.

“If you know what’s good for you, you’ll forget you ever heard the term Lifewell.”

Basically the same thing Connor had said to me.

“Well, obviously I don’t know what’s good for me,” I said.

“Geulia, this is an order. Do not ever say the term Lifewell again. Do not write it down. Do not think it—”

I turned and stepped toward him, and he inhaled sharply as I cupped the bulge in his pants. “I will suck you off, Dean Bennett. I will ride your face. I will drain this cock with my cunt. But I will not ever, ever take orders from you.”

His jaw twitched, a slight bob of his Adam’s apple, but his cold gaze held firm. “If I get wind that you’ve even muttered the term Lifewell in your sleep, I will expel you. Immediately.”

I shook my head. “You can’t—”

“Oh, darling, don’t you get it? Your tongue is coated with my cum. I can do whatever the fuck I choose.” Something flashed in his eyes, like a bolt of lightning in a midnight sky. “I can and I will. You’re dismissed.”

“Don’t forget my little recording, Xander,” I ground out. “I can ruin you. I can—”

“Yes, the board members you threatened to send the audio of that little stunt to... Tell me, what were their names again?”

He smiled, all teeth and no humor.

Before I could fumble for a response, he said, “Thought so.”

Yeah, I’d been bluffing there. I didn’t know who the hell to send the recording to. A basic Google search hadn’t given me shit about WIC’s board members, but I figured I could still find out somehow, if necessary. The important thing was I had the recording.

“You know the way out.” He sat in the seat behind his desk without looking up.

I shook my head. “One more thing. After what you did to my wig—and after that BJ I

just gave you—you owe me. I deserve better than the damn closet you’ve got me in.”

His handsome features distorted into confusion. Was it genuine?

“What are you talking about? The room you’re in is on the small side but perfectly lovely. Besides, not to be crass, but...we both know you’ve lived in worse situations.”

“The fuck I have. I have to crawl in on my hands and knees. It doesn’t even have a bed, Xander.”

His eyes narrowed. His nostrils flared. He opened his mouth and then closed it, his teeth clacking together, jaw clenched.

After a long moment, he said, “Get out and send Connor in—”

“But I don’t even have a bed —”

“And I’m going to take care of it,” he snapped. “But Tuesday? I insist you call me Dean Bennett.”

I shrugged. “Sure. We’ve got to maintain some boundaries, a modicum of decorum and what have you.”

He pointed to the door, his eyes spitting flames. “Send Connor in. And wait in the reception area until I’m done with him.”

Because of what had just gone down between Xander and me in here, I had to ask my next question. How could I not?

“Are you and Connor...” I made a circle with my thumb and index finger and

pumped the middle finger of my other hand into it.

Xander grimaced, and my heart fell.

“Please tell me you’re not a homophobe.” I rolled my eyes at him. “Or else I’ll have to scratch sitting on your face right off my to-do list.”

And I’d lose all respect for him, but...telling him that would mean admitting out loud that I had any respect for him in the first place. Was that even true? From the moment Mom introduced me to him, my feelings for Xander—Dean Bennett—had been a tangle of roses and thorns.

He’d captivated me. He’d confused me. I’d hardly been a virgin back then, but this man had been my sexual awakening. And the feelings I’d had for him didn’t stop in my panties.

Xander slowly rose out of his chair, his hands flexed into fists at his sides. “Get out. Take your baseless accusations—all of them—with you. And send Connor in.”

His blue eyes lingered, just for a second, sending cascading shivers down my spine. It was nothing I could explain, just something sharp in his gaze that seemed to pin me in place.

I bit the inside of my cheek, hoping the pain would ground me as I forced myself to walk out.

The moment I passed over the threshold, I knew. He might’ve admitted me to Whispering Ivy because I’d blackmailed him, but I couldn’t stop myself from thinking that blackmail wasn’t the only reason.

Connor was nowhere to be found for a good forty-five minutes. Xander made the time easy to track by buzzing Ms. Tissdale every five minutes, like clockwork.

She'd listen on her phone for a moment, then say, "Yes, sir. As soon as he arrives, I'll send him in." Or "Not yet, Dean Bennett."

Under direct orders to wait here, I slouched in the lobby, tapping my fingers on the edge of the chair, trying to tune out Ms. Tissdale's judgmental, side-eyed glances as she typed, her nose all but twitching with disapproval, like I smelled bad.

What a twat.

My annoyance at having to wait grew by the second. Why couldn't I just walk myself back to the apartment? What would happen if I just got up and—

Heavy footsteps sounded in the hallway.

I sat up, as if I had so many important places to be. Which technically I did—classes. I was already a week behind. Yeah, I could handle playing catchup, but Mom and I weren't—I wasn't—paying Whispering Ivy the big bucks to warm the chairs in the lobby of the dean's office.

"Let's go," Connor said, appearing in the doorway.

"Actually," Ms. Tissdale said. "The dean has been waiting on you. He'd like a word."

Now I got a hefty dose of side-eye from Connor.

I could almost hear him saying, What did you do, street leech?

He heaved a sigh and ran a hand through his floppy brown hair. "Thanks, Ms. T."

Then, without knocking or announcing himself, he went into the dean's office.

As much as I tried to pretend I didn't care, I found myself glancing over at the door more than once, itching to know what they were saying.

After about five more minutes of sitting there, I couldn't help it. I rose quietly and pretended to pace, always lingering just close enough to the door to catch snippets of their voices. Connor's sounded harsh, the kind of tone that made me picture his jaw clenched tight, lips pressed thin.

I strained to hear, and just when I thought I'd made out the word Lifewell, something shifted in my periphery. I glanced to the side to find Ms. Tissdale standing. She pointed at me then at my now empty chair.

"Kindly sit down," she said, one eyebrow arched, her voice an exaggerated whisper that cut through the quiet. "Eavesdropping isn't tolerated here."

I rolled my eyes but dropped back into the chair, doing my best to look bored and put-upon as I crossed my arms and waited, trying not to fidget since every time I did, I drew a glare. She probably couldn't wait to report back to Xander, tattling about how I couldn't even manage to sit quietly for a few minutes, how I didn't belong here.

Observant little cunt.

Finally, Xander's office door swung open, and Connor stepped out, his expression pinched like he was fighting off a migraine.

"Come on," he muttered, barely glancing at me.

He didn't even give Ms. Tissdale one of his usual flirty lines. His whole demeanor

felt off.

We walked back to the apartment in silence, his pace faster than usual, his jaw set in a hard line. I tried not to stare, but I was curious as hell. Whatever conversation he'd had with the dean had shifted something. Changed him. Was it because he didn't have something in his mouth like a pen or a straw to fixate on?

Probably not.

Back in the apartment, he led me past the hallway and into an unfamiliar part of the place. He opened a door to a small but actual room. A twin bed with a plain headboard sat in the middle, a window with heavy curtains filled one wall, and even a small desk took up one corner. It wasn't much, but it was light-years better than where they'd stashed me before.

"This is where you'll be staying now," Connor said flatly.

I gazed around the room, at its spare but functional layout, trying to keep my expression neutral. "So...what happened? Did this room just magically appear after you talked to Dean Bennett? Or was this where I was supposed to be staying all along?"

I suspected this was the real servant's quarters, where the dean had always intended for me to live. Why the fuck does a college, even a hoity-toity private one, have servant's quarters in the apartments? That's fucked up.

Connor didn't respond.

I rolled my eyes. "Damn, dude. Why do you hate me so much?"

His full lips twisted, something close to a sneer, though it didn't quite reach his eyes.

“Don’t flatter yourself, Dare. You’re not worth enough for anyone here to feel anything about you.”

His words shouldn’t have had an impact, but they did. I’d spent my entire life hearing just how unworthy, how worthless I was, at every single school I’d been to, all of which seemed to have a bully quota to fill. But after a while, words lost their sting, then their meaning altogether.

Something about the way Connor said it, though, felt like a serrated knife to my soul.

I kept my face neutral, fighting not to let him see any reaction, even as his words pried open everything I’d been trying to keep locked down. Eighteen years of rage at the world, Mom’s body, cold and still, the helplessness that clawed at me when I thought of it all.

And that word— Lifewell —still buzzed in my mind, more insistent than ever, since both Connor and Xander were so adamant that I not pursue it. If it didn’t matter, they wouldn’t be acting like it did, right?

What was the point of me being here if I couldn’t even say Lifewell out loud? I’d never find out anything. I’d never find out why I was here. Why Mom wanted me here.

Connor turned and stalked out, and I shut the door to my room.

My emotions felt so heavy inside me, like they were suffocating me from the inside out. I needed a release, something to break the tension.

I lay back on the bed and closed my eyes, slipping my hand down beneath my waistband, letting the sensation build slowly, taking control of my own body, my own emotions. Bit by bit, I let myself unwind, letting go of the ache for just a little while,

just enough to breathe again.

I came once, twice, three times, and finally started feeling like the impossible pressure inside me had eased.

Later, I went to my afternoon classes, then stopped by the offices of the professors of my morning classes to get any assignments I'd missed. I'd probably need a laptop. Maybe I could get an on-campus job to afford one?

I certainly couldn't flunk out. I had to stay sharp and keep focused. If I was going to figure out what was going on with this place, and what the fucking Lifewell was, I needed to learn as much as I could, to get actual credits I could transfer somewhere else later since I'd only had enough money for one semester.

When I finally made it back to my room, my stomach bottomed out.

"The fuck...?"

The doorframe was empty. No door at all, like someone had removed it to make sure I had zero privacy.

Fuck Connor and the fucking horse he rode in on. This was his work. It had to be.

But before I could storm out and go straight to Xander's office, I noticed something else. The closet door—still on its hinges—stood slightly ajar. I hadn't touched it.

Holding my breath, I took one step towards it, and then another. My pulse pounded in my ears. I fully expected someone to jump out at me and make me shit myself.

But when I swung the door open, no one was there. There wouldn't have been room for anyone to hide anyway because the closet was full.

Full of brand-new clothes, their tags still on, all in my size. Not only that, but at the bottom of the closet sat seven or eight shoeboxes. There were also boxes on a shelf almost too high for me to reach, but these were larger, and I knew before I stood on my tiptoes to pull one down what the contents were.

Wigs.

Holding my breath, I took one out. Long, blonde. Exquisite. Nicer than anything I'd ever owned.

I reached out but didn't dare touch anything. "The fuck...?"

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Chapter Seven

That evening, Connor appeared in my bedroom doorway and leaned against the empty frame.

I'd finished my homework, so I lay on my bed, staring up at the ceiling, because there was nothing else to do, other than masturbate some more, and let's be honest, I didn't really want my clit to fall off from overuse.

I ignored him until he cleared his throat.

"Really like the improvements you've made to this place," I said. "I won't have to make the effort to open the door to come in and out. Makes my life so much easier."

"We've been ordered to feed you," he said, his tone flat but with unmistakable annoyance barely contained beneath.

I sat up and looked him over, waiting for the punchline.

With a sigh, he jerked his head toward the kitchen and turned, leaving me to follow. Part of me almost wanted to call out, "Fuck you and your food," and stay right where I was, but my stomach had other ideas. I'd grabbed a sandwich from the dining hall for lunch, but that was hours ago.

Call me a glutton for punishment, but I was morbidly curious as to just what Connor would serve me up. Dog food?

When we reached the kitchen, I blinked, just as sure I must've been hallucinating as I was when I saw the twins finger-fucking each other during my first class. An actual meal covered the length of the table—no, more like a feast. Golden-skinned roast chicken, buttery mashed potatoes with chives, a salad, a basket of bread and...chocolate cake.

My nostrils twitched, and my belly sounded like King-Kong lived in there, beating his chest.

“Wow, this looks amazing. Do you cook?” I blurted out before I could stop myself.

“Yeah, I’m a regular Julia Child,” he deadpanned. “No, I don’t fucking cook. Seniors get privately catered meals.”

“But I’m not a senior.”

He heaved the most put-upon sigh I’d ever heard. “Which is why I said we’ve been ordered to feed you. If it were up to me, you could eat dog food straight out of the can with your cunt-smelling fingers.”

Knew it.

Connor picked up a plate and, without a word, started dishing up a portion of everything—a slice of chicken, a spoonful of potatoes, a heap of salad, and a humongous slice of cake. He set the plate on the counter next to a fabric napkin rolled around flatware, slid a glass of ice water next to it, and looked at me with a raised brow, like he was annoyed I still stood there, unmoving.

“We have to feed you,” he said, “but we don’t have to watch you eat. Take it to your room.”

I eyed the plate suspiciously. He'd gone to a surprising amount of effort, but something about the whole setup made me hesitate.

I stared at the food, then at the glass, and folded my arms. "How do I know it's safe?"

"Safe? Right." He let out a low, humorless laugh. "If you think I went to the trouble of drugging your food so I could fuck you, you need to wake up and realize sex with you isn't worth what the roofie would cost."

"Well, it's nice to know you took the time to ponder whether or not I'm rape-able. But no, I was thinking more about the kind of poison that would keep me from ever having sex again. You know, except posthumously."

He rolled his eyes to the ceiling and turned away. "Take the damn food and get out of my face."

I picked up the plate, the napkin with the flatware inside, and the glass and went back to my room. After I placed them on my desk, I decided to say grace for the first time in my life.

Please don't let this be my last meal. Also, please forgive me for my sins. And tell my mom I love her.

Then I dug in.

Home-cooked meals weren't really a thing for me growing up, unless you counted ramen, so I savored each bite, poisoned or not. The only time we ate like this was when we were living with Xander. Maybe he used the same caterers as the college? Either way, the food tasted mouthwateringly delicious and, to make it even better, an hour later, I wasn't dead.

So that was a good sign.

“I’m going out!” Connor’s voice boomed, the ultimate jump-scare. “Dishes better be done and kitchen spotless when I get back!”

No one responded.

Was he...talking to me?

A moment later, a door slammed.

“He was talking to you, back-alley icon,” another voice called.

Malcolm. He must’ve heard me say I preferred the term “back-alley icon” to Connor while he was getting his dick sucked by Kade. Kade must not be very good at it if Malcolm was pulled out of the moment enough to hear us.

But it sure looked like he knew what he was doing, despite the mask on his head.

I took my empty dishes into the kitchen, where I washed and dried them, wiped down the countertops, and put everything away in its proper place. Not because Connor expected it, but because I was used to pulling my own weight. If I could eat like that every night, cleaning up after was a small price to pay.

When I turned to head back to my room, Malcolm’s voice stopped me.

“Keep me company,” he said in his strange accent.

He nodded to the couch at the itty-bity empty space next to where his bare-chested, muscular body sat man-spreading.

I gave him a shrug, barely looking his way. “I’ll pass.”

“Wasn’t asking,” he replied, his voice a low rumble. “Things will go smoother here for you if you do as you’re told, the first time you’re told.”

The corners of my mouth twitched, but I swallowed my argument. Sitting alone in my room didn’t exactly sound better, so I joined him in the living room, squishing my body up against the armrest so there would be no accidental brushing of his parts against mine or vice versa.

The TV flickered in front of us, some Italian movie without subtitles filled with shadowy figures, exaggerated sighs, and a plot I couldn’t follow. I pulled my knees up, trying to act casual, but the quiet between us hung heavily, the kind I could feel crawling over my skin.

It wasn’t long before his hand touched my thigh, his fingers tracing up, inching higher.

I glanced over, shooting him my glariest glare. “Do I need to slap the meaning of the word consent into you?”

He just smirked, leaning in closer so I couldn’t smell anything but him—dark leather and soap. His hand grazed me through my panties.

“You can say no if you want to.” His voice sounded like a dare, low and thick. “But we both know you won’t.”

I hated that he was right.

God, I needed to get laid.

My breath hitched as his fingers pressed harder, making my heart boom, my body betraying any sense I had left.

He leaned in to kiss me, his tongue aggressive, his mouth possessive. His hands roamed over my skin as if he owned it, and at that moment, he did.

I wouldn't just give him my body. I'd beg him to take it.

The thought of that cock of his, huge and pulsing, inside me... I really didn't care who was attached to it. I just wanted the emptiness within me filled.

He pulled away, giving me a dark, dangerous look that made his pale-gray eyes almost silver.

Based on that kiss and that look, I knew this would be a rough fuck. Exactly what I needed.

Without warning, he yanked my shirt up and over my head. Deftly unhooked my bra and tossed it across the room.

"Lie back," he demanded.

I obeyed, lying back on the couch while trying to lower the volume of my panting. He glanced down at me, smirking, as I started to take off my panties.

"No need for that. I don't put this D in any bitch," he said. "No way to know what you're carrying around."

My face flushed, my chin, my forehead, my ears, even my damn nose, hot with anger. I sat up, but he grabbed me by the shoulders and pushed me back down. The very recent memory of those same rough fingers around my neck jolted me out of

whatever idiotic state of idiocy I'd been in.

If Connor hadn't stopped him, Malcolm very well might have choked me to death after the shower incident. What was I thinking even being alone in the apartment with him, much less fooling around with him? My sex drive was getting more and more out of control, clouding out all logic and reason with a hunger that demanded to be fed. No matter what.

"Malcolm, stop," I said as he shucked off his sweatpants.

No surprise that he went commando.

"Stop?" he asked, stroking his massive cock.

I licked my lips at the cum gathering at the tip. "I... No."

"No?" He arched a brow, giving himself another quick pull.

I shook my head. "I mean... Yes."

Fucking idiot. The horniest fucking idiot to ever live.

I needed whatever he would give me. We both knew it.

He all but pounced on me, straddling my bare stomach, scooting up on his knees. As he leaned down, my clit was more or less breakdancing. Malcolm knew how to work that magical tongue, and I wanted it tangled with mine again. Plus, if we were making out, he couldn't say anything douchey.

But then I realized he wasn't thinking about kissing when he hocked a mouthful of spit between my cleavage.

Gasping, I turned my head away. “Dude, gross! I’m not into that.”

More of his saliva splatted onto my skin.

I didn’t know what the fuck the Lifewell was or why my mom wanted me to come to Whispering Ivy so bad, but I was certain it wasn’t to degrade myself with rando asshats.

Like mother, like daughter though , I thought and immediately hated myself for it.

Malcolm slid his impressive length between my breasts, and I couldn’t stop the way my body reacted. The way heat pooled low in my stomach, the way my breaths snagged at the sight of this gladiator above me. Still, shame twisted into something undeniable inside me.

“Push your tits together,” he commanded through clenched teeth.

With a whimper, I shifted so I could cup them, squeezing his girth between them.

I hated that I liked it, but that didn’t change the way I moved with him, arching into it, my breath coming faster as he thrust harder. I wanted it, every brutal second.

If I ever had any self-respect, it was long gone.

But the way his hips moved, how his eyes flashed silver... The man was a fucking god.

He came like a beast, loudly, his hot cum spilling all over my chest and neck. When he came back to his senses, he barely glanced at me as he put his sweatpants back on, his eyes flicking back to the TV like nothing had happened.

When I reached for my shirt and bra, he said, “Don’t.”

Did he really expect me to just watch television with him, half naked, with his pearl necklace falling apart all over my chest?

Trying to catch my breath and ignore the way my skin still tingled, I stood, facing him, my chin lifted defiantly. “I’m going back to my room.”

At that exact moment—because of course—the front door opened. Thank fuck it was Kade, not Connor.

But the way Kade looked from my cum-covered tits to the back of Malcolm’s head, and back again, I almost wished it had been Connor.

In the shower, Kade had said labels were beneath him, but was whatever he and Malcolm had going on exclusive?

“Sir,” Kade said, “do you want me in your room?”

Without turning, Malcolm waved him off. “I’ve already been taken care of.”

“But—”

“We’ve been over this, Jones. You snooze, you lose.”

“But I can get you hard again. Fast—”

“Your desperation is stinking up the place.” Malcolm turned to glare at him, the power of it making even me shiver. “Get the fuck out of here.”

Kade’s shoulders slumped. “Yes, sir.”

He crossed the apartment toward a room I assumed was his and closed the door quietly behind him, even though I got the feeling he wanted to slam it. I would've.

“What’s the deal with you two?” I asked, trying to keep my voice casual.

Malcolm turned to me, his expression dark. “None of your fucking business. Now sit your ass back down and shut up. I’ll be hard again in a minute, and you’re going to give me a handy.”

Ohhh, wait... What was that strange feeling bubbling up inside me? Could it be...self-respect?

“Fuck you, Malcolm.” I headed back to my room, and if it had a door, I definitely would've slammed it.

But I wasn't sure who I was angrier at—Malcolm or myself.

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Chapter Eight

I spent the next few days in classes or wandering aimlessly around campus, killing time and doing everything I could to stay out of that apartment.

Being around Connor, Malcolm, and Kade meant dealing with their taunts and snide remarks and glares, and that heavy, twisting pull inside me that I couldn't get rid of. No matter how terrible they were to me, that desperate, wanting heat lingered, maddening and inexplicable.

It burned hottest with Malcolm, his touch rough and demanding whenever I veered within arm's length. With Kade, his hatred of me rolled off of him in waves, making me feel like he couldn't stand that I breathed the same air as him. Even Connor, with his cold dismissiveness and the way his anger flared, seemed to draw something needy from deep inside me.

It made me sick. Why did I feel that low buzz in my blood, like electricity in my veins, whenever one of them looked at me? What did it say about me that I flat-out craved people who treated me like dirt?

Every night, while I touched myself, biting my hand when I came so they wouldn't hear me, I fantasized about one of them. Then I cried myself to sleep with Mom's words rolling around in my brain.

Find out everything you can about the Lifewell. Do whatever it takes. Don't trust anyone.

What had I found out? Nothing, except Dean Bennett and Connor didn't want me to find out anything. What was I doing about it? Nothing.

But even when none of the guys were around, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was never truly alone. Every time I turned a corner in the halls, it felt like I'd stepped under a spotlight, hot and scrutinizing.

I'd glance around, convinced I'd catch someone watching, but there was never anyone there. It was just me and the prickle at the back of my neck, the tingle slicing down my spine.

I'd tried flirting with random classmates, hoping someone, anyone, would bite—literally and figuratively—because I was starving for teeth scraping against my skin while they stretched my pussy nine ways from Sunday. But no one did.

I even went to Xander's office, under the guise of thanking him for the clothes—they had to be from him, right?—and certain I could at least get him to let me blow him again. But Ms. Tissdale was always adamant that he was unavailable.

But I did discover a ritual on campus that, day after day, became impossible to resist. The threesome in the library hadn't been a one-off.

The twins—the dark-haired, identical but not-quite-twins with their piercing eyes and strange way of moving like they were connected by both their brains and pussies. Every day, at the same time, they'd slip away into the depths of the library's third floor, moving quietly and in sync, never looking back or checking if anyone saw.

They didn't need to. That part of the library looked like a maze of abandoned stacks and towering bookshelves, the perfect place to get lost. And for me, the perfect place to hide and get a free show.

Today, the twins circled the old prof as they stripped naked for him in a slow, practiced rhythm. They moved together, in perfect sync, peeling off shirts and slipping out of skirts, the purple haze swirling around them like a tornado of shimmering lust. His back always faced me, and I wondered just how old he was. In his sixties? Seventies ?

I mean, I'd still hit it.

One twin pushed the other against the shelf, their lips finding each other's with a desperate urgency I could feel, while the professor ran his hands over their bare shoulders and down their backs.

I shouldn't have been here, shouldn't have been watching this private moment, but I couldn't look away. I'd already rooted myself to the spot, my heart racing, my skin sweaty as my breath fell into rhythm with theirs, the quiet gasps and sighs filling the air.

I bit my lip, feeling that familiar, powerful heat stirring low in my belly. The hands-free, spontaneous orgasm always came. Always.

Every day was the same. I told myself I wouldn't come here, that I'd go to one of the study carrels where I could actually do some classwork or reading, but I couldn't resist. I'd find myself racing to the third floor before they even got here and slip into the shadows, hiding behind the shelves, waiting for them to appear.

And every day, I'd watch, caught up in the same twisted spell, my heart racing. Unfortunately, I couldn't find a hiding spot at the right angle to give me a view where I could actually see the professor's face.

Sometimes I'd close my eyes and imagine myself with them, imagine those fingers on my skin, those mouths trailing over my body, me at the center of it all. I'd picture

the twins pressing me up against the cold metal of the shelf, their mouths on my neck, their hands spreading my thighs for the professor to plunder my cunt. All the while, their purple haze would surround me, pulling me into their dark, private world.

It was insane. I knew that. But each time, the pull to go to them felt stronger, as was the orgasm. It was a drug and, well, addiction ran in my genes.

Afterward, I'd slip away, my cheeks flushed, my pulse throbbing as I walked back through the library, hoping no one would see the dazed look in my eyes or smell my sex-soaked panties. I always got away, unseen, unnoticed.

Until today.

Coming down from the high of my climax, I glanced up, with that someone-is-watching-me feeling washing over me again.

But this time, someone was.

The professor.

He'd turned around, facing me.

His gaze roved over me, intense and...familiar?

My heart skidded to a stop, freezing me in place. A red-hot flush burned through me. Every instinct screamed at me to look away, but I couldn't, not from the steady, almost curious way he stared at me, like he'd expected me all along.

In that moment, I saw him clearly for the first time. He wasn't ancient, like I'd let myself believe. He had a sharp jawline, smooth, unwrinkled skin, piercing dark eyes. Much younger than I'd thought. Older than me, yeah, but not old old. Maybe in his

forties.

It was ridiculous to assume he was an elderly man just because he had stark-white hair. If anyone should've known better, it was me.

Self-consciously, I tugged at my new blonde wig and whipped around, stumbling out from behind the shelf, my heartbeat drowning out the muffled sounds of their voices. I practically flew down the staircase, my footfalls echoing as I took the steps two at a time, too fast, too panicked.

Embarrassment still burned my cheeks as I turned the corner, almost sprinting down to the main level, desperate to put as much distance between me and that stare as possible.

That's when I collided with someone hard enough to knock us both off balance, the books they'd been carrying scattering everywhere. I looked up to find a gorgeous girl with gorgeous red ringlets blinking back at me, a mixture of surprise and amusement in her wide, blue eyes.

"Oh my god, I'm so sorry." I crouched down to gather the books I'd sent flying out of her arms.

"No worries," she replied, laughing a little as she reached for a book. "Happens to me at least once a week."

Her tone was easy, her smile soft, as I handed a thick, worn volume back to her.

She took it, and I returned her smile, though mine felt too shaky.

What if the professor and twins were getting dressed and planning to chase after me?

“I’m Tuesday,” I blurted.

The girl gave me a curious look, a grin tugging at her mouth. “Tuesday? Nice. My favorite day of the week. I’m sure you’ve heard that a million times, right? Sorry for being so lame. I’m Lena.”

There was something warm and unguarded in her expression and in her voice that was almost unsettling. I sure wasn’t used to friendliness.

“Hi, Lena. Sorry again for the ambush,” I said.

“Guess you had someplace important to be.” She raised an eyebrow, her smile never wavering.

“Something like that.” I shrugged, hoping I looked casual, though every cell in my body braced for the sound of the door opening and closing at the top of the stairwell and footsteps clambering down towards us.

Do not look over your shoulder. Wrap up the small talk and get the fuck out of here.

Turning, I waved. “Anyway, good to meet you, Lena.”

“Oh, wait.” She tilted her head. “You want to grab a coffee? I mean, some other time since you’re in a hurry to get some—”

“I would love to!” I blurted.

She laughed again, but not unkindly. “Caffeine deprived?”

More like companionship deprived. Conversation deprived.

“Yes,” I said. “Ah, shit. I don’t have any money, though.”

“My treat,” she offered.

“I couldn’t—”

“You can.” She bumped my shoulder gently with hers. “You’ll get it next time.”

I nodded. I still needed to find an on-campus job. I made a mental note to check every bulletin board I passed. Certainly, someone needed a tutor until I could find a steady gig.

We ducked into a small coffee shop beside the dining hall. Whenever I passed by, the scent alone beckoned me, but I’d never been inside. Having no money really sucked.

As we waited for our drinks at a small round table in the corner, Lena started telling me about a project she was working on for one of her classes.

“I’m researching this centuries’ old secret society, the Vitae Sovereigns,” she explained, brushing a red curl behind her ear. “Supposedly, the Vitae Sovereigns control the Seven Forces of Life.”

Noting her use of the word control—present tense—I raised an eyebrow. “The Seven Forces of Life?”

“Abundance, Passion, Appreciation, Appetite, Rejuvenation, Dignity, and Indignation,” she rattled off.

The server delivered our lattes, and we thanked her. My mind worked as I took my first sip of hot, milky goodness.

Dignity...pride. Indignation...wrath. Passion...lust. Appetite...gluttony.

I definitely noticed a pattern here.

Rejuvenation...sloth. Abundance...greed. Which would make appreciation...envy.

“So, basically the Seven Forces of Life are the Seven Deadly Sins with a better publicist?” I asked.

Lena laughed. “Yeah, I guess so. Anyway, there are supposedly seven Vitae Sovereign, each a god of one of the Life Forces.”

“Huh. I don’t believe in God or gods,” I said, despite that I’d prayed to one several days ago. “What class is this for anyway? Some kind of mythology?”

She shook her head. “Local Folklore and Regional Heritage. It’s a history course.”

I almost choked on my next sip. “Local folklore?”

She glanced around at the mostly empty coffee shop and then dropped her voice to a conspiratorial whisper, as if sharing a massive secret. “Supposedly the Vitae Sovereign are here. At Whispering Ivy.”

I snorted, practically spitting the hot liquid from my mouth. “Gods? Real-life gods here at Whispering Ivy?”

Lena fiddled with her mug, studying me with a thoughtful expression. “Yeah, it’s kind of absurd.”

Kind of?

“But Whispering Ivy has this way of making me question things, though. I don’t know what it is about this place, but...” She chuckled, almost self-consciously, her porcelain cheeks coloring. “I’ve been feeling like a total maniac since I first got here back in September. My sex drive is out of fucking control.”

I laughed, strangely relieved. “Same, girl. Same. It’s like they pump hormones into the ventilation system or something.”

“I know, right? Like, I’ll be sitting in class, minding my own business, and suddenly it’s like, why is everyone here so fuckable? It’s distracting as hell.” Her blue eyes gleamed with mischief as she leaned toward me. “I broke a dildo last night. How is that even possible?”

I laughed even harder, and tears leaked from my eyes. “I wish I had a dildo. Broken or not.”

“Like a loser, I didn’t bring a back-up. But...that’s the thing that makes me wonder if there’s any truth to this whole Vitae Sovereign thing. If the god of passion is here, that would make sense that we’re so horny, right?”

“Uh...”

“And it’s not just my sex drive. Everything seems heightened here. Rejuvenation... I sleep better. Appetite... I stay hungry.”

As if agreeing with her, my stomach growled.

She laughed. “You, too, huh?”

Staying away from the apartment meant no delicious dinners, so I’d only been living off a single meal from the dining hall a day and whatever I could swipe from the fruit

bowl when the kitchen was empty. Before I came to Whispering Ivy, that was more or less the same amount of food I had back at home on an average day.

But here... Yeah, I had to agree with Lena. I was constantly starving.

She sat up straighter, a big grin on her pretty face. "Let's have cinnamon rolls. They have super yummy ones here."

God, that sounded good. I swallowed down a moan. "I can't let you—"

"Yes, you can," she insisted, already hopping up. "Be right back!"

She headed to the counter, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

Vitae Sovereign. I knew enough about history and languages to know that Vitae meant life.

The Seven Forces of Life.

Life.

Life well.

What were the odds that Lena's Vitae Sovereign, the Seven Forces of Life, and the Lifewell were all connected?

Lena returned then with enormous cinnamon rolls slathered with cream-cheese frosting.

I groaned at the sight of them.

She laughed. “See? Told you.”

I broke off a chunk of the gooey delight and shoved it into my mouth to keep my burning questions down. Was this a coincidence? A set-up? Maybe Xander or Connor had sent Lena to see if I would disobey them and keep pursuing the Lifewell? Or have Lena steer me in the wrong direction so I would never discover what the Lifewell truly was?

If it was a set-up, I wouldn't fall for it.

“How are you researching these Vitae Sovereign people anyway?” I asked between bites.

I'd learned that not only were there no laptops for rent, there didn't seem to be any computers on campus, period, other than the one Ms. Tissdale was constantly taking out her life's aggressions on and the one in Xander's office. Not only was there no cell service, but there was also no Wi-Fi. No internet. Whispering Ivy was basically a Luddite's wet dream.

Lena nodded at the pile of books she'd been carrying when we bumped into each other, now sitting in the chair next to hers. “Mostly old texts from the library, which is why I was there. There's not really any up-to-date info.”

I glanced at the spines of the books, trying to memorize the titles so I could check them out after she returned them, but they looked so old and worn, I couldn't even see a title.

But wait. If this were a trap, if Xander or Connor had sent Lena to pique my curiosity, to see if I'd ask her about the Lifewell... Would they have sent her with books that actually gave the answers I was seeking? So maybe it wasn't a trap, or her Vitae Sovereigns had nothing to do with the Lifewell.

We lingered there for a while, and Lena got us each a second latte and a second cinnamon roll. We chatted about surface-level stuff, like the weird architecture on campus that didn't require students to go outside and our favorite music.

For the first time since I'd arrived at Whispering Ivy, I actually felt like a normal person, worthy of someone's company and attention. No passing strangulations or gropes from Malcolm, no tension from Kade, and no Connor leaning against a wall with disdain in his eyes and something half chewed sticking out from his full lips. Just me and Lena with her soft laugh and her wide, innocent eyes.

Plus, she actually seemed to listen when I spoke. And I gave her the same attention in return, instead of fantasizing about humping my cinnamon roll or the barista. Or her.

But, as if on cue, a shadow crossed the table. I looked up to see Connor, hands in his pockets, what was left of a pencil in his mouth, and that ever-present unreadable expression on his face.

"Connor," I said, trying to keep the irritation out of my voice. "What a coincidence, running into you here."

His brown eyes shifted to Lena. "Was passing by and saw you through the window."

"My lucky day," I said sarcastically.

A pit formed in my stomach. So much for making a friend on campus. Connor hadn't shown up by accident. This was definitely all a set-up. He'd known exactly where I'd be and who I'd be with because he'd arranged it.

Fucking bastard.

Was it him watching me, following me, making the back of neck always prickly at

every turn?

Either way, that fucking bastard.

“Mind if I join you two?” Without waiting for a response, he pulled up a chair and sat down.

I shot him a glare, which he ignored.

Lena looked between us, eyebrows raised, clearly picking up on the tension.

“Hey,” she said to him. “I’m Lena.”

“I’m uninterested,” he said, his voice flat, without breaking his gaze from me.

I rolled my eyes. “Jesus, Connor. You don’t have to be so rude.”

He remained perfectly still, his gaze unwavering from my face.

An awkward silence fell over the table. I squirmed in my chair. What the fuck was this?

“So, Connor...” Lena started, “how do you two know each other?”

“How do you two know each other?” he countered.

“We live in the same apartment,” I told Lena, then to Connor, I said, “And none of your business. Can you please go?”

He didn’t move.

We sat there in strained silence until it became too much for Lena, I guess, or Connor sent her some secret signal that her duty here was done.

“Well, I have a class,” she said, gathering her things with a smile. “Tuesday, it was so great hanging out. We should do this again sometime.”

“Yes, definitely,” I replied.

“Nice meeting you, Connor.” Lena gave him a polite nod before disappearing out the door, leaving us alone.

Was it their first time meeting, though? Whispering Ivy was a small college.

The second she was out of earshot, Connor picked up the abandoned spoon next to my

mug and examined it as though checking its worth and durability to chew on. “It’s time to go home.”

Home. I didn’t have a fucking home.

“Excuse me?” I glared at him, crossing my arms. “I’ll go back when I feel like it. Not when you say so.”

His eyes narrowed, and without another word, he grabbed my arm and practically dragged me out of the café. I wrenched free once we stood in the hall, spinning to face him, my face flushed hot.

“Don’t you ever put your hands on me like that!” I screamed. “ Ever !”

He laughed softly, the sound dark and mocking. “Or what?”

His face hardened, and he took a step forward, backing me up until I pressed against the cold stone wall. His hands braced on either side of me, trapping me. As I lifted my knee to fuck him up between his legs, he easily sidestepped. Then he plucked the pencil from his mouth, leaned in, and kissed me.

Hard.

The shock of his mouth on mine hit me like a lightning bolt, and for a moment I froze, too stunned to do anything. But then I found myself melting into him, gripping the front of his shirt, pulling him closer as his lips possessed mine with a ferocity that sent a shiver down my spine.

When his tongue touched mine, I swore I died for a moment, and I died happy. I could feel our souls touching.

What the shit?

My heart pounded so hard I could feel it in my throat, my chest, between my thighs, every inch of me alive with that maddening, inexplicable need. My knees were literally weak with it.

Apparently, at Whispering Ivy, it's not as simple as fight or flight or even fight, flight, or freeze. It's fight, flight, freeze, or fuck, because before I even realized what was happening, my hands found Connor's waistband.

I was ready to go, right here out in the open, in front of all seven of Lena's imaginary gods.

But just as quickly as he'd started, Connor pulled back, his breath ragged, his gaze dark and angry.

Oh god. I'd unzipped his jeans.

He yanked the zipper back up, looking at me with disgust.

"I didn't kiss you because I want you," he muttered, his voice barely above a whisper. "I kissed you to shut you up. I've got a headache, and the sound of your voice is driving me insane."

I gazed downward and...shit. Unless he had a micro-peen, he wasn't even hard.

Even though that had been the best kiss of my life.

My cheeks burned, embarrassment flooding through me, but my lips still tingled from the kiss. I wanted to lash out, shove him away, but the rush in my blood made it impossible to focus. I stared at him, every nerve buzzing, unsure whether I wanted to slap him or pull him back in.

But as he stepped back, letting me go, the shred of self-respect and the sliver of common sense I had kicked in.

That's it, I thought. I'm done letting him and the others push me around.

So maybe I didn't know the names of the board members to send the recording of Xander and me to. I could find that out. So what if I had to walk ten miles to get service to send it. I'd walk a hundred if it took that. Regardless of what he said, I did have something to hold over him, and I would use it. He would find me a place to live far away from Connor, Malcolm, and Kade, or else.

I let out a relieved breath, reaching down to pat my phone in my pocket...and froze.

My phone wasn't there. Panic speared through me, and I patted my other pocket.

Nothing.

I couldn't believe it. I must have left it back at the apartment or somewhere on campus. In the library, maybe? Did I have it when we were walking to the café? It was pretty much useless here, except for checking the time, so when was the last time I had it?

Connor watched me, a smirk tugging at his mouth. "Lose something?"

"Not your concern," I muttered.

I swallowed my rising sense of alarm. My mind raced. Without my phone, I had no leverage, no proof of any impropriety, no safety net. Even worse, I couldn't listen to my mom's voicemails or look at pictures of her. The realization stung, making me feel small, exposed. And stupid. How could I have been stupid enough to let it out of my sight?

Connor gave me a satisfied smile, like he knew exactly what I'd been thinking. "Good. Now let's go home."

I walked back to the apartment with him, my feet heavier with each step, heavier with dread that my phone wouldn't be in my room either.

My phone had been my ticket out of Connor's apartment. If Xander wouldn't move me out of there, I didn't have anywhere else to go.

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Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 5:22 pm

Chapter Nine

I tore through every corner of my room.

Ripped all the blankets and sheets off my bed, the pillowcase off the pillow. Lifted the mattress. Opened every drawer, removed the meager contents. Checked the pockets of every single garment in the closet and inside the shoe and wig boxes. Crawled around on the floor, looking under each piece of furniture.

Once the guys went to bed, I checked the rest of the apartment, knowing good and well if I'd left it in any of the common areas, it now belonged to Connor, Malcolm, or Kade, and odds of them giving it back were nil.

They might hold it above my head, out of my reach, making fun of what an old-ass phone it was and saying something super original like, "When I say jump, you say how high, bitch," making me leap in the air like a dog act on America's Got Talent .

But they would never give it back.

Fuck.

The more I looked, the harder it was to ignore the gnawing panic in my chest. How could I have lost my phone?

After a sleepless night, I retraced my steps through campus, desperate to spot it in any of the familiar places I'd spent time lately. The worn stone steps outside the chapel, where I'd watched the wintery rain spill over the garden; the courtyard bench, tucked

beneath the shadow of the statue, where I sometimes took my lunch; even the café where Lena had bought me coffee and cinnamon rolls.

But it was nowhere. Like it had simply vanished.

Was it possible Lena had taken it? I had no idea where to find her or even her last name, and as far as I knew, she had no way to find me either. If she had taken it, it hadn't been by accident, so...

I took a deep breath.

I had three options. I could throw myself on the guys' mercy, offering anything they wanted in return if they had it and gave it back. But any of them knowing I'd lost my phone might lead to Xander finding out.

What if Connor wasn't the only one of them reporting back to him? As long as Xander didn't know I didn't have my phone, I could still use the recording to get what I wanted—to live absolutely anywhere but that apartment. But once he found out the phone was gone, I had no power. None.

Which crossed out my second option, too, which was checking the lost and found. I'd asked around and found out it was located in a drawer in Ms. Tissdale's desk. So I might as well just walk up and tell Xander the truth. Asking her would definitely go right to him.

And the third option... The only place I hadn't checked. The library.

I might have dropped my phone when I crashed into Lena.

I wasn't eager for the professor to see me again, but I had to try. I waited until later in the afternoon, instead of going at the typical time of their rendezvous, hoping I would

find my phone in the stairwell and wouldn't even have to check on the third floor.

No such luck, though.

I took a deep breath and pushed through the third-floor door. The familiar creak of the floorboards made my breath quicken.

That small, isolated corner of the library had somehow become a refuge, as twisted as it was. Each day, watching their almost ritualistic sex unfold in the shadows of the abandoned stacks, I felt both haunted and free. I'd lose myself in their bodies, their movements, the way they moved like pieces of a single, dark puzzle fitting together just right.

And despite my timing, today was no different.

The professor was already there when I reached my usual hiding spot, standing still as a statue, his back to me. The twins circled him, their movements like clockwork as they stripped, their clothes slipping away as if by invisible hands. Shirts lifted over heads, and skirts unzipped and slid to the floor in quiet whispers of fabric. They moved together with a matched rhythm that was almost hypnotic, as though they were two halves of the same whole.

The hazy purple glow around them seemed to pulse with their desire, filling the space around them with a thrumming energy that I could feel all the way to the marrow in my bones.

I stood rooted to the spot, caught up in that same dark spell, my heart thudding, my skin damp with sweat, all the blood in my body rushing to my clit as their quiet sighs filled the air. It felt like I was part of it, part of them .

The familiar heat stirred low in my belly, simmering, rising, until it broke over me in

waves, that same hands-free, spine-tingling release that had become my guilty pleasure. I bit down on my lip hard to keep myself silent, to keep myself hidden, even as the aftershocks pulsed through me, leaving me trembling.

I stayed there, catching my breath, and waited as they dressed. They moved with the same calm, practiced ease as they straightened their skirts and buttoned their shirts, their expressions soft and unreadable. Then they left together, the echo of their footsteps growing fainter and fainter.

The professor waited ten minutes or so, I guess giving them a head start, before he left, too.

After he left, I waited as well, until the quiet settled around me and I was certain I was alone before I finally moved, stepping out from behind the shelf and into the aisle.

Just as I turned to go, an arm snaked around my waist, yanking me backward.

My heart leapt into my throat. A hand clamped over my mouth before I could even think to scream. Fingers pressed down, hard, hard enough I thought maybe they would knock a few of my teeth loose or dislocate my jaw. I could barely breathe, let alone make a sound.

The other arm cinched around my waist lifted me off my feet, pinning me against a hard, muscular chest. I twisted and struggled against the impossibly strong grip that had me locked in place.

“Don’t. Say. A. Word.”

I seethed at the sound. This was planned. Whoever had me was using one of those voice changers. Hands-free, obviously.

Just like Ghostface from the Scream movies. Most likely Kade. But maybe Malcolm or Connor.

It had to be one of them, but that didn't stop the terror that had settled in my stomach from spreading throughout my body.

I tried to turn my head, but he shoved me forward, my chest and cheek pressing against the cold, hard wall.

Bite his palm! my subconscious shouted.

But I couldn't even open my lips, my teeth useless inside my closed, helpless mouth.

The heat of his breath brushed against my neck, close and intimate, his lips hovering near my ear.

"Do as I say," he said. "And maybe I'll let you walk out of here."

His hand trailed down from my mouth, brushing along my collarbone, sending a wave of nausea rolling through me. Maybe if I vomited, it would throw him off enough to loosen his grip, and then I could break free. Or maybe I would choke on my own puke while he sexually assaulted me.

Keeping me sandwiched between his body and the wall, he yanked my arm behind me and forced my hand downward, guiding it down his pants, pressing my palm against his erection. He was so hard that bile rose into my throat.

Using my elbows wasn't an option. My range of motion was severely limited, but I could dig my nails into his penis. I could kick backward, maybe get him in the instep.

I could also get killed.

I wanted to pull away, to scream, but even if he didn't have my voice trapped in my mouth, fear constricted my throat. He worked his hips, rubbing himself up and down on my hand and sighing with satisfaction. It sickened me at how much pleasure he was obviously getting from this.

Tears burned up my throat, so hot that they tasted ashy and bitter. I swallowed those bitches back down, reminding myself of the mantra that had gotten me through so much tough shit:

I could cry later. First, I'd fight.

And also pay attention...

I inhaled through my nose, trying to pick up a familiar scent, but whichever one of them this was had been smart. Connor had that smokey, cedary rain thing going on, while Kade smelled warm and spicy. Malcolm smelled like soap and dark leather. This guy smelled like Dollar Store men's body spray.

"Stroke me," he ordered through his voice-changer. "Now."

I whimpered. Every instinct in me recoiled, but I wrapped my trembling fingers around him, feeling his shaft pulse as he guided my movements. His breathing grew heavier, his body pressing harder against mine, trapping me there as I moved my hand in a jerky rhythm. His low, guttural sounds filled the quiet of the library.

The length of him, the girth, the bulbous head... This wasn't Malcolm. The memory of his cock, the shape and heft and size of it between my tits, had burned into my brain. This one was thicker but not as long.

Kade, then? I'd only seen him naked in the shower briefly, and I'd been more concerned with getting the fuck out of there than sneaking a peek at his junk.

What about his frame? I could only estimate his height, but the arms... All three of the guys were muscular and strong, well-built, but this guy was too broad, too jacked to be Connor.

If only he would say more, even with that creepy-as-fuck manufactured voice, then maybe I could recognize a speech pattern.

What if it wasn't any of them?

But it had to be. Because if it wasn't...

Fuck. My stomach lurched. If Connor or Malcolm or Kade wanted me dead, wanted to truly do harm to me, they'd had plenty of opportunities. I slept in a room with no door.

But if this were a total stranger...

No. No . It was one of them.

Even they wouldn't be ballsy enough to attack me in the apartment, where they would be the only suspects.

"Don't stop," he warned.

He withdrew his hand from mine and used it to pull my hair off my neck, to yank my shirt off my shoulder and expose it. The fabric tore.

I gasped. Tears leaked down my chin.

What if this ended in one way? The wrong way.

No. Please no. I'd wanted so badly to get fucked, but not like this.

Not like this.

I shuddered as he kissed from behind my ear, down my neck, finally settling in the curve of my shoulder. His tongue flicked out, and I whimpered as he began to suck the skin there in earnest.

Time stretched, warped, my mind fracturing under the weight of his control, my body locked in place. He convulsed against me, his release hot and unrelenting, dripping over my fingers. He held me there, his hand still over my mouth, as though daring me to resist, daring me to make a sound.

When he finally let go, his hand stayed on my shoulder, holding me in place as he leaned close, his breath brushing against my cheek, his disguised voice unrecognizable but the threat in it unmistakable.

"Leave Whispering Ivy. And never come back. Or next time I catch you alone, I won't just take a hand job." The genuine, sinister smile in his fake, scary voice splintered dread down my spine. "Next time, I'll take your life."

With one last shove, my forehead cracking against the wall, he released me. I stumbled, desperate not to lose my footing as my vision swam. My breaths came too shallow and quick. Clumsily, I spun around to see his face, but the aisle stood empty, silent, as if he'd vanished into thin air.

I caught a flash of movement to my left and turned, just in time to see a hidden trapdoor in the wall swing shut, sealing him away before I could even process what had just happened.

The library held still, its shadows thick and watchful, the quiet pressing down on me

like a suffocating weight.

My cum-drenched hand shook, my whole body jerking, and my knees buckled. I sank to the floor and leaned against the wall, every inch of me still throbbing with raw terror.

When I finally found the will to stand and staggered my way out of the library, my legs barely held me upright as I descended the stairs, clutching the cold railing for support. Shame clung to my skin like a second layer. Every step echoed in the stairwell, louder than the last.

I could still feel the ghost of his breath against my neck, his hand clamped over my mouth, my fingers wrapped around him.

My thoughts raced as I hurried back to the apartment. It had to be one of them—Connor, Malcolm, or Kade. There was no one else it could be. Who else would do this?

When I reached the apartment, I shoved open the door and found all three of them in the living room. They sat sprawled out, taking up as much space as possible while watching TV like they didn't have a single care in the world.

Kade, still with his mask on, turned to face me. "You look like you just saw a ghost. You okay?"

I slammed the door behind me and got no satisfaction whatsoever from the fact that all three of them flinched.

I crossed my arms, forcing my voice to stay steady throughout my full-body trembles. "Which one of you was it?"

Malcolm exchanged a look with Kade, a smirk playing at the corners of his mouth. “Which one of us did you dream about fucking last night? I would guess me, but—”

“I am not fucking playing with you, Malcolm!” I shouted.

“But you wish you were,” he sing-songed, and I wanted to kick in his teeth.

I clenched my fists, taking a deep breath to keep from losing control. “One of you grabbed me in the library. Pinned me to the wall and...forced me to...” I swallowed, the words lodged in my throat. “One of you threatened me. Assaulted me.”

“Someone assaulted you?” A hint of actual concern laced Kade’s voice, but coming from the guy who’d trapped me naked in the shower with him before we’d even been introduced, it didn’t mean a hell of a lot.

Rage boiled within me. “One of you assaulted me!”

Malcolm rolled his eyes, waving a dismissive hand. “Sure. You’ve got quite the imagination, drama queen.”

“I’m not imagining this!” I snapped. “I don’t know which one of you it was, but I swear—”

“What did they do, pull your pigtailed?” Malcolm taunted in his odd accent.

I would’ve lunged at him, gouged out his eyeballs with my cummy fingers, had Connor’s voice not cut through, low and deadly serious.

“Enough.” He stood, his expression unreadable as he looked from Malcolm to Kade, his jaw clenched. “This isn’t a joke.”

Malcolm's smirk faded, and Kade shifted uncomfortably under Connor's gaze.

Connor took a step forward and jabbed a finger at Malcolm, then Kade. "It better not have been one of you. Because if it was, you're in deep shit."

The tension in the room adhered to my skin like humid summer air. Malcolm and Kade exchanged wary looks.

Connor's eyes flicked back to me, his expression shifting, something almost fierce in his gaze.

"Starting tomorrow," he said, his voice tight, "I'm going to be wherever you go. Classes, the dining hall, everywhere. You're not going anywhere alone."

My chest tightened as suspicion crawled between my shoulder blades. Was this sudden shift an attempt to cover his own tracks?

I studied his face, searching for any sign of deception, but his expression looked as hard and cold as ever. I bit my lip, taking in every detail of his body.

It wasn't him in the library.

"You think I need a babysitter now?" I challenged, crossing my arms, my jaw set. "I can take care of myself."

Connor's gaze didn't waver. "Maybe you can, maybe you can't. Either way, I'm not giving you a choice."

I opened my mouth to argue, but the intensity in his expression stopped me.

Besides, as much as I didn't want to spend a second with Connor, I didn't want to be

alone either.

Malcolm let out an exaggerated sigh, clearly over the entire ordeal, while Kade mumbled something under his breath.

“Do either of you have something you want to add?” Connor demanded.

The danger in his voice made me shiver.

“No,” Malcolm said.

Kade shook his head.

Without waiting for any of them to say anything else, I beelined for the bathroom, but I still heard what Connor said to them next.

“You fuck with her, you fuck with me. You know the rules.”

What. The. Fuck?

I turned on the water in the sink and waited for it to get scalding hot before dispensing half the bottle of soap into my palms and shoving them under the stream. I yelped but began scrubbing anyway. My whole body would not stop quaking.

Footsteps.

Out of the corner of my eye, Connor appeared and leaned in the doorway.

“What exactly happened in the library?” he asked.

“Don’t wanna talk about it,” I said without looking up from the sink.

“Don’t give a fuck.” Then softer, quieter—gentler?—he asked, “Do you need me to take you to the clinic?”

I shook my head. “He didn’t rape me. Just forced me to give him a hand job.”

Connor exhaled. His fist connected with the doorframe in an explosion of sound, and I about jumped out of my skin.

“Fuck. I won’t let...” Another hard exhale. “I’ll keep you safe.”

I spun to face him. “I don’t want to be ableist, but are you fucking bipolar? You’ve kept me miserable. All three of you...”

“I’ll keep you safe,” he said again.

Part of me wondered if I should give my wannabe guardian angel a head’s up that whoever had assaulted me had also threatened to kill me if I stayed, but Mom’s words came back to me.

Don’t trust anyone.

I went back to scrubbing my hands. The incident in the library had changed everything. Even if I found my phone, even if Xander let me, I couldn’t risk moving out of this apartment now. Yeah, I could take care of myself, but why ever the fuck Mom sent me here, she hadn’t sent me here to wind up dead like her. I owed it to her to accept Connor’s protection.

Like it or not, I needed him.

“Fine.” I dried my hands and turned on my heel, my blood still burning hot inside me.

I'd let him be my shield, my shadow following me everywhere.

At this point, I had no proof, just a suspicion about a Scream movie mega-fan. It had to have been Kade in the library, and he wouldn't dare strike again with Connor around.

If he thought he could scare me into leaving Whispering Ivy, he had no idea who he was dealing with.

Chapter Ten

Over the next few days, Connor became a silent presence wherever I went.

It unnerved me the way he was always a few steps behind, always watching. There to protect me, nothing more, both indifferent and relentless while he hovered in the background.

Everywhere I went, he was there—a few paces behind me, his gaze never softening, his solemn expression never giving a damn thing away. He dropped me off at each class and then stood there waiting to pick me up and escort me somewhere else. He even followed me into the dining hall, leaning against the wall in that Connor way, while I got my midday sandwich. I couldn't walk, think, or even breathe without feeling his eyes on me.

Nor could I shake the feeling that he wasn't the only one watching me.

It made no fucking sense. He didn't want me here, didn't want me talking about Lifewell. Why was he defending me instead of just letting the creep resurface and chase me off? Or worse, make good on his threat to kill me?

The days passed, the threat lingering in my mind like a dark cloud.

By the fifth day of Connor shadowing me like some grim-faced bodyguard, I needed answers. He couldn't keep doing this forever. I wasn't sure how much longer either of us could stand this arrangement.

But then what? I found myself running through escape plans, wondering where I could go if I really had to leave. The answer was always the same—nowhere.

I stopped abruptly just outside the library—to actually check out a book for my Econ class—and Connor nearly bumped into me. He took a step back, his usual cool mask slipping for just a second as his eyebrow quirked up in annoyance.

“What?” he asked around his pen, as if I was in his way, as if he wasn’t the one in my space.

I exhaled, searching his face, looking for even the tiniest crack in that cold, unreadable expression. “Why are you even doing this?”

“Doing what?” Something flickered in his eyes. Something defensive.

I gestured vaguely at him. “The whole white-knight thing. Am I supposed to believe it’s out of the goodness of your heart?”

His jaw clenched, his eyes narrowing. “I already told you. I’m making sure no one fucks with you.”

I shook my head, blowing out an exasperated breath. “You’ve been fucking with me since day one! You, Malcolm, and Kade.”

Kade’s name fell off my lips loaded with extra disgust.

Connor said nothing, which only fueled my frustration. I took a step forward, close enough now that I could see the flecks of gold in his brown eyes, the way they reflected the light like shards of glass.

“You know what I mean,” he finally said. “I’m making sure no one else hurts you.”

“I know it was Kade.” I grew more convinced each day. “The attack in the library. You know it, too. You’re just trying to cover it up.”

Connor’s eyes darkened, his body going rigid, but he didn’t move, didn’t even flinch.

You fuck with her, you fuck with me , he’d told Malcolm and Kade.

But that...had to be performative, right?

“It wasn’t Kade,” he said, his voice steel. “And I’m not covering for anyone.” He shoved his hands in his jeans’ pockets and exhaled slowly. “Why do you think it was him?”

“Because I know it wasn’t you. The guy was beefier. And I know it wasn’t Malcolm because...” I faltered, but then I lifted my chin. “I’ve seen Malcolm’s dick up close and personal. It wasn’t him. Plus, whoever it was had a voice-changer just like Ghostface in *Scream* . Ring any bells?”

Connor didn’t react—or tried not to. But his Adam’s apple lifted and fell. Almost imperceptible.

“It could’ve been anyone,” he said.

“Anyone who wants me gone!” I cried. “Who else would that be other than you or...?”

Xander . I knew it wasn’t Xander himself, but he had the means to hire someone...

Or the professor who’d caught me staring in the library? Maybe he thought I was a threat to the little three-person party he had going on?

“What?” Connor demanded, searching my face.

I shook my head. “Nothing. Maybe you’re right. Maybe it wasn’t Kade. Maybe it was just...random.”

I didn’t believe that for a hot second, but...that professor did have motive. So did Xander, if he really wanted me out of here.

“What about what you said to Kade and Malcolm, though?” I asked. “That they know the rules?”

He shook his head, and I balled my hands into fists. I wanted to smack him. Shove him up against the wall of the library the way the guy who’d attacked me had shoved me against the wall upstairs. Make him tell me what fucking rules .

“That’s none of your business,” he said.

Oh my fucking god. Forget smacking him. I’d skip straight to killing him.

“You and your cronies have rules about me, and that’s not my business ?”

“That’s what I said.”

I couldn’t take it anymore. The first step to killing him was smacking him, so I socked him in the shoulder.

As I reeled back, pain shooting through my knuckles, wondering how many fingers I’d broken, he shouted, “FUCK!”

His eyes wide, he reached up to rub where my fist had landed. “That actually hurt. The fuck are you? Some kind of lightweight boxing champ?”

I shook out my hand because ow . I wanted to scream, too, seeing his FUCK and raising him a FUCKITY FUCK FUCK. I bent and flexed my fingers to make sure I still could.

“I told you I could take care of myself,” I told him.

He glared at me, rolling his shoulder. “You’re a goddamn spitfire, that’s for sure.”

Was that... Was that the first thing he’d ever said to me that wasn’t dismissive or insulting?

I blew out a slow breath, concentrating on anything other than the pain in my hand, like the fact that he was talking to me. “Who is Lena, Connor?”

I hadn’t seen her around again. Poof, she was gone, and this college wasn’t that big to lose track of someone. So if she’d been part of a set-up, whether it was Connor or Xander who’d put the whole thing into motion, I wanted to know. Now.

He stared at me, rubbed his chin, and stared at me some more. The look in his brown eyes radiated pure confusion, but not only could I see it in his eyes...I could feel it.

I could feel it. He didn’t know what I was talking about.

“The fuck are you talking about?” he demanded. “The girl in the café?”

“Yes, Lena. Do you know her?”

Connor scowled. “I know her, and I use that phrase loosely, because the only thing I know about her is her name, which she told me when she was in the café with you.”

“That was the first time you met her?”

“That was the only time I met her. Why? You sound suspicious of her. Do you think she might’ve had something to do with your attack?”

I shook my head. “Obviously not. I told you, big beefy dude with a penis.”

Unless she’d orchestrated the attack for some reason? But why?

Okay, now I was just being paranoid that everyone was out to get me.

“Do you know anything about my phone?”

“What about your phone?”

I swallowed hard. Once I said this, it would get to Xander. But...the longer I went without finding it, the more it hit home that the recording wasn’t, by far, the most valuable thing on it. All of my pictures of my mom. All of her voicemails to me. Gone.

“I can’t find it.” My voice broke at the end, and I hated myself for that show of weakness.

“And you think I took it?” Connor’s eyes narrowed.

“I don’t know. I don’t know if someone took it or if I just misplaced it.”

“I could help you look for it,” he said.

Well, excuse me while I fall over dead from the shock of it all.

“Wow,” I said with a humorless laugh. “If I didn’t know better, I might believe you actually gave a damn about my well-being.”

Connor's gaze dropped to the ground. His jaw clenched, a muscle in his cheek twitching. He looked up again, his eyes blazing. "If I didn't give a damn, I wouldn't be here."

The words left his mouth, raw and intense, every syllable freezing me in place. His fierce expression made my pulse quicken, my breath catch. He stood so close now, close enough that I could feel the heat radiating off him. Close enough that I could see the faint shadow of stubble along his jawline. Close enough that I could feel the tension crackling between us, thick and heavy.

Even if I didn't—couldn't—fully trust him, part of me had to admit that it was nice having someone looking after me, watching my back.

I wanted him to kiss me again. I didn't understand it, and I hated myself for it, but the need vibrated over my skin nonetheless.

Ridiculous. Stupid. After everything, I should've been repulsed by the idea. I should've been disgusted even thinking about it. But instead, I found myself holding my breath, wondering if he'd close that final few inches between us, if he'd pull me in the way he had before, with that same passion that left me reeling, the same heat that made me forget, just for a moment, who he really was.

But he didn't move. He just stood there, his eyes flicking down to my mouth, his hands balled into fists at his sides, like he was fighting some inner battle.

I reached up, my fingers grazing his chin, and pressed up onto my tiptoes. "If you give a damn, tell me what the Lifewell is."

Wait...what? What about the kissing?

Connor grabbed my wrist and flung my arm away from his face. He took a step back,

putting distance between us. But he didn't look disgusted.

He looked furious.

"Tell you what..." he hissed.

Despite his tone, my heartbeat sped up in my chest. "What?"

Was he actually going to tell me something?

"You don't ever fucking ask me that again, and I won't tell Dean Bennett you did this time. Stop pushing, Tuesday," he ground out. "You don't even understand the questions you're asking."

"Then help me understand! Why don't you want me to know what the Lifewell is?"

His jaw tightened, and he gave me a long, measured look, like he was deciding just how much he wanted to tell me. Or how little.

"The truth is, things are the way they are for a reason." He tapped me hard on the temple. "You need to learn how to accept that and stop looking for answers that won't do you any good."

"Fine ." I placed my hands on my hips, my stance wide, my eyes so full of fire I could practically smell the smoke. "Maybe I'll just leave Whispering Ivy altogether. Maybe I'll go somewhere else, somewhere far away, where I don't have to be constantly looking over my shoulder."

The moment the words left my mouth, panic clawed its way in. Besides the fact that I had nowhere to go, no money, no family, the thought of leaving Whispering Ivy, of walking away from whatever secrets this place held, whatever my mom sent me to

discover, rattled a chill through my bones.

Plus, I had nothing to justify it, but I couldn't shake the feeling in my gut that I was in just as much danger out in the world as I was here. If not more. That whoever was after me would follow me wherever I went to make sure I never learned what the Lifewell was.

Connor's eyes flashed with something—anger, maybe, or disappointment. “So do it. Leave if you want to leave.”

His voice sounded colder than I'd ever heard it.

My stomach twisted. The thought of going to Xander and demanding he refund my tuition so I could take the money and run, disappear somewhere, maybe even leave the country, popped into a brain like a flipped-on light bulb, but it felt flimsy. Desperate. Childish, even. What would that even accomplish?

On the other hand...what was I accomplishing here? Horning it up in the library and sometimes in the apartment with Malcolm?

It wasn't worth my self-respect.

I nodded slowly, my decision made. “I think that's the smartest thing you've ever said, Connor.”

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Chapter Eleven

The summons to Xander's office didn't come as a surprise.

The previous evening, after we went back to the apartment, Connor beelined to his room and slammed the door behind him. He hadn't come back out for dinner, and the next morning, a quickly scrawled note for me lay on the kitchen counter.

Tuesday -

Dean's office as soon as you wake up.

You can take care of yourself.

C

My palms itched with nerves as I made my way to the administrative wing, preparing myself for whatever lecture, guilt trip, or manipulation Xander had waiting.

I'd barely stepped inside his office when he leaned back in his chair and said, "I hear you're considering dropping out, Tuesday."

I scoffed, folding my arms. "Connor makes an excellent spy. Have you considered he's wasting his talents here at Whispering Ivy and would be better suited for the CIA?"

"Are you?" he asked, completely ignoring what I'd said. "Considering dropping

out?”

“I’m thinking about it, yeah.”

I had no idea what to expect from him.

He nodded slowly, his electric gaze thoughtful. He steeped his fingers, tilted his head. “You’re doing well here, you know. Your professors are all very impressed. Grades, attendance, class engagement—you’re excelling across the board.”

Pride swelled within me, only to be smothered by the overwhelming mix of other emotions churning in my stomach.

I lifted my shoulders in a tiny shrug. “It’s not like it was in the cards for me to get my degree from Whispering Ivy.”

“There are scholarships,” he said. “You showed up too late to apply this semester, but some of them are quite generous, if you’re interested.”

I almost laughed. “Right. Because getting a scholarship would solve all my problems.”

Xander’s brow furrowed, his blue eyes fixed on mine. “Hmmm. Don’t you think you owe it to your mother to stay?”

I blinked hard, the question throwing me off balance. “What?”

“You said she supported your decision to come here. Don’t you think she’ll be ecstatic if you could graduate from Whispering Ivy? You mentioned Yale or Harvard as options, but those are far more expensive than Whispering Ivy, and far more competitive. Odds that you’d get any financial assistance at either of those

institutions...”

I tuned him out. Mom would never be ecstatic about anything again, and I didn’t think her sending me here had a damn thing to do with my education. She’d left me this place, this puzzle, these expectations with no clear direction.

I bit my lip, thinking of the stack of unpaid bills, the final notices stacked high on the kitchen counter in our rental, the fridge that usually didn’t have much more than a mostly empty bottle of generic-brand ketchup in it, all the years when we barely scraped by. I couldn’t even begin to imagine how my mom even came up with the money to send me here in the first place. We didn’t exactly have a secret stash of cash lying around...except she did.

Silence settled between Xander and me, tense and heavy, until finally, he leaned forward, the chair creaking as he folded his hands on his desk.

“Look,” he said, his voice low. “This place isn’t always easy. But I think you should stick it out for the rest of the semester.”

“You didn’t even want me here.”

“Well, now I want you to see the potential in yourself that I already see. I think your mother sees it, too. That’s all.”

My mother. The woman he’d referred to as a goddamn whore on the day I showed up here. The woman he’d compared me to.

He cleared his throat and sat back, rubbing his neatly trimmed beard. “Is there anything I can do to make you reconsider, even temporarily?”

His gaze softened, flooding me with an unsettling warmth.

“Maybe we can set up a couple of meetings each week,” he suggested, his voice dropping even lower, more intimate. “Just you and me. I’d like to make sure you’re being taken care of...personally.”

God, I was so sick of all the hot and cold, the back and forth, the up and down, the emotional whiplash of this fucking place.

The tugging sensation in my mind, the same feeling I’d had last time I’d been in here, came over me again. I swiftly ignored it.

“Did you buy me the clothes and wigs?” I blurted.

Xander frowned. “I did. Were they to your liking?”

“Yes. Thank you.”

“That outfit in particular looks very nice on you. Bet it would look very nice on the floor of my bedroom, too.”

My pulse jumped. Was I hearing things? He’d said it so nonchalant, so offhand, like he was saying he bet pepperoni would go well on a pizza.

He must have sensed my surprise because he smiled, warm and teasing. “It’s just a thought.” He leaned back slightly, his gaze never wavering from mine. “If you’re open to it.”

“Well, actually,” I said with a teasing smile of my own. “If you want me in your bed, Dean Bennett, we could work something out. If I could come live with you, I’d stay at Whispering Ivy.”

That would sure solve a lot of my problems. My moving into the guys’ apartment had

messed up whatever twisted thing Kade had going on with Malcolm. He wanted me out, hence why he'd attacked me in the library. I was sure it was him. Moving in with Xander—

“I’m afraid that’s not possible. But a visit now and again, on the other hand...if we’re discrete...” The warmth in his eyes morphed into an inferno.

My pussy clenched as he stood and moved around the desk until he stood close enough that I could smell his musky sandalwood scent. He studied my face, searching, his expression gentler than I'd ever seen it.

Without moving, without breathing, I melted into him.

“Tuesday...” He reached up, fingers grazing the side of my face, the edge of his thumb brushing over my cheek lightly, almost reverently, as if he were handling something delicate. “I want you here.”

The words held a weight I couldn't quite identify, a promise that felt...personal.

His thumb lingered, his fingers tracing a slow path along my jaw, and then his hand moved down to wrap around my neck with a lighter touch than Malcolm, but wholly possessive. He leaned down, his lips skimming over my skin, sending a shockwave all the way down to my toes.

“Dean Bennett...” I whispered, but I had no idea what I planned to say next.

All my thoughts, all my senses, swirled around him.

He dipped lower, his lips, soft and warm, on the exposed swell of my breasts, sending a wave of heat radiating out from where he touched. I moaned and arched toward him.

“You can stay with me tonight,” he murmured against my chest, his voice low and husky. “Just...trust me.”

Trust. The word broke the spell, a knife to my gut. Trust wasn't something I could afford.

Don't trust anyone. Don't trust anyone. Don't trust anyone.

“Tell me...about...”

That's as far as I got.

His lips found mine, soft and searching. His hands moved down my body, his fingers sliding over the curve of my hips, his touch firm and dominating. His lips grew wilder, more impatient, as his tongue tangled with mine.

I couldn't bring myself to push him away.

He broke the kiss and dropped to his knees, pushing my thighs apart wider and wider until the scent of my arousal wafted up. He grazed his hand underneath my skirt and pressed his fingers against my damp panties, eliciting a gasp from me.

I brought my hands to his broad shoulders to help anchor myself to this reality. I certainly didn't want to be anywhere else.

He slipped one finger beneath the elastic, gifting me with the slightest touch between my folds before withdrawing. He lifted his glistening finger to his mouth and sucked it into his mouth.

“You taste so good,” he groaned.

The molten heat in his eyes sped my heartbeat even faster.

He skimmed his hands up my skirt and hooked his fingers in my panties. “Let’s get you out of these, shall we?”

I nodded, and he slid my panties down slowly, inch by inch. Then he pressed open-mouthed kisses to my lower stomach as he unbuttoned my skirt. I threw back my head and moaned as the fabric slipped down to my feet. He palmed my ass and nudged me backward some, towards the edge of the chair, the same one I’d gotten myself off in.

I sank into it, my whole body pulsing with need. Even though I couldn’t see anything, it felt like our own purple haze surrounded us, like the twins and the professor, cranking our lust to maddening levels.

Xander knelt in front of me and slid his hands under my ass as he dipped his head and teased kisses up my thigh. “My god, you are so beautiful.”

His tongue flicked out, tasting my opening before flattening against me with a long, languid lick up to my clit.

I cried out and clung to the armrests, bucking my hips against his mouth. How many times had I fantasized about this? Woke up in a sweat with my fingers buried between my legs and his name on my lips?

He pulled away, and I cried out again, this time out of sheer misery.

Raising his head, his eyes smoldering, he rasped out, “Put your legs over my shoulders.”

Yeessssssssssss, Daddy.

As soon as I repositioned myself, my knees hooked over his shoulders, my calves resting against his back, he grabbed me firmly by the hips, his fingers digging in, and jerked me closer.

“Much better,” he said, his voice gravelly. Then he lowered his head again, his gaze holding mine as his lips connected with my clit in a featherlight kiss. “You’re so fucking wet, Miss Dare.”

I whimpered. No fantasy could’ve prepared me for his breath against my skin, the sensation of his beard scratching my inner thighs, his tongue fucking me.

My breath caught, and I sank back, my body arching under his touch. His fingers traced slow circles along my quivering thighs, teasing, building that ache inside me while his mouth worked me, practiced and precise, slow and torturous.

Nothing in my life had ever, ever felt so divine.

“Oh, goddamn, Dean Bennett,” I breathed, my chest heaving with each word.

He glanced up with a smirk. “In situations like this, you can call me Xander.”

“I will definitely be calling you Dean Bennett.” I grabbed a handful of his hair and pushed his head back down.

Fuuuuuck, he felt so good.

You’re being used , a little voice whispered inside my head.

But fuck if I cared. If being used eventually led to this man’s cock buried in my pussy, use me, and use me again. After that, fucking use me again.

One of his fingers slipped inside me, and the feral sound that erupted from my throat echoed between the walls. The thought of Ms. Tissdale hearing me almost made me giggle. But then he was sucking and licking and fingerfucking me, and my entire body began to twitch. Waves of pleasure rolled through me, each one more intense than the last, bringing me higher.

But then, just as I was about to reach that dizzying peak, a strange, unexplainable feeling crept over me, a shadow of doubt laced with something deeper, something heavy, constricting, tightening with each second. It felt almost...wrong. Not in a moral way, but...

As I tried to pull back, tried to think clearly, the thought slipped away, leaving nothing but the heat and the hunger consuming me.

“Come for me, Geulia,” he said.

That was all it took for me to unravel. I orgasmed so hard that the world dropped out from beneath my feet.

“Geulia?” a voice called from far away.

My lips felt strange. Was I...smiling?

I opened my eyes, blinking against the sun streaming through the windows. I glanced around. This wasn't my room. It had multiple windows and a closed door, with posh, expensive-looking furniture and artwork hanging on the walls.

Panic grabbed my heart, its talons sinking in. Where the fuck was I?

“Geulia, are you all right?”

The bed I lay in shifted, and Xander came into view. He smiled as he sat on the edge of the mattress, his button-up white shirt undone at the collar and his sleeves rolled up his thick forearms. He brushed the stray hairs of my wig off my forehead.

Oh. I was dreaming. Right?

“Where am I?” I whispered.

He ran a hand over his bearded chin. “You’re in my bed.”

My heart pounded in my chest as images of Xander kneeling in front of me, of his mouth on me, of his tongue inside me, flooded my brain.

Wait...was I not dreaming?

Holy shit, if we fucked and I didn’t remember, I would fling myself off the top of the library.

“Did we fuck?” I blurted.

He chuckled. “It didn’t go quite that far.”

I pulled myself into a sitting position. I wore a white T-shirt, too big for me, and nothing else. “I don’t remember getting changed. I don’t remember...coming here. Why did I come here?”

He licked his bottom lip, a conflicted expression in his shockingly blue eyes. “You fainted in my office. I gave you oral sex, and after you orgasmed...”

I blinked. Rapidly. “Are you telling me you made me come so hard I fucking blacked out?”

He chuckled. “I was deeply worried about you, so I carried you in here. You woke, briefly, but... I felt it best that you stay with me last night so I could keep an eye on you.”

Something didn’t feel right, but me being me, my dominant thought was: Well, I’m wide awake now, so how about getting some hands on me, too, along with your eyes?

“How...” I looked around the decadent room once again. “How did you get me here without anyone seeing us?”

He pointed to the door. “Leads straight to my office.”

Of fucking course it did. After all, this was Whispering Ivy, where trapdoors existed in the library and where bathroom “holes” in some apartments led to bustling hallways filled with students.

“Anyway, I didn’t think you would mind my undressing you and putting you in something a bit more comfortable before I put you to bed.”

His thoughtfulness pinched my heart. “Well, you’ve already seen everything, so no, I don’t mind.”

With a smile, he jerked his thumb towards a burgundy velvet couch on the side of the room. “I slept there, just so you’re aware.”

“Oh.” My shoulders slumped. “No post cunnilingus cuddles?”

He stood. Too abruptly. Shoved his hands into his pants pockets.

“I was teasing,” I said in a rush. “I know you’re not going to, like, be my boyfriend or anything. You’re the dean of the college.”

Why did that make me sound so...immature? It was the truth.

He nodded once, his Adam’s apple bobbing.

I bit my lip, trying to remember why I’d come to his office in the first place. It was like a fog divided my memories, between getting my pussy eaten by the hot dean and...whatever came immediately before that. I remembered standing outside the library talking to Connor...about... What was it? I couldn’t recall. I couldn’t remember anything until Xander’s mouth sucked my soul out through my clit.

My pussy clenched at the thought.

“So...why was I in your office again?” I asked.

“You came by to check the lost and found for your phone and just popped in to say hi.” A wicked smile played on his lips. “But then things...escalated.”

I would say so, but when had I ever “popped in to say hi?” That wasn’t my style. No, I must’ve had a reason for coming here, but what the fuck was it?

Perhaps more importantly, he now knew about my missing phone.

“Was my phone there? At the lost and found?” I asked.

He shook his head. “No, but if someone turns it in, we’ll certainly let you know.”

“So...are you going to kick me out now? Since I don’t have any dirt on you?”

The talons of my panic grew sharper, piercing every chamber of my heart.

I couldn't leave Whispering Ivy. I couldn't .

He studied me, his eyes quizzical. Then the corner of his mouth quirked up. "Though you used...let's say unconventional methods to be admitted into the college, had you gone through the proper channels to apply, the results would've been the same. You would've gotten in. Your recommendation letters were glowing, and your transcripts stellar, if a little light on extracurriculars."

"Well, my favorite extracurriculars aren't ones I could list on my application."

His lips twitched. I wondered if he could still taste me on them.

"At any rate, let's put that unsavory initial reunion behind us. We both behaved rather badly, didn't we?"

Mmm, but I wanted to continue to behave badly with Xander. My pussy was wide awake now, on its third or fourth cup of coffee, so the thought of behaving badly with him, especially without the blackmail and cruel barbs, got me all hot and bothered yet again.

"Geulia?" he prompted with a raised eyebrow.

"Oh. Yes." I nodded briskly.

"Good girl." He stepped toward me, running his hand over the back of my head, making me wish I wasn't wearing my wig so I could feel his fingertips in my hair.

I beamed at him. I so wanted to be his good girl who did very bad things with him.

He turned and crossed to his dresser mirror while he put on his tie, unrolled his sleeves, and adjusted the cuff links on his shirt.

His eyes met mine in the mirror. “You’re all right?”

I nodded. “Just peachy. So...any chance we can meet in your office again sometime?”

“I think the odds are very much in your favor.” His delicious smile slicked my inner thighs. “But for now, we need to get you dressed and on your way before Ms. Tissdale arrives for the day, and I need to get to work.”

Groaning, I climbed out of his bed and pulled the shirt over my head. Now nude, I walked past him to where I’d spotted my clothes neatly folded on a chair.

“Dear gods,” he murmured.

I turned around to face him, to see the volcanic heat in his eyes while he clutched the edge of his dresser. I held his gaze as I dressed as seductively as I could, even popping my underwear’s elastic against my ass and squeezing my tits together while I put on my bra.

He heaved a tortured breath and palmed his cock through his dress pants. “Geulia...”

“Which finger did you have inside me?” I asked, closing the distance between us.

He held up his left hand, folding the fingers down one by one, until the middle and index remained lifted. I took his hand in mine, kissing those fingertips, licking them. Then I took them in my mouth, sucking, swirling my tongue around them, just as I’d done to his cock.

Reaching down, I caressed the giant bulge in his pants. He ground himself into my hand with a throaty groan.

But then I released his fingers from my mouth and withdrew my hand from his hard cock.

“Don’t want to be late to class,” I told him with a sweet smile.

Because as much as I wanted to drag him to the bed and ride him like the world’s sexiest unicorn...I’m not stupid.

I didn’t really know what had changed his mind, but I believed Xander now wanted me to stay here.

So for me to get my way at this college, I needed to leave him wanting to impale me with that horn of his even more than I wanted him to.

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Chapter Twelve

I really was dreaming. Or rather, nightmare-ing.

I hid in the library, watching the professor and the twins, when a voice said, “Wake up, sweetheart.”

My mom’s voice.

I spun, and there she stood. But she looked so pale, and her eye sockets were black holes.

I reached out for her. “Mom?”

But I blinked, and she was gone.

“Wake up, sweetheart.”

The voice, her voice, came from behind me.

I spun once more, but someone grabbed me from behind and shoved me up against the library wall, their hot breath against my neck.

“I warned you what would happen if you didn’t leave Whispering Ivy.” The voice changed from Mom’s to a weird mix of hers and Ghostface’s. “Time to die, whore, but don’t worry. Mommy’s here to drag you straight to hell.”

I woke with a start, gasping as I sat up. Cold sweat coated my skin, and my heart rioted like a rabid animal in my chest. Shadows blurred in the dark, shapes that felt like monsters lurking just out of sight. I squeezed my eyes shut, fighting to steady my breaths.

“You woke me up.”

My eyes flew open at the accented voice. Malcolm stood at the foot of my bed, watching me with his signature smirk, half amused, half sinister. His large, very naked frame loomed over me, arms crossed, the dim light from the hallway painting his tan skin with an eerie glow.

“What are you doing here?” The words came out small, raw. Ragged.

He sighed. “Hello? I already told you. You woke me up. Thanks for that, by the way.”

My cheeks heated. “How—”

“You were shrieking like a damned banshee getting gang-banged.” He cocked his head. “Dreaming of me giving you a pounding, eh?”

“No, I really wasn’t. And I’m awake now, so you can go back to bed. I won’t disturb you again.”

Because no way in hell was I ever going back to sleep after that nightmare.

Malcolm made no move to leave.

“Get out,” I snapped, lying back and pulling the blankets over my head.

But a moment later, he ripped them off, leaving me feeling exposed under his probing

gaze.

He snorted. “Not so fast, sweetheart. If you want privacy, I suggest a door with a lock.”

Yeah, we both knew I didn’t remove my own damn door.

I kicked out at him to make him leave, my foot connecting with his knee. I must’ve caught him off guard because the move actually made him stumble backwards. He instantly regained his footing.

Judging from his growl, I’d done nothing but piss him off.

He lunged forward and wrapped his fingers around my wrist. “Come on. You’re awake. I’m awake—because of you—and you’re going to keep me company.”

I tried to tug my arm back, but his fingers only tightened with bruising strength.

“No. Get the fuck out.” I pulled back again, but he didn’t release me.

In fact, he was already hauling me to my feet, pushing me ahead of him into the hall. “I don’t really care that much what you want.”

With each step, my stomach twisted, a mess of mixed emotions.

Did I want to be with Malcolm? No. Did I want to be alone? Also no. Not after that nightmare.

Had the rendezvous with Xander left me hornier than ever, even needier for a proper fuck? Yes. Did I want that fuck to be with Xander? Obviously, but it wasn’t like we’d ever be a couple or anything.

I needed to hold out as long as I could for him. I needed to wait until he begged me for it. Until I knew we'd be doing it again and again and again.

But I had no idea what sort of relationship Malcolm and Kade actually had, what sort of sexual game they were playing. Still, it was obvious Kade wanted Malcolm all to himself...and I had no doubts that Malcolm could have serious influence over Kade as a result.

So maybe if I could endear myself to Malcolm, he could convince Kade, to, you know, not kill me?

Because it had to have been Kade who attacked me in the library. It had to have been.

I stopped fighting and dragging my feet into Malcolm's room.

He closed and locked his door, all the while sweeping his heated, pale-gray eyes over my body. "On top of the covers."

"Don't want to risk me getting my bedbugs on your sheets?" I narrowed my eyes, giving him a look of pure disdain.

Malcolm chuckled, the sound rippling through the room like dark silk.

"Get naked," he ordered. "We're gonna fuck."

I opened my mouth to retort, but he closed the space between us in an instant. His lips crashed down onto mine. I gasped, the sound swallowed by his mouth as he pressed me down onto the mattress. His hands were everywhere at once, gripping my hips, sliding up my back, holding me in place like he owned me. His hard cock rubbed against my stomach.

"I'm gonna fuck you like the slut you are, Tuesday," he growled against my lips.

“Play with you like you’re the little toy you are. My own personal cock sleeve.”

My pulse whooshed in my ears. Blood thrummed to my clit, my pussy already slippery wet for his massive cock.

“I thought you didn’t put your D anywhere. Isn’t that what you said?”

He grinned. “Eh, a cunt’s a cunt. But you can fight if you want to. It’ll make it even hotter.”

“Damn, you know how to make a girl feel special,” I panted out, already pulling my nightshirt over my head and wiggling out of my panties.

“Roll over,” he said. “On your stomach.”

“Why?”

“Prone bone, bitch,” he said. “No offense, but while I was fucking your tits, looking at your face was kind of a bummer.”

Lucky for him, I wasn’t opposed to a hatefuck.

“Offense taken, asshole.”

He groaned as he tweaked my nipple hard enough to make me gasp. “You have a great bod, so it’s not a total loss. Roll over.”

I flipped onto my belly since I didn’t really want to gaze deeply into his eyes while we bumped uglies, either. He wanted me, and he would give me what I wanted. For now, that would be enough.

I just hoped the fuck would be a good one so we could make it a regular thing, and he

would get Kade to back the fuck off.

His fingers trailed down my back, and he laughed as I tensed under his touch.

“Bet you’re wet as fuck, so don’t pretend like you don’t want me,” he said.

He pressed his hand into the back of my head, so I twisted my neck, freeing my mouth and nose so I could breathe. I gasped as he slapped my ass hard.

“Open those legs, baby. We both know you’re an expert at it.” He shoved my thighs apart before I had the chance, spreading them wide enough that I winced.

He groaned as he took his position behind me, his cock hot against my inner thigh.

Without warning, he took me with one swift thrust, both of us grunting.

“Oh, yeah, take it all. Take every inch of me, whore.”

His weight landed on my back, essentially paralyzing me as he thrust harder and deeper. I could only clutch the covers and moan as he pounded into me over and over, the stretch, the fullness, so fucking delicious. I didn’t mind that it felt like he was more interested in punishing me than pleasuring himself.

It felt so good to finally not be empty.

I squeezed my eyes closed, pretending it was Xander inside me, fucking my brains out.

Geulia, baby , he’d say. You have no idea how long I’ve wanted this. Wanted you. Roll over so I can see your beautiful face when you come for me.

With great effort, I worked my arm underneath me, squeezing it between my body

and the mattress, until my fingers found my clit. Since Malcolm was completely uninterested in my needs, only seeming to care about pushing my uterus into my skull, I frantically rubbed myself while the whole bed creaked and bounced as he increased his pace, his force, the volume of his groans.

Oh, fuck yes. God, his huge cock felt good inside me.

The bed dipped, and his breath blew hot against my skin as he pressed his lips against my neck.

“How does it feel?” he growled.

I moaned and shivered in response.

He grunted. “You can scream, moan, beg, and shiver all you want, little toy, but you’re not getting out of this bed until you answer the fucking question. How does my cock feel inside your tight cunt?”

He angled my hips up off the bed slightly, filling me even more.

My pussy spasmed as I climbed higher toward that peak. “So...amazing...”

“Mmm.” He opened his mouth and sank his teeth into the flesh just underneath my ear.

Okaaaaaaaaay, so Malcolm was into biting. Everybody’s got their kinks, and I wasn’t opposed to—

Twin ice picks stabbed into my neck.

“FUCK!” I screamed.

I tried to jerk away, but I was impaled by his cock, pinned down by his body, and his hand clamped down on my hip, further immobilizing me. I thrashed, helpless, useless.

Then I threw my head, the only part of me I could move, back. My skull connected with his with a sickening crack. In a burst of pain-blind, panic-fueled strength, I reared up, bucking him out of me, off of me.

Something crashed behind me. I scrambled up, scooting back against the headboard. I touched my neck where it stung, and when I drew my fingers back—blood. Not a lot, but still.

That fucker had broken my skin.

Malcolm lay in a crumpled heap on the floor all the way across the room, as if some invisible force had hurled him off me.

Had I...?

Surely not.

He straightened up, sitting with his back against the wall.

For a split second, we just stared at each other, both of us stunned into silence. Then something shifted in his gaze, a dark gleam in his gray eyes as he picked himself up, his stare locked on me. A slow, twisted smile spread across his face as he moved toward me, deliberate and unhurried.

My heart beat an aggressive heavy metal song in my rib cage. My breath came out in shallow heaves.

The lamps cast shadows that stretched and twisted across his face, exaggerating every

dark line, distorting every sharp angle, turning his eyes a glowing silver instead of gray. He looked monstrous. I wanted to look away, wanted to scream, but all I could do was stare, mesmerized and horrified.

“You fucking bitch,” he snarled.

Then he launched himself at me with inhuman speed. He trapped me against the headboard, his hands on the wall behind my head, his muscled arms a cage.

He stretched his mouth open, his lips peeled back to reveal teeth that were far too sharp, too pointed, too white.

Fangs.

“Hold still,” he whispered. “This won’t hurt...much.”

A vampire. Malcolm was a fucking vampire.

Push him off again , my brain screamed. Right now!

But he grabbed my head, pushing it to the side, fully exposing my neck.

I struggled and fought and screamed as his fangs pierced my flesh. I waited for them to sink in farther. Waited for the pain.

Waited to die.

“FUCK!” Malcolm drew back, his fangs still on display, staring at me with terror in his wide eyes. “What the fuck are you?”

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