

The RA

The Gamer's Tale

“And for the Promising Up & Coming Noob Award, it's... Aaron Slater!”

Destiny applauded along with the rest of the club, along with a few who indulged in some good-natured boos, boys whose honor prohibited them bestowing honorifics on a freshman. Sophomore, she supposed, in a couple weeks. Or did he not become a sophomore until the fall? Would she be a college freshman after graduation, or when classes started at Lakeview in August? Crazy to think about.

Aaron shook the gold-painted plastic trophy over his head. “Gee, so many people I owe this to,” he said into the microphone even as Barney tried to keep him from it. “I'd like to thank god, for giving me these magic fingers—”

“And there are children present, so we'll stop you right there.” Barney nudged the twerp offstage. Or, more accurately, out from the front of Ms. Stadler's classroom. The teacher herself was barely listening. She tried to be, Destiny knew, but the stack of papers to grade on the corner of her desk and the toddler waiting for her at home meant she could only spare so much attention for the farewell get-together of the Hayes High Gaming Club.

“Next up, we have a little token of our appreciation for somebody everybody wants at their back. When the chips are down, when the stakes are high, you want...” Destiny straightened up. She'd made top 50 on the North American PUBG server. Finally, all those hours of grinding and training were going to— “Michael Soo!”

She slumped back down, hoping nobody had noticed. Michael Soo? He was a very solid shooter, but he was also a competitive asswipe. He'd shot her in the back last week because she hadn't immediately ducked after he ordered the squad to duck. The enemy team cresting the hill in their jeep, which she'd been establishing a lock-on with her rocket launcher, was more than grateful for the warning from the sound of the gunshot, and promptly hunted down the rest of the team.

He'd blamed Destiny for attracting them.

Michael marched up, snatched his trophy, and promptly resumed playing whatever that was on his phone. No, researching a game, not playing one. Michael wasn't some Candy Crush casual, she'd give him that.

“Now what's better than an MVP?” continued Barney. He was one of the few members of HHGC who was in any other extracurriculars, in his case, theater. Not that he was an actor; Barney was on set crew. But he knew actors, if only high school ones, which in fairness was more than Destiny could say of herself.

“Your mom!” yelled Aaron.

Barney ignored him. “Let’s make some noise for your favorite, my favorite, the second most useful finger, Destiny Holbrook!” Destiny rose, smiling. She didn’t win a lot of awards, and however much her stepdad was always complaining about participation trophies, she’d never been given one of those, either. Sure, it was only some stupid plastic thing, and sure, all the seniors got one, but the team had customized them, so everybody got some unique recognition. As stressful as it was sometimes being the only girl in HHGC, at least for once they’d have to—

She looked at the inscription on the base of the trophy. “Team Waifu...?” she said, looking up at Barney through the lenses of her glasses.

“Hell yeah!” Barney took her wrist and raised it and the trophy over the petite girl’s head. “Team Waifu, everybody!” Her voice was so small, he must have figured the others hadn’t heard her. Which would have been nice to have it left that way.

“Wai-fu! Wai-fu! Wai-fu!” he began chanting. The others soon fell in line. Ms. Stadler looked up from her grading, frowning, but said nothing as Destiny hurried back to her seat, cheeks flushing, smile forced and hanging by a thread.

At least, Ms. Stadler said nothing until the ceremony broke up, the members of the HHGC all promising to log on at 8 for the night’s raid. The young teacher beckoned her with a finger, waiting until the door swung shut behind Barney and his now empty trophy box before she spoke.

“Are you OK, Destiny?”

Destiny snorted. “Um, yeah...? Why wouldn’t I be?” She couldn’t wait to get home and cry.

“Team Waifu?” suggested Ms. Sadler.

“They were just teasing,” Destiny said, rolling her eyes. She’d seen popular girls roll their eyes at teachers before. “I mean, I guess if they only ever talk to one girl, who else are they supposed to hit on?”

Her sophomore chemistry teacher nodded, disregarding Destiny’s rare attempt at sass. “They *were* just teasing. During the awards ceremony. Instead of recognizing your skill, they recognizing your uterus. Not telling you how to feel, but if it were me, I might be kind of upset.”

“Boys will be boys,” she said. Another thing her stepdad said all the time, usually when one of her stepbrothers did something monumentally stupid or gross.

“They will, but girls get to be girls, too.”

Destiny shook her head. “I’m a girl. Just because I’m a nerd and I don’t spend an hour every morning in front of the mirror doesn’t mean I’m not a girl.”

Ms. Sadler saw she’d been unclear, and put her hands softly on Destiny’s shoulders. She flinched, if only a little. Teachers weren’t supposed to touch students, were they? Besides, she was already upset over that stupid trophy. Somebody being nice to her would only make her cry harder, and sooner.

In fact...

The teacher squeezed her shoulder's, and off went the valve on the young woman's waterworks. "Hey! Hey, Destiny, that's not what I meant at all. Of course you're a girl. The fact that you're a kick-ass gamer nerd only makes you girlier in my book." Destiny fell into the woman's arms, melting into the instant hug. "I'm sorry that happened. I should have vetted the trophies, so that's on me."

"Snr frrg furrhr," Destiny sobbed into the woman's blouse, her glasses unusable from the surge of tears.

"I know, honey. I know. But hey. In a couple months, you're going to go to college. Lakeview, right?"

Destiny nodded. "Urrm hrrmrhr rrn krnnrrr snurrhs," she mumbled.

"Computer science? That's great. You're going to learn so much, so fast, you'll have to delete memories of dumb high school boys to make room for it. You're going to Lakeview, right? They have a great program."

"Thurrs whrr hrrhrrrd."

Her teacher held her for a while, letting her get the worst of it out. Destiny felt even more pathetic dumping all this on Ms. Sadler, who she hadn't even had for a class in years. She'd loved her class. Ms. Sadler had a knack for making her curious about the how of things, stuff scientists had known for years but were fresh and interesting to a novice like her. She liked to end class – labs, anyway – with a question, something to make them think about the social issues around the science, the implications. Along with other notes on the chalkboard behind her was written in red dry erase marker the question, *What is the role of the artist when their PC surpasses their art?*

That was the main reason her stepdad gave for why he thought she was stupid to want to study computer science, when computers were teaching themselves to code. It was better than her mother, who nominally supported her but mostly wanted her to meet a nice man and start working on making her some grandkids.

Ms. Sadler being Ms. Sadler, she offered a roll of coarse paper towels in lieu of tissues for Destiny to tidy up her face. Perk of not wearing makeup: less messy cleanup after an emotional outburst like that. She apologized, to which her teacher insisted there was no need, which for some reason made her apologize again, for which she apologized.

Ms. Sadler shook her head. "Can I tell you something, Destiny? A little perspective I wish somebody had given me before I went to college."

Destiny sniffled, trying not to fixate on that stupid trophy. "Sure. I have no idea what to expect, so any advice is good advice."

"Except it's not." The woman shook her head sternly. "People are going to tell you – have probably already told you – that 'girly' is a four-letter-word. They'll–"

"It's five letters..." Destiny said warily.

Her teacher smiled. “Exactly. I mean four-letter-word, like a lot of bad words. Fuck, for instance.”

“Ms. Sadler...!”

She laughed. “Oh, in a couple weeks we’ll both just be adults out in the world. Relax. But my point is, they’re going to try to make you feel like if you want to succeed, especially in the STEM field, you need to be like men. Not even like men, but like insecure shits – another four-letter-word, see? But don’t let them. It’s OK to have feelings. Important, even. It’s OK to cry. Or laugh. Or, when someone tells you to smile, to tell them ‘no thanks, I don’t feel like it.’ Use that finger you’re so fond of, if you like.”

Destiny, or as she was better known online, Mittlefinger, picked up the trophy. She wasn’t sure what to make of this pep talk, but it was working, she was pretty sure. Her eyes narrowed into a scowl as her teacher continued. “Going to college is going to be the best thing for you. Find people who make you feel good about yourself. Who support your choices because they’re *your* choices. Don’t settle for people just because they’re a decent shot and don’t breathe too loud on the voice chat. Find the ones who appreciate you for who you are. Competitive, brilliant, feisty, insightful, and, yes, total waifu material – but only because of all those other things.”

Destiny walked across the room and threw the trophy in the trash. “You’re a really good teacher, Ms. Sadler.”

The teacher walked with her to the door. “You’re a really good gamer, Destiny.”

Destiny made a face. “At least I wouldn’t shoot my own teammates in the back.”

Ms. Sadler flashed an exasperated look. “Oh my god, I know, right! I can’t tell you how good it felt watching Michael get crushed under those tires. MVP my ass.”

“What’s a ‘waifu?’”

Destiny frowned. “It’s Japanese. Kind of. Just means, like, girl I want to marry.”

Her mother shook her head. “So why is that bad? It sounds like a compliment.”

“It’d just be nice to be recognized for something other than being a girl, that’s all.”

“There’s nothing wrong with being a girl, sweetheart. Especially a pretty girl like you – not that you’d know it in that.” Her mother surveyed Destiny’s hoodie with disdain, but settled for stroking her hair and kissing her forehead. “Just try to see the good in people.”

“I know, Mom. Look, it’s almost 8. I gotta...”

Her mother rose with a sniff of disapproval. “You gotta shoot aliens, or whatever it is this week.”

“Communists.”

“Well, at least there’s some good coming of it. Have fun.”

Destiny stared at her darkened monitor fretfully for some time after her mother left, even after her headset started issuing the faint sounds of the HHGC voice chat when the boys started logging in.

“Sup bitches?”

“How’s it going, gang?”

“Pretty good, just got home from your mom’s house.”

“You mean my house...? Because I don’t remember seeing you come or go.”

“Your mom sure saw me come.”

“Probably had too much in her eyes to see you go!”

“Fuck you, pussy!”

“Yes, Michael, that is what you do with a pussy.”

She could just sit it out. See how these tryhards fared without Mittlefinger. She nodded to herself. Ms. Sadler had been right. These boys only stressed her out and made her feel bad about herself. Yes, they were semi-competent, most of them, usually, and yes, it was better than dealing with random PUGs. At least these doofuses wouldn’t hear her voice and lose their fucking minds over it.

“Where the fuck is Destiny?”

“Says she’s signed in.”

“Well tell that Motherfinger to hurry the motherfinger up already.”

“Bet you wanna smell that finger.”

Destiny cringed at the sound of one of them sniffing so loudly their mic picked it up and broadcast it across her bedroom. Yeah, no way she was going to put up with this. Waifu? Well prepare for divorce court.

“Have you guys read the links I sent you yet? The Red Scare DLC is supposed to be way undertuned. Confirmed legendary +18% RoF sniper, day one, brahs.”

“Maybe Destiny’s busy doing your stupid homework.”

“Maybe she’s making us all sammiches.”

“Dude, don’t be a dick.”

“Dude, don’t be such a pussy. She’s never gonna fuck you, man.”

No. No more. She was going to tell these little four-letter-words what four-letter-words they all were, and invite them to go four-letter-word themselves in their three-letter-words. Or... no. Better yet, don’t give them the satisfaction. With a broad grin, she jerked her headset out of the USB port. Her speakers were off – they were always off, ever since her stepbrother had nearly caught her masturbating to a Markiplier stream where his AC had busted and he was all sweaty and kept complaining about it in that magical, rumbling voice of his, and...

There. Unplugged. Done. No more HHGC.

Destiny’s smile slowly faded over the next minute as she tried to think what else she could do. She didn’t really have any other friends. She could hang out with Mom and

Stan, but... Ugh, she hated retrosports. Who had patience for games where only mutants could be good at it, and it took three hours of beer commercials before it was over? It was the twenty-first century, and they hadn't realized the utility of being able to gg when it was obvious they were gonna lose?

Maybe she could...

Hmm. Or...

Was there really a high drop rate 18% RoF boost sniper in Red Scare?

"Hey guys, sorry I'm late."

"Waifu!"

"You shouldn't wear things like that around the house," her mother said sternly.

"Mom, it's like ninety-five degrees outside!"

"It's eighty-eight, and you're not outside."

"It's ninety-five in my room," Destiny grumbled. The fan on her CPU was like an oven. Great in winter, but come summertime, upstairs, with Stan and his insistence that the house didn't need AC, though he'd conveniently decided to favor his wife with a window unit in their bedroom. Even so, it wasn't to be turned down below 80 when he wasn't in it. It was brutal in that room. Only it was even more brutal outside, six acres full of bugs, snakes and coyotes.

Would she have her own air conditioning at college? The thought made her smile. Sleeping under sheets and blankets because it was winter outside of them. It probably said on their website, but sitting at her PC was always too distracting to read some college-crafted commercial for their dumb dorms.

"We live in a house with men, Destiny. We all make concessions. Now go put on some actual shorts, instead of those... shorty shorts."

"It's booty shorts, Mom, and these aren't even—"

"You watch your language, young lady. Oh and hey, this ought to cheer you up. A letter came for you today."

"A letter? Like, on paper?"

"It's about your housing situation. Your roommate, and the rules. You make sure you read the whole thing."

Destiny snatched the letter out of her mother's hands and ran upstairs. Her mother opening her mail, the sweltering heat, Blaine showering with the door open again... it was all forgotten as she read the letter.

And again.

And again.

Coed floor? She hadn't signed up for a coed floor. What did that mean? Would boys be, like, next door? She was pretty sure her dorm room wouldn't have its own bathroom, so... would they share? Would some boy just plop down in the next stall and drop a twosie? And her roommate – *Charlie* Andrews. Was that Charles? They couldn't room her with a *boy*, could they...?! How big were these dorm rooms, anyway?!

Her mother was no help. The woman still had a flip phone, for crying out loud. Of course she hadn't read up on Lakeview housing policies. Yes, she'd read the letter, but she seemed sure Charlie was a typo or else short for some girl's name. In any event, she was happy that the MRS degree that was her real hope for her daughter's education would begin on day one. She wouldn't even have to leave the building to find a man.

Destiny waited as long as she could – almost two hours – before picking up the phone. There was contact information there, and some tips for talking points the roommates-to-be should discuss before meeting in August. Had Charlie even gotten her letter yet? Well, no matter. If something had gotten fouled up, Destiny wanted it addressed and resolved immediately.

The phone rang twice before someone picked up. “Well hello.”

“Um, is this Charlie Andrews?”

“Why, yes it is, and you must be Destiny Milligan.”

“What? No, Destiny Holbrook.” How did she... Oh right, the letter. Destiny was still too relieved to hear a female voice on the phone.

“Really? Oh, I'm sorry, I'd swear my letter said—”

“My stepdad is Milligan. My mom changed her name when she remarried, but I didn't.”

“Oh wow. Man, I'm already learning about you. This is so amazing. I've been sitting here wanting to call you all day but I didn't want to be too eager. Which, I guess now that I said it out loud, makes me sound way too eager, huh.”

Destiny heard herself laugh. “No! No, not at all. I've, um, been doing the same, actually. I was actually freaking out because I didn't know they were putting me on a boys and girls floor, and then I saw your name and I was like, uh oh, and...”

“My name? Oh my gosh, did it say Charlie instead of Charlotte? Oh wow, I would have been losing my mind if, like, my letter had said ‘yo, here's Doug.’” Suddenly Charlie's voice dropped a couple octaves. “I promise, I am totally a girl. Go ahead, ask me something only a girl would know. Boy bands, tampons, anything.”

Destiny laughed even harder. “I believe you, I believe you!”

Charlie's voice went back to normal. “Oh thank goodness. I – *I'm fine, Dad, I'm talking to Destiny!*” There was a pause, a faint male voice. Destiny could only somewhat make it out, something about keeping out of trouble. “My dad says hi, by the way. And some other things that he was *DEFINITELY KIDDING ABOUT, RIGHT DAD?!*”

Destiny waited awkwardly through a less audible response from Charlie's dad. While she waited, she searched *Charlie Andrews* on facebook. The letter had given her enough context to figure out which user was her roommate. Sort of, anyway. The girl had fairly robust privacy settings. The only picture Destiny could find of her was her profile picture, a group of like forty people posing together in caps and gowns. No telling which one was Charlie. With trembling fingers, she clicked Add Friend.

"I am so sorry about that," Charlie was apologizing right around that same time. "My dad thinks he's very funny, and had very little respect for important conversations with lovely roommates. Which, by the way, did you just friend me?"

"Um, yeah. Is that weird? You don't have to—"

"No! No, it's awesome. I love that you just... did that, no hesitation. That's so kick-butt. But let me put a twist on it for you, yeah? I'm not going to accept it. Not until we've met, face to face, and we get to know the real Charlie and Destiny and not the personas we've sculpted for ourselves online. And then once we're officially new best friends, we can also be, bleh, facebook friends, too."

Destiny grinned. This girl, whoever she was, was something else. Who was she in that big picture? She could probably ferret it out, but... maybe she was onto something. "That sounds cool." It sounded terrifying, but everything about college sounded terrifying. Why couldn't college just be a Thunderjaw? Sure, it was an eighty-foot robotic T-Rex, but at least it had all its crit spots easily spotted. "So, um, we're supposed to talk about smoking and stuff?"

"Oh yes, my newest friend, let us talk of smoking and bedtimes and wall hangings and other items of import. For tonight we talk! Tomorrow, we meet."

"Um, move-in day isn't until late August. Right...?"

"Metaphorical tomorrow," pronounced Charlie in the same weird tone.

"Are you, um, drunk?"

"No, just really nervous and bad at coping. Are you?"

"Same."

"I already love you. Just putting that out there."

"Um, thanks." Destiny tried not to end the statement with an implied question mark, but she was pretty sure she failed. "So, yeah, do you smoke?"

Almost there. Thank god. She could see what must be Lakeview in the distance as Michael took the off-ramp. Limestone buildings, tall or broad or both, sprawled across a campus the size of her hometown. Over ten times the size by population. She was surprised at how many trees were growing there. It looked almost like a forest that a college had gotten lost in and given up and decided to live there. Farther still, a million

sparkles danced across the surface of what she could only assume was Bear Lake. Destiny remembered that from the email the Lakeview Admissions Office had sent her encouraging her to apply. She'd never taken the tour. Her mom didn't have a car, and her stepdad wasn't about to loan her his.

Michael, it seemed, had taken it. As they drew closer, he named off various buildings. Destiny was listening, but only for what he wasn't saying. Not for hours now. But they were close. He would say it again soon.

He didn't, though. He didn't even go to his dorm first. Michael drove straight to Higgins Hall, upbeat despite the traffic of thousands of freshmen moving in, and despite the tense situation he'd created in the car back at that rest stop. Finally they arrived. It was pretty small, at least compared to the nearby buildings. Maybe those were where the classes happened? They turned into a little circular driveway in front of the building, but some woman with a weird accent told them they needed to go to the back lot to unload. Around they went, another fifteen minutes of snail-paced driving to get from one side of the building to the other.

If not for her PC and the box with all her consoles and gear, Destiny considered, she could have just grabbed her suitcase and run off on foot.

"Excited?" Michael asked as he waited for a minivan to vacate a decent unloading spot.

"Yeah." She managed to make her lips do the smile thing. God, why wouldn't that van move.

Michael's eyes strayed to a pair of girls exiting the building hand in hand, one brunette, one with jet black hair, both agonizingly gorgeous. Was that something college girls did, holding hands? Or were they...? She was paying more attention to their surroundings than Michael though, and pointed when the space was open. His leer lingered for a moment, then gave her a smile. Almost exactly like his normal smile, but not quite.

"Thanks so much for the ride," she said, exiting before the car was even in park. Leg cramps from the long drive slowed her, though. Not like she could have snatched her stuff and darted off anyway, sealed in Michael's trunk as it was.

Michael hurried after her, though, popping up and meeting her behind the car, where she was already tugging the handle. "Hey, whoa, what's your hurry, Mittlefinger? This isn't a timed mission – relax." He chuckled.

"Sorry, I'm just... yeah, really excited." She was as afraid as she'd ever been in her life, actually. She'd only thought that's how she felt when he picked her up that morning, but then, the rest stop.

"Same. Say, how about I help you carry your things up to your room? Dude-bro style, you know?" He laughed at what was, she supposed, a joke. He popped open his

trunk and before she could stop him, hefted the big box containing her PC. She'd saved her tips for a year to buy that thing. It was her most precious possession in the world.

Now it was in the hands of Michael Soo. Her heart raced. No time to insult him now. It was past warranty. An oopsie with that box would... She shuddered. "Sure. I'll get my suitcase and the other box."

He laughed again. "No way you're going to be able to get that up there by yourself, shortstack."

Fuck, there it was again. Oh no. Oh fuck no. But he had her box. "Sure. I, um, think there's some events we're supposed to go to today, so I guess we ought to hurry up and get it up there? Plus I'm sure you're excited to get to your dorm, meet your roommate."

The two started walking, Destiny forced to stop every few paces to wait for the lackadaisical gait of the HHGC's nominal MVP. "No rush. Besides, you're on the third floor, right? Gotta pace ourselves. Your setup's like a pile of bricks, babe. Gonna need a little rest after hefting it up three flights of stairs."

They were walking past two people wearing matching shirts, Lakeview red with the word "HIGGINS STAFF" written on the front. A girl and a boy. The girl looked miserably hot even sitting on a bench in the shade of a tree, the ground around it littered with cigarette butts. The boy was handsome, smiling brightly. He'd overheard them, plainly, and stepped over to address them.

Before he could though, the blonde girl flopped back on the tabletop with a groan and demonstrated that she, too, had eavesdropped. "Two flights of stairs," she said.

"Excuse me?" Michael hadn't expected to be interrupted, much less corrected.

"If she's on the third floor, then that's two flights of stairs. One from 1 to 2, one from 2 to 3. Except, fun fact, the bottom floor, this one here up those two steps..." She waved a sweaty arm at the door people were entering and exiting from with their boxes and families. "That's the 'basement.'"

"Oh. So... it is three flights of stairs," Michael replied, letting his annoyance show. The girl was pretty, but he'd just been invited up to Destiny's room. Not that he knew anything about flirting anyway.

The other boy responded. "Sorry to say it's actually four." He pointed to the next row of windows. "That's Higgins Ground, ten feet off the ground, and there's Higgins 1, Higgins 2, and Higgins 3. Which means," his smile broadened, "I'm your RA! Hi, I'm Spencer. You're going to have a ton of names to learn though once we get to introducing you to everybody, so I'll spare you last names. And you're...?"

Destiny had already set her suitcase down. If this boy, Spencer, noticed Michael standing there with his heavy load, he sure didn't seem like he cared. She took his extended hand and gave it a shake. "Destiny."

“Destiny! I remember that one from the roster. That’s an awesome name. I’m so glad to meet you. And I’m sure you’re excited to start moving in, so unless you need anything from me...?” He stepped aside, not that he’d been in the way. A dad and what had to be a little brother, maybe in eighth grade or so, didn’t spare them a dirty look as they carried a mini-sofa around the idle duo.

“Come on, babe, this shit isn’t light,” Michael complained, resuming walking.

“Yeah, um, I guess I’ll see you around.” Would she? What the heck was an RA?

“Up four flights, down the hall, and where it splits, hang a right. You got your student ID, right?” She nodded. “Great – just swipe it through the slot by your door. Easy peasy. Welcome to Higgins, Destiny.”

“Why do you keep saying everybody’s names so much?” the blonde girl asked her coworker as they walked past.

“Um, to learn my residents’ names...?”

“It’s creepy,” Destiny thought she heard her say.

If this girl thought *that* guy was creepy, she’d love to introduce her to Michael.

Speaking of, she followed the boy in silence. There was nothing she wanted to say, and fortunately, that box really did weigh a ton so he had his work cut out for him. Four flights of stairs, ugh. Their high school hadn’t even had stairs, unless you counted the bleachers at the football field. Destiny had never climbed them. She’d bet Michael hadn’t either.

Soon enough they made it to the “third” floor, which was somehow also the fifth floor. Destiny tried not to be too obvious looking in the open doors they passed, but she was curious about what sort of boys they’d be sticking her with. Every door she looked in, though, was girls. The boys must be on the left turn side of where she followed Spencer’s directions to turn right.

Her own door, 311, was closed. Destiny’s heart sank. She’d held out hope that Charlie would already be there. Maybe with her dad. Mom would do. She’d settled for a sibling. But no. Just her, and Michael.

“We can just set it down here and go back for the rest,” she suggested.

“What, and leave it out here to get stolen?”

“It’s just one box. I can get it, if you wanna wait here.”

“Come on, let’s just catch our breath, and then I’ll be happy to go get it for you.”

She hated how reasonable he seemed. Seeing no alternative, she retrieved her student ID from the pocket of her shorts and swiped it in the slot. With a little click, the door opened. There was no sign of Charlie having been in here. It was pretty spacious, Destiny thought, way bigger than her room at home. Bigger than her mom and Stan’s room, even. Except then Michael followed her in, closing the door behind him, and suddenly it was a dungeon cell.

He set the box down on one of the desks – not the one Destiny would choose, as the light shining on it suggested it would be brutal on her ability to see her monitor in the latter half of the day. Not that that was a concern at the moment. Michael sat down on the lower bunk and patted the space beside him.

Destiny sat in the desk chair, next to her PC. It was the closest thing she had to a refuge.

“Come on, relax, Finger. We made it!”

“Yeah.” Another attempt at smiling.

“Oh hey, you’re not still thinking about what we talked about way back there, are you?” Destiny was, of course. She’d thought of little else since. She said nothing. “Look, don’t make a big deal out of it. I mean, we’re starting college, right? It’s exciting! I just let the moment get the best of me, that’s all.”

“Oh. OK.”

“‘Oh, OK.’ I said *relax*. It was a compliment. You’d think you’d be flattered.”

“I... I was.” A lie, and a transparent one. Michael was hearing what he wanted to hear, though.

“I mean, what are the odds two people from Hayes even going here, much less two who are already friends, right? I don’t know, just feels like it’s... I don’t know. Fate.”

“Heh. Yeah.”

“But like I was saying, I mean, you and I, we’ve always had chemistry, I think. And I can’t help noticing you’re looking extra cute today. Making those first impressions with your two best traits, right?” He laughed. She couldn’t. “So it just made me wonder if, on some level, you were trying to get a little attention.”

She shook her head vehemently. “No! No, I, um, like I said before, I just wanted to look nice. That’s all.”

He grinned. “Look nice for who, though?”

“Nobody. Like, whoever. I swear.”

Michael laughed at her nervousness. “Man, you are high-strung today. Too much caffeine, huh? I know how you mean. I feel like I have all this *energy*. You know?”

“Maybe we should go get the other box, then?”

“We will, babe. We will.” He scooted closed, just close enough to hook a foot in one of the legs of her chair. Skinny as he was, it wasn’t easy for him, but he dragged Destiny in to where their knees touched. She quickly adjusted so they didn’t, which made him pull her closer still.

“You know – I can’t believe I’m saying this – but I actually used to have a little crush on you?”

Destiny braced. In a panic, she whipped out her phone. “Sorry! I, um, got a text.” She held it so he couldn’t see. “It’s from my roommate. One sec.”

Michael frowned. “Hey, I’m opening up to you here. A little respect would be nice.”

“No, I know. I know. I just... One sec.” She brought up Charlie in her contacts and sent off a text. It was the first one she’d sent, though Charlie had texted her that morning. *Can’t wait to meet you today, roomie!!!!*

How soon will you be here? she typed. Send.

“Done?” asked Michael, visibly annoyed. “I was trying to say, I like you. And now that we’re here, the two of us, I can’t help but wonder if we owe to ourselves to see... what if, ya know?”

Her phone buzzed. *I’m having lunch with my dad, and then we’ll be there! Are you there already???? What’s it like? Take whichever bunk you want!*

“Um, yeah. Sorry, just, that’s my roommate again. She’s going to be here really soon, with her dad.”

Michael seemed perplex by the unsolicited information. “Um, OK...? Now can we actually have a conversation, or...?”

“Sorry. I, um, it’s very nice of you to say...” Had he said anything nice? “... all that. I just, um, I wanted to come here to start fresh. Leave high school behind. I don’t think, you know, *that*, would be, um...”

“Don’t think what? I haven’t suggested anything. I’m just talking is all.” He leaned in, smiling wolfishly. “But maybe you’re right. Maybe we should take today as an opportunity to say our goodbyes in style.” Her breath caught in her throat as he closed the remaining distance and kissed her. She could still taste the Diet Coke on his tongue as he unceremoniously, unasked, shoved it in her mouth.

Her breath was coming in gasps of raw panic. Destiny knew full well what was about to happen. Would her parents find out? The HHGC guys? Ms. Sadler?

“Looks like somebody’s already pretty excited,” said Michael, standing and unbuttoning his cargo shorts. “Tell you what, I’ll let you go first. If you do a good job, maybe I’ll see if Mittlefinger doesn’t get to earn her nick?”

A few minutes later, there was a firm knock at the door. “Destiny, you in there?” A male voice.

She spat out Michael’s cock, craning her neck and yelled, much too loudly she thought, “Yes! I’m in here!”

“We’re kinda in the middle of something, aren’t we babe?” said Michael, irked, his cock twitching in her face.

“Oh. Can I talk at you for a sec? Won’t take long, I promise.”

“Sure, just... one second!” She squirmed around Michael, who was trying to pull up and fasten his shorts like he was swapping elemental resistance trinkets in the Four Fates raid boss fight. He folded his hands in front of his crotch as she opened the door.

It was Spencer, that boy from the parking lot. “Hey. Sorry to bug you, but they let me take a break from the brick oven out there. I’m going around making sure everybody knows we have a floor meeting tonight at 7 in our lounge – just down the hall that way. I’ll round everybody up, but we’re gonna do introductions, talk about Welcome Week stuff, all that jazz.”

“Sounds great.”

“Awesome. And if you wouldn’t mind, pass word along to...” He stopped, looked at the nametags on the door. “Charlie.” That made him frown for some reason.

“Will do.”

“All right. I’ll let you two get on with your goodbyes. My apologies, madam and sir.” He did a dorky little genuflection.

“No!” Destiny caught herself and dialed it back. “Sorry, he was just leaving actually. Perfect timing.”

“Oh. Well then.” Something in his countenance changed, then, though Destiny was too distraught to notice. “Hey, why don’t I escort your friend out? One of those rules we have around here, no guests unescorted.”

“I can find the way,” said Michael.

“Of course you can – the rule’s not for in case a guest gets lost. It’s for everybody else.” His smile returned, but not so warm this time. It was focused entirely on Michael. “Gotta start doing my job sometime, you know?” He stood back, waiting for the two to say goodbye, but not closing the door or looking away.

“Oh, I still have a box in his – in *your*, I mean – car. I’ll run down and–”

“I’ll bring it up for you,” Michael sad, eyeing this RA fellow peevishly.

“Oh. OK. I, um, have to go to the bathroom, so you can just... yeah. Set it down.”

“Wanna gimme your key?”

Destiny darted into the hall. She was pretty sure she’d seen a bathroom on the way in. The prospect of a boy doing twosies suddenly didn’t seem like such a big problem. “Hallway’s fine!”

Destiny didn’t leave her stall until she heard Spencer calling everybody to the floor meeting. She wasn’t sure she heard a word that was said.

“Hey, I’m sorry to bug you, but... are you OK?”

Destiny didn’t roll over. She stayed right where she was, curled up in a ball on the mattress of the top bunk, facing the wall. “Yeah.”

Her roommate’s voice was pure tenderness, though her mind was far, far away. “Because you don’t seem OK.”

“I’m *fine*,” she said more firmly. Still pretty feebly, though.

“Are you homesick? Because I know I am. If you wanted to talk about it, or just complain, or cry, I would listen.”

Destiny didn't answer. Not sure what else to do, Charlie once more left, no doubt off to make more friends while her disappointment of a roommate sobbed into her blanket. She felt like such an idiot whenever she crawled out from under her self-pity long enough to think about anything more than the taste of dick in her mouth that just wouldn't seem to go away. She'd thought her dorm would be like a hotel, with sheets and pillows and stuff waiting for her. She hadn't packed any.

Some hours later, the hubbub on the floor died down and Charlie returned. She said Destiny's name softly, but when she got no answer, she changed into her pajamas, switched off the light, and went to bed. The next morning she did the reverse, then left. Probably to meet all the friends she and everybody else had probably already made for breakfast or whatever. Destiny's stomach was growling. She still had some Combos in her purse, purchased at the rest stop right before Michael pulled his first volley. “*Why haven't we ever... You know...*”

She tried to calm her tummy, but the Combos just tasted like sweaty dick. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't stop thinking about that taste. How it had felt in her mouth. How strong his grip had been on her skull.

Charlie returned. Destiny tried to stay as still as possible. The preposterously pretty blonde hadn't given up yet, though. Of all the girls in that profile pic, why did she have to be *that* one? “Hey, Destiny. Are you awake?”

“Mm.”

“I only ask because we're all going on this campus tour soon. Spencer's leading it. Are you, um, gonna come with? Everybody's really nice; I bet they'd really like to meet you. I think you still have time to get a shower and grab a bite to—”

“I want to go home!” Destiny shrieked. Her tears resumed. Tenderness in bitter moments was, as ever, her trigger.

Before she knew it, someone else was in bed with her. Charlie curled up beside her. leaning against the wall so she could see Destiny's face. “Oh, hey, it's OK. It's so OK.”

“It's definitely NOT OK!” Destiny whimpered. “Just go on your stupid tour and leave me alone!”

“No. No way. If you're staying, I'm staying.”

“Would you just go? God, we're not even friends!”

Charlie shook her head, then slid down and, of all things, made Destiny her little spoon. She couldn't have said whether she accepted it because she was too emotionally exhausted to fight back, or because this full body hug was the nicest touch she'd ever experienced in her life. She was so... warm. So soft. Was this... Why did she suddenly feel...

“I want to be your friend, if you’ll let me,” the girl said quietly. “I’m not a mind reader or anything, but I can tell you’re in a bad place. Is it really homesickness? Or did something happen?”

“Why would you think something happened?”

“Because a bunch of the girls here are homesick, but they got out of bed this morning. Last night, too. They even ate, and changed clothes.”

Destiny sniffled. “Do I smell bad?”

Charlie draped an arm over her. That was her only answer. She lay there, squeezing Destiny’s hand, until at last there was nothing to do but let it out. Spencer had come around, calling for people to meet up for the tour. Charlie said nothing, and soon the floor was silent again.

“There was this boy,” Destiny said at last.

Charlie listened, listened until her roommate had finished. She wasn’t crying now, but only because she was out of tears.

“Did he even bring back your stuff? The rest of it, I mean. I, um, saw you didn’t have, um, a lot of stuff.”

Destiny, who had somewhere along the telling rolled over to face Charlie, shook her head. “No. But I don’t care. I don’t ever want to see him again.”

“We should go to Spencer. He’ll—”

“NO! Oh my god, no. No. I don’t ever want anyone else to know what happened.”

Charlie pressed her forehead to Destiny’s. “We don’t have to tell him everything. We can just say he took your stuff. If he goes here, maybe there’s something they can do?”

“No. I just want to be done with it.”

Charlie’s lips pursed, but she nodded. “If that’s what you want. But please, please, please don’t go home because of this. OK?”

“I don’t even have sheets, or a pillow.”

“He took your...!” Destiny felt too foolish about it to correct her. “OK. So hey, let’s you and me go shopping, yeah?”

“I don’t have any money, really.” She’d spent the last of her PUBG tourney money on those Combos. There was a meal plan here, or something? Destiny remembered reading something that said she’d get food here. She’d figured she’d get a job, or maybe double down on her gaming, once she got here.

“Then let me.” A self-conscious look stole over Charlie’s face. “I mean, you’re gonna find out soon enough that my parents do purty good. So trust me, I won’t miss it.”

“Oh my gosh, no way! I couldn’t—”

“You can. Come on, please? My heart is breaking in half for you right now, so do me a favor and let me feel better by doing something nice for this sweet, beautiful girl who is going to stay here at Lakeview and maybe become my new best friend?”

Things got better. Charlie bought her new sheets, and not one, not two, but *three* pillows – she said she liked to sleep with one between her legs. One of the clerks at Target overheard her and, having already noticed said legs by virtue of being a man, with eyes, tripped over his own shopping cart wheel and bumped into a shelf of linens and scattered them everywhere. Destiny had never heard of such a thing – each bed in her home had exactly one pillow per occupant – but her roommate insisted, and by the end of Welcome Week, Destiny couldn't imagine sleeping without one.

Especially after one of the girls a couple doors down shared a video of that fight everybody was talking about, the one where their naked RA fought off some crazy naked girl from another naked girl. Destiny's libido was in a sensitive place after Michael, but that helped. A lot.

So did Charlie – though not in the same way. Destiny had seldom had close female friends. In elementary school, yeah. As she got older, though, her hobbies became less traditionally feminine, as did her competitive edge. Her girl friends started getting excited to practice putting on makeup and making lists about the cutest boys, ranked by various attributes. Destiny got excited about 180 no-scoping people in the face. Ironically, it was around the same time that her body began to change from what had widely, if not charitably, been referred to as “sickly” into something more... healthy.

Charlie responded with horror to Destiny's admission that she'd learned to avoid emphasizing her figure as a coping mechanism for dwelling in male spaces with less harassment – and look how that had turned out. That Sunday, she arranged an outing for makeovers and massages, footing the bill for Destiny. The generosity made her uncomfortable, but Charlie's pleading to be allowed to be nice to her was even more uncomfortable, so she relented. By the time she arrived at her first class on Monday, for the first time, she felt... *hot*.

It was a good thing, too, because half the floor (at least!) pulled that off without seeming to try. Charlie seemed to have become overnight friends with the lot of them, and the more she dragged Destiny out with her, the more stark the contrast became. Leigh, the girl from the fight, who was basically just Barbie but with bigger boobs. This Korean girl, Kyu-Ri, whom Destiny had hoped would be a kindred spirit but apparently even in Korea girls that hot just didn't game. Heck, only two doors down there were these girls who were actual instagram models!

And then... there was Spencer.

Destiny had noticed him even on move-in day, although she'd had much more pressing things on her mind than a cute RA. She'd been apprehensive about living with a bunch of boys, but having only the one? She knew some of the girls didn't like it, but in

Destiny's book, having Spencer around was pure win. She'd never liked having a female boss, for one. Beth-Anne at Forky's had always been such a bitch about every little thing. Plus, after the way he'd gotten rid of Michael, he just made her feel safe. He had a gentle way about him, in a way she'd never known a boy to have.

And god, how she wished she'd been there for that shower fight. The video couldn't do him justice.

By the time she went to her first college class, she was in a much better place. Higgins 3 already felt like home. The girls were so nice – most of them – and the food court was really cool and the weather was gorgeous and the wind in the trees and Charlie and unbelievable bandwidth. All those doubts and anxieties she'd harbored were melting away.

All except one, anyway. But nothing to be done about that.

Unfortunately, girls were still girls. She posted to the discord server – the “Hottie Haven,” which always made her smile – to see if anybody else wanted to do some gaming. Even just casual stuff like Minecraft. No traction.

DamnDanielle: you got mariokart? I'm tits af at mariokart

SexiLexy: Mario Kart! Mario Kart! Mario Kart!

KC: ngl some mk sounds chill

SexiLexy: MARIOKARRRRRRRRRRRT

Mittlefinger: Frick sorry you guys! I have it, but somebody ran off with my consoles

Minutes later, she received a DM.

Tori: Somebody on this floor?

Mittlefinger: No, some guy.

Tori: Here at Lakeview, or like last year, or what?

Mittlefinger: Here

Mittlefinger: Move-in day

Mittlefinger: He was supposed to help me move in but we sort of had a fight and he ran off with it.

Tori: Did you tell Spencer?

Mittlefinger: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snitches_Get_Stitches

Tori: This isn't a guy copying on a quiz. This is a thief.

Mittlefinger: Seriously don't tell him. I just want to drop it, OK?

Tori: No, it's not OK.

Mittlefinger: Please, Tori. I know you mean well but I really really REALLY don't want to think about it, OK? Please

Thirty seconds later, the door to their room swung open, and there was Tori, arms folded sternly. Charlie swiveled her chair. (The desk chairs that came with the room were kinda shitty; Destiny expressed a stray moment of admiration for one of the gamer chairs during their Target shopping spree, and they'd come home with *two!* One for each!)

“Heya Tori! Oooh, I *love* that top.”

Tori entered unasked and shut the door firmly behind her. “Tell me what’s going on, Destiny.”

Charlie looked between the two. “What’s up? Did something happen?”

Destiny shook her head. “I told you I *don’t* want to talk about it!”

But Tori only marched over and crouched in front of her. “Does he go here?”

Charlie joined them, maneuvering behind her roommate and placing two gentle hands on her shoulders. “It’s OK, Destiny. You can trust her. She won’t do anything with your permission. Right, Tori?”

Tori took a moment before grudgingly acknowledging the question. “Sure. Yes, that is. Destiny, I just want you to get what’s yours, OK? That’s it. If you won’t tell the RA, then try me. Who is he.”

“H-his name is Michael,” Destiny said. Nice and vague still. Nothing committed.

“Michael. OK. Did he just steal from you, or was there more?”

To that, Destiny had no response. Saying it once, to Charlie, had been hard. Saying it again was more than she was ready for.

Tori’s eyes narrowed as if she’d said it all, though. “He hurt you.”

Numbly, Destiny nodded.

“OK. Do you want me to hurt him back? Spencer can’t do that for you. He has to play by the rules. But I can.”

“No! Oh god, no. That would only make it worse.”

There was no missing that Tori didn’t like that answer, but she again nodded her obedience to Destiny’s wishes. “All right, then. So why don’t you tell me Michael’s full name, and I’ll go get your things back. Nothing mean,” she said before Destiny could beg her not to. “No squabbles. Just ‘hi, I think you got my friend’s stuff, I’d like you to return it.’ I get your stuff, you play some Mario Kart, fin.”

“I don’t want to have to talk to him again. You can’t—”

“No I know. And I can make sure he knows, too. Just give me a name, and I’ll find him. I have my ways.”

Charlie smiled softly. “Meaning you haven’t deleted the email Spencer sent out with a link to the Lakeview campus directory.”

“That’s one of my ways.” But Tori smiled.

Charlie leaned down until her face hung upside right in front of Destiny's. "Would you feel better if I went, too? I bet you got so much gaming stuff we'll need both of us to carry it anyway."

It was Charlie's volunteerism that won her over.

Destiny was too distraught to hold her mouse steady while her friends were away. A thousand what-if's played out in her head. If Michael got mad, he could tell everybody in the HHGC what happened. Make up a lie, like she'd asked for it, so nobody would believe her. It was a small town; her mom could hear about it from somebody. Ms. Sadler – would she believe Michael if he put it out there that Destiny had been some kind of slut-tease?

Two hours later, Charlie and Tori returned, the latter carrying a familiar box, filled to the brim with consoles, controllers, wires and accessories. Her headset! Her beloved D.Va headset! She'd been playing on 1% volume with subtitles for days, but... her headset!

Tori set the box down gently on the bed like it was no big deal.

"You got it!" Destiny leapt to her feet and hugged the girl. "You're amazing! How on earth did you do it?!"

Charlie nudged Tori with an elbow, grinning proudly. "Amazing doesn't begin to cover it. We just walked up to the building, waited for someone to walk in—"

"They just let you in...? He lives in Rowlands. That's all boys."

Tori glanced at Charlie just as Charlie looked over Tori. "Um, ya. He let us in." Charlie didn't quite roll her eyes. "Anyway, yeah, we walked up to his room and Tori knocks, like *BOOM, BOOM.*" She replicated it, pounding on their door with the bottom of her fist.

"Wanted to make sure the little diaper sniffer heard us." Tori shrugged.

"So he comes to the door, and he sees us, and gets this, *ugh*, the sleaziest grin I've ever seen, like he doordashed a couple of prostitutes or something. But it let us walk right in there. It was just him – he had a roommate, but not there."

Tori sat back, content to let Charlie tell it. "So he's like, 'hey, ladies.' You ever notice how creeps always use the word 'ladies,' like it's suave or something? 'Nice tits, *ladies.*' Ew."

Destiny had never made such an observation, but nodded in complete agreement. "Ugh, totally. Ew."

"So he figures we're there to see his roommate, tells us he's out but we're welcome to stay. Duh. But Tori, she just folds her arms..." She look at Tori. "Fold your arms. Go on, show her."

With a dryly amused look, Tori obliged. Destiny was impressed. "And she's like, 'you have a box of our friends stuff. We're here to take it to her.' Like, that's it. She

doesn't tell him to hand it over, doesn't do that *nyeh* thing, where like you poke them in the chest with a finger and *ow, nyeh*. Just 'You got it, we're taking it.'

"And it's super obvious he knows exactly what we're talking about. He's all shifty, looking around, licking his guilty little jerk-boy lips, but he goes 'I dunno what you're talking about, but you can frisk me.' So Tori, she just opens up the closet, and then the other side, and there it is. He's squawking and telling her she can't go through his stuff, but she just grabs it, like she's a full-on cop! It was *incredible*."

Tori shrugged. "Little worm's not worth any more breath than he's already wasting on himself."

"He makes like he's going to stop her, but I'm like nuh uh, you don't put your nasty little claws on a girl, buddy!"

Tori grinned. "I believe what she actually said was, 'hey, no! Come on...!'"

Charlie blushed. "I'm a lover, not a fighter."

"Nothing wrong with that. But yeah, I wasn't looking to have a dialogue with him. You said don't start anything. So I just looked him in the eye and told him that the only reason I wasn't knocking him right on his ass was because you told me not to. Only..."

"Only then he called you a bad word."

Destiny frowned. "What did he call me?"

"Oh, he was putting on a show, trying to act like he wasn't being pushed around by girls. He said something like 'you tell that slut...'"

Slut. Four letters.

"That was as much as he got to say, though, because... You want to tell him, Tori?"

"Eh, you can finish."

"Tori just set your box down, grabbed him by the shoulders and just *POW*, pushed him up against the wall, like the one with the window, and told him if she ever caught him looking at you again, she'd test how strong the *glass* was! It was *insane*. He looked like he was gonna pee himself."

Destiny's eyes widened. "You said that?!"

Tori nodded. "I know you said not to start anything, but he had to know not to follow us back over here. I know you don't want to tell the RA about it all, but we might want to at least make sure he's got his eyes open in case little Mr. Thievy-Dick tries to stop in."

"And even if he does, you'll have me with you the whole time. But yeah, maybe telling Spencer would be—"

Suddenly the door, which had never quite shut behind them, swung up a few more inches. He had a clipboard in hand; he carried it so if anybody had a problem he could jot it down and fix it. Always fixing things. "Did I hear my name? Anything I can do for you ladies?"

Ladies. The girls shared a look, and burst into a spontaneous fit of mass giggles. Destiny hopped to her feet and pulled both of them into a hug. “You guys are the best,” she murmured into the huddle.

Spencer waited until they separated, not disrupting the sweet moment. “Well. No idea what’s going on, but... I see kindness, and I’m digging it.”

Charlie beamed at him. “Somebody took some of Destiny’s stuff. Tori went and got it back! She was amazing.”

There was a flicker of something that passed over his face, not bitterness at being cut out of the loop, Destiny thought, but anger that someone had preyed on one of his residents. One of his “Hotties.” (Not that she thought the term applied to her.) But then he was all smiles. “Yeah? Tori, that’s awesome. Great work.”

That smile made Destiny wish she’d gone herself. Still, Tori more than deserved it. Charlie, too. “She helped,” Destiny added. “I think they’re due a little pat on the butt for a good job,” she said. In a jokey way. Kind of.

“Destiny!” Charlie said, aghast, eyes twinkling. Was it crass of her to suggest it? Maybe. Still, her roommate didn’t do a very good job of hiding her crush on the guy. She brought him up a dozen times a day, always gushing with positivity. More than usual. Destiny didn’t know anything about being a wingman, but surely it couldn’t hurt Charlie’s odds to plant an idea or two in his head.

Only, then Tori turned, cocking her ass out toward him. It was *rocking* those jeans. “Pat me.” She flashed him a lopsided grin.

Spencer’s cheeks flushed, but to be cool, he gave Tori’s behind a few pats – with his clipboard. Still, the other side of her lips perked up. Suddenly Charlie was turning too, and giggled excitedly as she too received the clip-pat.

“You all are a trip. But I’m proud of you. You know, Tori, we’re doing floor government elections this weekend, to decide how we spend our floor funds, programs, all that. You should really think about putting your name in for governor.” He poked her with the clipboard, in the tummy this time. “If you don’t, I will.”

“You totally should! I mean, who else? Governor Tori – *love* the sound of it.”

“Pff, I was gonna put in for *his* job,” Tori laughed. “But yeah, I’ll think about it.”

That night, the memory of that pat sat heavy in Destiny’s gut. Or, well, not her gut, but... deeper.

Maybe it was weird, but she’d never seen porn before coming to Lakeview. Stan was a dunce about technology, at least digital technology, but he’d known enough to buy software to monitor everybody’s browsing habits. Never stopped his sons, but Destiny would be mortified if he caught her. Sure, she could have looked up a work-around at

school, like everybody did for the school's network, but what happened when the software released a patch and she didn't catch it in time? Small chance maybe, but considering the fallout...! Her mother would practically disown her if she got Stan thinking about her like that.

On the Hottie Haven though, girls posted sexual stuff all the time. She'd discovered that masturbation wasn't only something boys did! Once she saw this woman doing that, it... Mmm. It did something to her. The woman made it look *really* good, even without a guy there to do things to her. Suddenly Destiny was being sucked down this rabbit hole of pornography. She wasn't a *complete* idiot; she knew the women were only acting, or mostly. They weren't good enough actresses to be totally faking it. Still, once she started touching herself *down there*, it felt... good? Some? But nothing close to the way the porn women were behaving.

So she looked for videos that really zoomed in. You could count the zits ringing these girls buttocks in some of these things. But where *precisely* did they touch themselves? Every little fold, bump, crevice and flap felt distinct. It would make more sense to do more conventional research, she knew. There was a wiki for *Getting Over It*, a game where you played a bald jock trapped in a cauldron climbing a mountain of junk to the moon using only a two-handed grip on a sledgehammer. Surely someone had made some kind of wiki for sex.

But... this visual – and so very auditory – form of research was so much more *fun*. And lucky for her, she and Charlie had very different class schedules. She loved having her around, like a sister almost but better, since Destiny knew her mother could never raise a daughter that turned out that great. Still, she'd never had to share a bedroom before, and sharing one sixteen hours a day was a big transition. Especially when you were watching a woman as sexy as any girl on their floor run her hands on and in every inch of her body, clumsily copying it with one hand while pressing a speaker to her ear with the other, dreading the thought of the lesbians next door hearing it and getting *ideas*. (Not that there was anything wrong with that! Besides, they were two of the prettiest girls she'd ever seen; hard to imagine them ever wanting to cheat.)

That pat. The way Tori's, then Charlie's bottoms had *bounced* from that light pressure. The way Spencer looked at them, that forbidden fruit look, that look that said he knew how positively *edible* those butts were but he had to be good, be noble, walk the straight and narrow path no matter how glad they might be if he took a day off.

Destiny could almost wish she'd been as brave as Tori, confronting Michael herself, for a pat like that.

He had nice hands, she thought. Big, but not those freaky I-could-palm-a-basketball big hands like some guys had. Like Stan's. Spencer's wouldn't be calloused like that, though. They looked like they'd feel soft. Harder, though, with a little slap.

What would they taste like? Charlie was sound asleep, breathing slow and deep. Destiny slid one of her own fingers in her mouth. Two. Hmm. Mm. She licked them. That felt good. No wonder Michael had wanted her to...

No. Think about Spencer. Happy times.

Her fingers tingled as her tongue swirled around them. That was really nice. She'd seen a lot of the women in those videos do that, but usually just so it slid in her vagina more easily. Destiny got why, though lately, she never seemed to need it. She was definitely looking at too much porn. Horny all the time. So horny.

One thing that seemed to vary a lot in the videos was how much attention they paid to their breasts. Some ignored them altogether, but others couldn't seem to get enough. It seemed like it was mostly the flatter-chested ones who didn't much like it. She was anything but flat. "Big tits," she whispered, squeezing them through her nightshirt. Words she'd heard plenty in her life, but only from boys, at school or online. Hearing these women say it to themselves, like Destiny just did – "Such big tits!" – suddenly made the words... alluring.

She kneaded those huge, juicy titties of hers with fingers still dripping with her saliva. The flesh of her breasts could *just* feel the moisture. That made it so much better. It was wetter. Messier. *Sex ought to be messy*, she thought, tugging her shirt off as quietly as the springs in her bunk bed would let her. It should be spitty and slimy and sweaty.

Charlie had asked one night if it would be OK to sleep with the window open. She knew it got hotter, but she loved the fresh air. Dreamed of living on a tropical island someday, she said, sleeping right down on the beach. Destiny tended to sweat easily, though she was used to it from home. If Charlie wanted the windows open, though, Destiny would smile and agree that it absolutely felt better. Charlie got open windows whenever she wanted.

Tonight, Destiny was genuinely grateful for it though. She was hot already, and the night summer air outside made her hotter. Her breasts glistened in the faint light from her monitor down below, a blue-white light that glowed on the sheen of sweat on her skin like some kind of sex angel. They didn't *feel* angelic, though. They felt like sin made flesh.

Big, sinful tits.

You can pat them if you want, Spencer. She sunk her fingers into the tender skin. No. Dirtier. She stuffed two fingers from each hand in her mouth at the same time like she was hungry for them, soaking them in her saliva. *Now* she could play with her tits, her big fucking tits. Wet and nasty and dirty.

If Spencer patted them, she'd have to apologize. Then clean his hands. With her mouth. Suck those fingers clean one by one. *I'm sorry, Spencer. Is that better, Spencer?* She found a nipple. She was realizing that she had little nipples for breasts, big bouncy

perky breasts, compared to the women online. It was like instead of having the erogenous zone spread in a several inch diameter, it was all clustered in one tiny bundle hardly bigger than her thumbnail. When she touched it, it was electric.

“Twist them, Spencer,” she whispered. Shit, she shouldn’t be doing that. She stuffed her pillow over her mouth so she could breathe naturally, which was to say heavily. Her big tits pressed harder into her twin grasps with each heaving breath.

The memory of the pat came again. Tori’s hard round ass jiggling proudly at his expression of pleasure with her. And Charlie’s. Her beautiful roommate’s beautiful bottom, the thrill of it on her face. When Destiny was away at class tomorrow, would she touch herself to that same thought? That shouldn’t turn her on, but her brain was a soupy mess conflating her feelings for her roommate and for Spencer and for Spencer’s hard, red, heroically throbbing cock.

Maybe he liked butts more than boobs. Maybe that was what he wanted, not to play with her big, wet, sweaty tits, “My big hard fucking nipples, frick, yes,” but to squeeze her soft little butt. Her ass.

“My ass.”

She held her breath as she slowly – first the shoulder, oomf now on my big tits – rolled onto her front, rolling her pillow with her. Then, with equal care, arched her back and brought her knees closer, raising her ass into the air. Presenting herself like a literal bitch in heat. Destiny’s slick and sticky fingers found their way into the waistband of her shorts and peeeeeeled them down. They were kinda tight, didn’t want to fight over the enhanced curves of her thighs and behind. She had to force it, grunting into her pillow as she struggled to get at her pussy.

Back home, once a month they’d order pizza from in town. It was good – her mom wasn’t much of a cook – but the best part was the lava cakes they’d have for dessert. They had to split them, but that was fine. Better even. It meant she got to cut the thing in half and watch the goo bubble forth. She loved the decadence of it, the theater. Once, she’d been curious, and she’d put her fingers in it, just to see.

That was her pussy tonight. Molten lava, sweet as chocolate.

She brought a thin tendril of her wetness up to her mouth, twisting her neck out of the pillow to get a taste. Destiny *loved* the taste of her pussy. She didn’t think she was supposed to, but the women in the porn had done that sometimes. It felt like one of the parts they did for theater, but it had made her curious. But she’d really liked it. Destiny had heard boys talk about eating a girl out (which was kind of the same as she was doing, just with her hand as an intermediary). They always joked that it tasted like tuna. No. It didn’t taste like anything else. Just her. Just her own delicious lust.

“Pat me. Pat me, Spencer.”

But his hand would linger once he felt it. Her curves might be more impressive up top, up on her jiggly biggity tits, “slap my big tits,” she squeezed down *hard*, harder than

Spencer ever would because he wasn't that kind of boy. He treated women kindly, gently, sweetly. But here in her own bed, she could treat her body like one of those sluts in the pornos.

Destiny was still in the process of deciding whether she preferred to penetrate herself, or to play with her clit. (Funny, she'd learned the word in health class back in middle school, but never guessed it was a little pleasure button patched on like an upgrade for her pussy.) Her hips bucked in the air as she diddled it. A trickle of that stuff leaking out of her dripped into her palm. They'd never given her a word for that stuff, unless that was cum? Did girls cum too? She really ought to find that wiki.

He would knead it. Knead her ass. Squish it and play with her like she was play dough. She was too close to an orgasm, she wasn't ready yet, didn't want to stop. Grudgingly, she abandoned her tits, her pussy, and reached behind her, grabbed a cheek in each hand and pulled. Suddenly the heat in the air was cold, cold air drifting over her wide-spread slit, her pussy a gaping hole like another porn whore, her asshole open and available and vulnerable to anything Spencer wanted to do with it. He wouldn't ass-fuck her. Not him. Maybe if she asked him to. Did she want him to? If he wanted to.

"Pat me, Spencer."

"Pat me."

She froze. That second one hadn't been her.

"Charlie...?"

Oh shit. Four-letter shit.

Heart in her throat, she craned her neck down over the edge of her bunk. Their beds were an L configuration, not the more space-saving alignment most of the girls on the floor used. Charlie's pillow was on the end out in the open, that way, she'd said, they could still talk at night if they wanted. Which they had almost every night of their short acquaintance.

Tonight, neither had words. As Destiny peered down, Charlie was rearing upright from the same position Destiny had been in, her perfect bottom slowly eclipsed by a face that was visibly flushed even in the near total darkness.

Had Charlie started before her, or after? How much had she heard? All of it, probably, if she'd been awake. She was a sound sleeper, but apparently not tonight.

An embarrassed smile lifted the blonde girl's adorable cheeks. "That pat, right?"

Destiny found herself grinning back. "So jelly."

"You, um, don't have to stop. If you don't want."

"Oh. I mean, I could stop." She tilted her head, red hair spilling down and nearly touching her roommate's face. "Unless you want me to keep going."

"Keep going?" Charlie licked her lips. "And, um, keep doing that whispering thing."

She was so bad. How did anybody on this floor think she was a good girl? Pure, pure, perfect evil.

“Pat me.” She didn’t know what to say now, with an audience, so she just picked up where she’d left off. It was embarrassing, being watched like this, but the way Charlie stared, unashamed, eager, made her feel like one of those incredible vixens from her videos.

“Harder? Touch me harder, Spencer.” She’d been whispering to him before. That must be what she wanted to hear. It felt hot to say, at least. The pat was good, it was a strong jumping off point, but it couldn’t end there.

“Pat me... between my legs. Yessss, right there, yessss...” Her fingers drifted back to her dripping snatch. “Right there, right on my dripping snatch...”

“You’re so hot, Destiny.” Charlie gripped the rail of Destiny’s bunk and started pulling herself to a stand.

Destiny repeated her roommate’s words to herself in Spencer’s voice. “You like hot girls, don’t you baby. This hotness is all yours.”

Charlie’s face was right in front of her. God, she was beautiful. The same light caught her face, the sex angel light, except now shining on an actual angel. “Say it louder. Say it like you’d say it to him.”

“I’m all yours,” Destiny repeated. Not a whisper now, merely breathy. She was breathing so hard. So close. “Pat me. Pat every inch of me. Touch me everywhere. Every single fucking where. I’m all, all yours.”

Only when the wetness on Charlie’s fingers touched her cheek did she fully comprehend her roommate, her friend, her perfect wonderful beautiful generous loving perfect perfect roommate, had been doing the same nasty slutty thing Destiny had been.

“I love you,” moaned Charlie, and launched their lips together.

Destiny’s heart and soul and cunt exploded at the speed of light.

When she could think again, she felt Charlie’s trembling through her grip on the bedframe, on the brink of that same bottomless precipice she’d just plunged from. Destiny scooted and squirmed until her arms were wrapped around Charlie beneath her armpits. If she hadn’t done that, Destiny was pretty sure Charlie would have fallen over and quite possibly toppled to the floor. She whined, a high-pitched squeal as her body tensed with pleasure, then fell slack in Destiny’s iron clasp.

After a long, panting moment, Charlie regained her grip and supported herself again. “Nice reflexes. Hand eye coordination of a gamer girl.” She nuzzled her nose against Destiny’s.

She smiled, but instead, of, um what?, she said, “I’m not gay.”

Oh *SHIT. S-H-I-T!* How could she possibly— Did she even— Was she really or— Charlie shook her head. “I don’t think I am either? But I liked that just now.”

Destiny let out a breath. “I’m sorry. I don’t know why I said that. I liked it too. I’m sorry.”

Slender fingers brushed hair out of the sweat on her forehead. “It’s OK. It was in the spur of the moment. I think all in all, you did so, so good in the spur of the moment tonight, so I’ll let it slide.”

Destiny kissed her knuckles. It didn’t *feel* gay? Just Charlie. “Do you want to, um...”

Wordlessly, Charlie vaulted up into Destiny’s bunk, barely giving her time to roll back. She assumed a position, and Destiny saw the opportunity to nestle in behind her. Oh god. Her bare boobs were touching another girl’s bare back. This had to be at least a little gay. But it wasn’t for pleasure. It was... something else.

Oh, fuck it. Her free arm reached down and placed a hand softly on Charlie’s bare hip. Her fingers teased, dancing here and there along her skin. She didn’t go after the pussy or anything. Neither of them knew if this was or could be *that*. Just her hip, her ribs, her stomach. She was so *smooth*. And just a little slick.

“You remember our first night here?”

Destiny giggled into the curtain of Charlie’s soft, perfumey hair. “Yeah, it was only like a week ago.”

“But what a week,” laughed Charlie. “I was so, so scared you were going to leave me.”

“I’m so so glad you didn’t let me.”

The girls lie there for a while, each silently weighing and measuring how they felt about this, about what had happened right before this. Neither expressed a desire to separate.

“Charlie? Can I ask you something, and you won’t take offense?”

Her roommate swiveled her head, looking amused but not unaccusatory. “That depends on what you ask me!”

“Why are you always so nice to me? I mean, you’re nice to everyone, but – remember when I called you, in the summer? You were even crazy nice to me then. And I’m not complaining! It’s just... I don’t get it. What did I do to deserve this?”

Charlie’s face let go of the feigned umbrage. “Well, part of it, it’s just how I am. I’m a people pleaser, and it is absolutely a toxic trait and I’m trying to do better even though for once it seems to be working out for me.”

“I’ll say, it got you into bed with me.”

“Yeah it did.” Charlie tried to nudge her playfully with an elbow, but missed. “But yeah, it’s... Well, it’s embarrassing, but like... it was the math.”

“Uh... what?”

“I started thinking about it and psyching myself up and freaking myself out. Living with someone, I mean. None of my close friends were coming here, and none of

my not-so-close friends would I have wanted to live with. So that meant a stranger. Living in an area roughly 225 square feet with someone I'd never met. I used a calculator at the time, but for easy illustration, call the room 10 feet high, so 2250 cubic feet, 1125 apiece, some of that lost to dead space by the ceiling.

"The space didn't matter in the grander scheme of things, but it made me realize how small and close it would be. So I ran some extrapolations, figured conservatively spending 10-12 hours a day in that space with that person. Potentially a lot more depending on... well.

"So times 7 days times thirty-six weeks – I actually looked at the whole school calendar and estimated departures for breaks and weekends – I realized, I'm going to spend more time with this person, this random stranger, in that one school year than I ever have with any friend I've ever had."

Destiny scrunched her nose. "Really?"

"Think about it. Yeah, your high school friends have four years, but maybe a class or two a day at best, a few hours some evenings, the occasional burst of vacationing together or... well. But you spend maybe twenty hours a week together? Thirty tops if you're inseparable."

"No wonder you want to be an actuary, Charlie, geez."

"I know, right? Maths! But yeah. I knew I was going to be close to this person, and I dunno, I guess I sort of told myself that I was trading what I had then for what we have now, and I guess I was afraid we wouldn't hit it off. So I said, you're going to *make* this person love you and want to be your best friend, even if they're awful and you can't stand them."

Destiny shook softly with laughter. "That's pretty twisted. Paranoid, even. But hey, at least it worked, right?"

Charlie wriggled into Destiny's embrace and took her hand. Oh man, she remembered Peyton and Sydney back on move-in day. This was so, so gay. She squeezed Charlie's hand. Well, whatever. With maybe one exception, boys had never done much for her anyway.

"Lawrence Svenster's inconsolably enraged red oakwood timber rod emerged from Scarlotte's pussy dripping with cum. Her cum. His cum. So much cum. It pumped with the passion pounding through both of their hearts. Her thighs spread, because she welcomed him to return, because she could deny him nothing he desired, because she ached to be driven mad with another ravaging at his powerful but gentle hands.

“I can’t,’ he said when his eyes, feasting on the glistening femininity of her insatiable cunt. ‘If I put this where I want to, I’m not sure I’ll ever have the strength to leave.’

“‘Would that be so bad?’ she asks. ‘I could make you breakfast if you stay.’

“‘You have children to raise. I want nothing more than to stay, to put this beast of lust inside your perfect body and have my way with you, to finish ruining you for other men. But I can’t do that to a hard-working mother of three. I won’t.’

“Scarlotte’s legs were too weak from the way he’d split her in half like Paul Bunyan on a flimsy pine tree, so she couldn’t follow in time as he grabbed his clothes and fled. The door to her upscale and very fashionable but not too ostentatious penthouse apartment swung shut behind him before she could even explain that the children were staying with her aunt for the weekend and they could have had all the sex they wanted for days and days and days.

“But she knew she would never forget him, and the fervor for lust and pleasure he had awakened inside her.”

Destiny sat back, grinning ear to ear. Charlie was sitting cross-legged on her bunk, her anxiousness on her face. “It’s stupid, isn’t it.”

“Charlie, this is so good. I loved this.”

“You’re just being nice.”

“If you don’t share this with everybody, I will. And then I’ll get all the credit. At least until they find out I suck at writing and couldn’t possibly have written something this hot.”

“You’re just saying that.” A smile threatened at the corners of her lips, though.

Destiny stood up, and without fanfare or hesitation, shimmied her shorts and panties down past her hips. There was her roommate’s smile back. “I’m going to climb into my bunk, and I’m going to read this again, and anybody who wants to see what it does to me is welcome to join me.”

Charlie caught her by the hips right before she got to the ladder. “You can use my bunk, if you want.”

Her roommate’s silken grasp guided – “guided,” generously used when “dragged” might have been more apt – Destiny into her bed. She wasn’t past the first page before the girl produced one of those sex toys she’d gotten and slid it with ease into Destiny’s pussy.

“You’re so wet,” Charlie marveled.

“I told you.”

Charlie gave it a twist, and another when she was rewarded with a soft moan. “It’s not too cheesy?”

“Of course it’s too cheesy, but that’s what makes it hot. And funny, and sweet, and wonderful, just like you.”

Charlie bit her lower lip, flattered successfully, tapped the glistening rubber phallus on her chin. She'd learned to like being sex-messy, same as Destiny. "You're just saying that because you want me to use this thing on you."

"I'll read it out loud to you again, but only if you play Lawrence Svenster to my Scarlotte Andersen."

Charlie considered. "And then I'll read it, and you...?"

Destiny nodded, and scrolled back to the beginning. "It was a bright and sunny day, the kind of day where you couldn't possibly know your life, and every pleasure center in your body, was about to have a moment that would change you forever..."

Charlie did her best to work that fake dick in her like she was the idealized version of Spencer himself.

Another day on Higgins 3.

This floor was paradise. It was unusual for them to do something so overtly sexual to each other, but not unusual. After that first incredible night together, the social barriers between them just sort of went away. By the end of their second week, they'd pretty much stopped holding back. If one of them felt like touching themselves, they just... did. Often as not it set their roommate to joining them. It still didn't really feel "gay" to her, just people acting according to their needs and desires. Like Destiny had heard, college just turned out to be a time for experimentation and being wild and uninhibited and sexy, and luckily for her, she lived with someone who felt exactly the same way.

A lot of the girls here did. Destiny loved it. It made her feel like she wasn't a freak or anything just because sometimes, she just needed to kiss somebody and her roommate was the only one around to kiss. Sometimes Charlie came home with a little gift for her, a cupcake from the bakery in the student union, or a flower she'd picked on campus, or a strap-on she'd gotten from that sex shop just off-campus, Textbooks & Stuff. Brilliant business name – students could charge things to the credit cards their parents lent them and never realize what was actually being purchased.

Destiny's fantasies never seemed to feature women. When she closed her eyes and wallowed in some nasty little daydream, it was always cock. Almost always one cock in particular really. She shared with another girl sometimes – almost always one girl in particular – but the sharing wasn't part of the fantasy. Somehow, that feeling of validation, another woman craving what she craved, that was part of it, but not the girl herself.

To the extent she even understood it. The two of them had talked about it, once, and decided they didn't want to talk about it. "*Is it OK if we just... be good to each other? No labels.*" That's what she'd proposed.

Charlie had answered with a kiss and nothing more, and that had been that. It was nobody else's business but theirs. Not the Hotties, not Spencer's, not Stan's or her mom's or the HHGC's or anybody's.

Destiny came early, so early that by the time she finished reading the chapter she was close to another. "Fuck me Spencer, don't stop, fuck me, fucking fuck me," she pleaded. Invoking Spencer in their little sex romps was par for the course. They shared all their fantasies with one another, though this "Hearts of Fire" story of Charlie's was next level.

As they swapped places, Charlie narrating her story in her own buttery rich voice, Destiny hammered the girl's tight little pussy with that cock, just like she'd want Spencer to do. Her story was pretty silly, going from the wholesome family dynamic to the lurid and foulmouthed depictions of sex, but that only highlighted how badly Charlie wanted him. Destiny did her best to let him have it.

In fact, it had given her an idea.

Charlie hadn't even set down her backpack yet before Destiny rolled right up to her, her gamer chair bumping into the girl's knees. Destiny held them together with two handfuls of Charlie's butt. "I want to play a game with you."

The girl beamed down at her. "I'll say you do. Do I get to at least take my shoes off first?"

She laughed. "No, not a game like that."

"Boooo!"

Destiny slapped her butt. "It's a video game."

"It's... Oh." Charlie hid her disappointment, but Destiny had braced herself for it. Almost two months cohabitating, and she'd never managed to gain any traction at putting a controller in the girl's hands. "Um, OK, just let me set my stuff down and maybe take a quick shower, and then... yeah, why not."

Destiny shook her head, adopting a sly grin. "No. This is a now thing. C'mere." Awkwardly, but she hoped a little cutely, she wiggled her chair back to her desk, pulling Charlie along behind her. At her desk, she pulled until Charlie settled into her lap.

"Wow. You must be really excited to see me pew-pew the aliens or whatever." Charlie peered over her shoulder. "You're not really going to make me shoot anything, are you? I'm not really comfortable—"

Destiny was already tapping keys, however, and after a moment, her screen went dark. A moment later, with little swirl of flames, the title screen appeared. The fire graphic spun to the middle of the screen, then exploded into a heart with angel wings, all of it wreathed in flame. It looked like the fire was moving, but really it was just a trick

she'd learned in her intro to graphic design class using a water filter effect to simulate rippling.

HEARTS – the word blossomed on the screen, and then fading in a moment later, *Of FIRE*.

Charlie stared. “Destiny? What is...”

In small script at the bottom of the screen it flashed, *Written by Charlotte Andrews*, and then after a moment, *Designed by Destiny H*.

“I didn’t want my dad’s name on it, so I...” Destiny shrugged.

“What is this?”

Destiny took Charlie’s hand and put it on the mouse, fingers aligned. She clicked on Charlie’s index finger, clicking the left mouse button. The menu appeared, with options like *START NEW GAME*, *CONTINUE*, *LOAD*, *SETTINGS* and so on.

“Did you do this?” Charlie asked, her voice strangely quiet.

“Yeah. Here, just...” She clicked to start a new game, and the fire burned the screen flickering red and orange, and then an image popped up, slightly cartoony but realistic enough to convey its subject matter. It was a woman in a business suit and a fancy hat, standing on the sidewalk in front of what seemed to be a clothing boutique, bags in hand.

It was a bright and sunny day for Scarlotte Andersen, the wealthy CEO of What’s Mine Is Yours charitable foundation. The sort of day where she couldn’t possibly know that her life was about to change forever...

Destiny clicked by proxy again, and the image zoomed in. The woman’s immaculately arranged hair was golden blonde, and she wore a face that was unmistakably Charlie’s.

“Is that me...?”

Destiny nodded. “Uh, huh. I hope you don’t mind, but I fed this program we use for class every picture I could find of you. I’m getting better at posing the model, but there’s still a lot to learn before it gets perfect. Still, I think it got pretty good at spitting out stuff that looks pretty OK. ”

“OK? Destiny, I look unbelievable. Is... is that *your* body?”

Her roommate blushed. “Um, yeah. I guess. I figured, if we’re going to make an adult video game, we’re gonna need big tits. And that way, it’s both of us. You’re not mad are you?”

Charlie clicked on her own this time. The text turned cyan, the font bigger. *You have your own driver, of course, but today you feel like walking*. The image showed Scarlotte stepping off the curb, her ankle bracelet doing a little sparkle animation.

Click. A series of still shots progressed rapidly – Destiny hoped cinematically. A car rounding the corner. A zoom to another shot of the driver fiddling with his radio. back to Scarlotte, now a few feet into the crosswalk, likewise distracted by a text. Zoom

to that – *NEW LAND MINES FOUND IN SOUTHEAST ASIA – WE NEED YOU*, it read – then back out where the car was nearly on top of her. Scarlotte turned, facing the impending catastrophe with horror in her eyes. A thought bubble blossoming with one bubble, two bubbles, three bubbles, then the big one with a thought of three adorable children. (One of them only had eight fingers, but she'd iron that out.) One last shot of Scarlotte, clasping her hands in prayer.

Click. Three rapid-fire stills. A man in the crosswalk, only a silhouette but an impressive one. Him leaping into the air, colliding with Scarlotte, and finally the two of them landing safely back on the sidewalk, his solid black profile hovering atop Charlie's shocked but grateful face. It had taken a *lot* of editing to get the facial expression right on that one.

Click. The same shot, but it faded out the silhouette image and replaced it with the visage of Lawrence Svenster, whose face the girls both knew well. She'd aged it a little, given him a crease or two and a bit of stubble – Spencer often had stubble in their fantasies – but there was no missing who it was meant to be.

The image held through the next handful of clicks through dialogue. Solid red for Scarlotte's voice, royal blue for Lawrence's, cyan for narration.

You saved my life!

I suppose I did. Think nothing of it. Maybe someday you'll save mine?

I can feel those muscles of yours – hard to imagine you'll need any help from my soft, fragile, womanly body, stranger.

The name's Lawrence Svenster. Are you all right? And forgive my saying so, but you're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen.

Scarlotte felt the same way, but she was too shy to say it back. What would her children think of her if they could see her panting with lust over this total stranger? Thank goodness none of the passerbyers could see how unbelievably wet he was making her pussy.

Click. A shot up the skirt. The woman wasn't wearing underwear, and the folds of her pussy were glistening thanks to a little graphic overlay.

"Destiny, this is..."

Destiny braced herself. When Charlie didn't finish the sentence, she tried. "I know, it's really dumb, but I–"

"Did you turn my story into a video game?"

"Yeah, but it's nowhere near done yet. It's only about three quarters through chapter one, but I–"

Charlie threw her lips at Destiny so hard the chair sprawled over backwards. She squealed in surprise, made sure Destiny was OK, then resumed kissing.

"You like it?"

"I love it. I love it, I love it, I love it! I love you."

“Well there’s more to it. Here, let me...”

Destiny sat her chair back upright. She’d figured Charlie would fetch hers, but instead she settled back into Destiny’s lap. The svelte blonde laughed and clapped and purred through scene after scene. Chapter one was mostly just Spencer – Svenster – rescuing her, then her pretending to thank him when it was clear she was just too horny for him not to beg for fuck after fuck after fuck. Charlie giggled delightedly at seeing her own dialogue, lifted nearly verbatim, and positively gushed with excitement over the attention to detail on the models in the sex scene.

“Oh my god, it even got that little mole by your pussy. How did it even...?!”

“I had to edit it in myself. You, um, mentioned it enough times I thought you’d want it included. Though I guess it’s *our* mole there, your face, my bod. Though the butt’s more yours than—”

Charlie tackled her again, though this time not to the floor. “Is this why you put up that privacy screen? So you could surprise me?”

Destiny nodded, blushing. “Yeah.”

“Please tell me there isn’t really a game called Children of Hell.”

She laughed. “Definitely not.” She’d made up a title that she felt sure would keep Charlie from popping around unasked, describing the fictional game as a cartoony romp through the fires of hell, putting down all the bad kids who’d been sent there. She’d been prepared to describe the Gore Galore mod she was testing for it, but the title alone had been enough to deter her softie of a roomie.

“You are so talented. You’re going to make so many people so happy. How did you even learn to do this? We’ve been at college for not even half a semester. I feel like I’ve barely learned anything, and you’re over here churning out something as amazing as *this!*”

“Hey, you’re the one who wrote it. I just made a program paint what you described. You did the hard part.”

“Pretty sure Spencer is the ‘hard part.’” The girls fell to giggling.

A few hours later the girls were nearly asleep, after Charlie had played through the available content another half a dozen times, gushing over fresh minutiae each time, after she’d gotten invested enough to start making suggestions for how they could make it even better, after the girls collapsed in sweaty heaps in their respective bunks masturbating themselves silly as they blurted out pieces of freshly inspired fantasies back and forth between their bunks. Not an uncommon occurrence, but there was fresh vigor to it that night.

“A chapter where Scarlotte convinces Spencer to fuck her and her secretary at the same time.”

“One where they go to a land mine sight, somewhere tropical and gorgeous, and he saves her by charming this huge snake, and he fucks her while it slithers around his big fucking buff shoulders.”

“I’m feeling a line where Scarlotte’s like, ‘Titfucking? Mr. Svenster, I’ve never heard a term so vulgar. But... what is it? Do you think I would like it?’”

“I wonder if we release it to the Haven if we could get other girls to volunteer to let me use their images. I want to make him fuck Tori, too.”

“She’d love that. Mmm, I’d love that. Oh! Or one where three anonymous blonde triplets who don’t quite look like the you-know-who’s, and they try to seduce him but he just blows them off to come fuck us while they watch and play with their pussies and ask if they can join in but we’re like *no. Bad.*”

“A scene where Spencer sneaks into our bedroom in the night and we wakes up with his cock buried all the way inside his Scarlotte.”

“He couldn’t help himself. He needed you.”

“He needed us.”

And so on, until they got tired of coming. Or, more precisely, until they got too tired to come. Destiny’s eyes were closed, though the smile of true and well-earned self-satisfaction lingered on her lips.

“Destiny? Are you still awake?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you excited for fall break?”

“No.”

“Do you want to come home with me? I want you to meet my family, and my friends.”

“Uh, why?”

Charlie was quiet a moment. “Because you’re my best friend. And because, um, I know home isn’t, um, always happy for you.”

She didn’t say that her only prospect of a ride home, way out in the boonies where she came from, was Michael. They’d talked around their plans enough that it was an established fact. Buses didn’t go where she lived. Highways either. It was a place the world avoided, and having now seen a different part of the world, Destiny understood why. “You don’t have to rescue me or anything. I can handle it for one week. And I can deal with him.”

Suddenly Charlie’s face was hovering to the side of her bed. “I know you can. But you don’t have to.”

“Charlie...”

“Please? Just this once. If you don’t like it, you don’t have to come with me for winter break. I mean, spring, you’re mine, but...”

Destiny giggled. “What happens on spring break?”

Charlie waggled her eyebrows playfully. "It stays on spring break, that's what."

"Devil incarnate, you."

"So come home with me, and make me behave."

"I don't think there's a person on this earth who could make *you* behave." She pursed her lips. "Besides the one."

"I'd be so good for him," Charlie concurred. "But please? Please please please please please?"

"It wouldn't be too weird? I'm not used to... people. And you have a *lot* of friends."

"We have really good internet..."

Destiny laughed, then leaned in and kissed her roommate's forehead. "OK. I'll go."

Charlie beamed, and without a word, climbed into bed with her and assumed her preferred place as the littler spoon. That they were naked bothered them not at all. They'd each learned that they preferred to have nothing between them.

Two days later, Charlie's dad picked them up in front of the Higgins center building. He was his daughter's father, sweet and funny and she didn't have to worry what she wore around him. On their ride back to school a week later, he told her he hoped she'd consider coming back in the winter.

Destiny's mom had never called to ask why she hadn't come to her house for break. (Destiny couldn't think of the place as "home" any more.) She'd emailed, but it was to forward her a news article about her cousin getting arrested for another drunken disorderly.

"I don't want to impose," she said, praying he'd tell her she wasn't.

"Are you kidding? Charlie's been bugging me for a sister since she was three."

The girls locked eyes. Charlie nodded seriously.

"Um, then sure. I'd like that."

"HAPPY HALLOWEEN!" the Hotties cried out in unison.

Spencer arrived. Their floor shirts, believed to be long gone, were returned. Charlie scored one for each of them, S for Destiny and XS for her small. Their eyes met in silent remembrance of the old joke. Destiny's boobs were too big for her shirt, constantly creeping out the bottom, but a size bigger and it would be loose everywhere else. She'd figured, if you were gonna wear a slutty hot shirt, then wear it hot and slutty. Charlie had gotten hers too small as well precisely so she'd have the same problem. She acted like she was just an adorable little pixie in her pixie-sized top, but they'd helped

one another come in those things way too many times to feign innocence with one another.

In fact, they were wearing their own custom-designed shirts that night. Destiny didn't ask how much they'd cost; Charlie had said she'd pay. It was uncomfortable sometimes being a charity case, but Charlie always insisted, and was always happier when she was allowed to do some pampering. Besides, now that the *Hearts of Fire* game was in a better place, Destiny had hopes her new guild of dippy undateable boys would at least be useful to get her back into some tournament winnings.

It was interesting seeing everybody's reactions. It was a printing of the logo she'd designed for the game, but with the heart cut out, the hole framed by a shiny metal heart that really showcased their tits. Some of the girls, the less literary ones, took them as just roommates who'd splurged on cute matching tops, tight and revealing per hot-college-girl norms. The ones who followed Charlie's narrative, however, oohed and aahed and squealed delightedly, gushing about their favorite scenes.

Nobody knew about the game. That was just for her and Charlie. And maybe Spencer, if they could ever find a way to show it to him that didn't make them look like stalkers. He was notoriously chill about the Hotties' flirtations, so maybe someday. She and Charlie liked to roleplay the blowjob scene in chapter five on one of their dildo, masturbating (themselves or each other, depending on how horny they were that afternoon) while they jointly fellated the cock that they agreed was most Spencerly. Huge, menacing almost, but cast in a very friendly seeming orange-yellow plastic.

They made it a point to show them to Tori. She was a silent fan of Charlie's work, DMing her accolades rather than expressing it in #ra-writes on the Haven. Tori pried her eyes off of Spencer after a moment, grinning in immediate recognition. "Hearts of Fire! You two look amazing!"

"Right? Destiny did the logo herself! Doesn't it look incredible?"

"But did you bring enough for everyone?" Tori joked. Then glanced at Spencer, then back to her friends. Then Spencer again, and back. They couldn't blame her. Last night, the pre-Halloween party had started something incredible. The choker movement, with girls throwing themselves at him to earn a place in the resistance or whatever, had given them hope. Sure, most of those stories the girls told, secret meetings in the bathtub and sucking him off in the shower, was probably bullshit. (Two four-letter words.) Still, if even some of them were true, there was hope that maybe Spencer's boss was finally getting off his back. By now, most of the girls believed Andi's story about that insanely hot pity fuck she'd landed after her douche nozzle boyfriend from home dumped her. If he was whipping it out as a community development tool, then there was hope for any of them. Very exciting times.

"Says the girl who took everybody's shirts in the first place!" Destiny chided jokingly.

Before Tori gave another rote apology – seemed like anybody who was still annoyed with it only had to look her way to get one – Destiny reached around and pulled the string on her sex-toy costume.

“Wanna come on my titties?!” chirped Tori, then laughed. “I can’t believe I’m wearing this. Been so pissed off at him, and now I can’t remember why. We really did get lucky with him, didn’t we.”

Destiny and Charlie didn’t comment that Tori seemed to be unconsciously rubbing at her pussy. “I think we got really lucky with our governor, too.”

“This is such a fun party, by the way, Tori.” Charlie bounced giddily. “I don’t know how you put this together on such short notice! Did Katrina and Spencer help?”

“Nah, just me. I figured after last night, and really after everything we’ve been through, I could just tap a few girls who...” Her eyes slow drifted around the room until settling on that same predictable point. “Who... blowjob...”

Charlie snapped her fingers. “I bet a few girls who blowjob would make a fun party, too, Little Miss One-Track-Mind. Rub it on our faces, why don’t you.”

“Mm, I’ll ask him. Maybe he would rub...” Tori’s head lolled to the side.

Destiny laughed. “You guys are so bad. But seriously, cool party. Hot enough to be like a for real party, but Hottie enough to not have to feel self-conscious about all the... yeah.” She shook her head at where Peyton and Sydney were... yeesh. It was definitely a new era on Higgins 3.

Tori smiled. “Well tell your friends; I’m up for re-election next August. Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m gonna make sure he doesn’t need anything.” She licked her lips and started weaving through the crowd, but they both heard her mutter a sultry repetition. “Anything.”

The roommates smiled after her. It felt so good to see the two not just pretending to get along, but actually bonding again. And his dick must have tasted amazing to see how Tori was so preoccupied it. Cum-drunk, she’d heard a guy in her guild say the other day. Destiny wondered if Charlie had acted like she was mad at him, if he’d have fucked her until her brains dribbled out her cunt, too.

Not Charlie, though. She couldn’t even pretend to be mean.

Before long, the two made it a point to drift over to the guy when he wasn’t distracted by one of the games. Or “games,” some of them. Exhibits was more like it. Casey was reapplying that whip cream bikini of hers every ten minutes. She was going to wind up diabetic if she kept sucking that stuff down.

Spencer smiled as he turned their way. There was no pretending his cock wasn’t trying to burst through his pants. Destiny remembered trick-or-treating as a kid, when her dad would drive her to town in her costume and chauffeur her to the good neighborhoods with the big candy bars. She’d score enough to last her weeks. Tonight

was even better. Instead of candy, they'd have pics and videos of this boy to leave them creaming for days.

"Look at you two – matching outfits. Very nice, both of you. I feel bad for the guys at whatever party you'd been planning to wear those to."

"There's nowhere we'd rather be," said Destiny.

Spencer nodded, but it was slow, somber for a party. He spoke softly, for their ears alone. "You know, I'm not supposed to have favorites, but..." He pulled the girls into a gentle hug. They each melted into his arms, embracing him back fiercely. He went on in a whisper, their ears side by side as they were each raining kisses on his cheek. (He hadn't said not to, and after what some of the girls had gotten away with...)

"I don't think they know how lucky they are to have you two."

Destiny stopped sucking on her side of his neck long enough to ask, "Why?"

He lifted his chin, granting them better access. Her hand found his cock, where Charlie's had already was. "Because. While everybody was looking out for themselves and what they wanted, here you were, looking out for each other."

"What do you mean?" purred Charlie as she sucked on his ear. Fuck he tasted good, Destiny thought. Better than in the hundred times she'd pleased herself just imagining him in her mouth.

"I, um, know about your, you know, crush. Crushes," he murmured awkwardly.

"You'd better by now," giggled Destiny. They'd staged having sex to mess with her guild only hours earlier, Charlie joining in when she walked in on it. They hadn't been subtle with him.

"And I know you were there last night, saw me and Tori, and Casey..."

"And Katrina," added Charlie, licking up his cheek. "I'm so proud of you for making everything right with them, by the way. You did good."

"Right. But you two, you kept your heads down. Supported your friends, showed kindness and empathy. Especially to one another. You should know, Charlie, when I was making the rounds today, catching up with all the stuff I let slip through the cracks, Destiny and I, we..."

He didn't resist as Destiny pulled down his zipper, nor as Charlie undid the button. "I would have, you know," he said, directed this time at the redhead and her big tits. *Pat them*, she thought, barely suppressed a giggle as she wondered how that old thought had resurfaced out of nowhere.

"I know. But like I said—"

"She said not without you, Charlie."

The roommate's eyes met around his chiseled jawline. "He... offered? And you...?"

Destiny shrugged. Then kissed him – but only on her side of his mouth. His cock, they shared evenly, stroking the length of him. "Yeah. I mean, I wouldn't even want to without you."

Charlie's big soft eyes were suddenly watery, and before they knew it all three mouths met in the middle, one big vortex of lips and tongues, kissing and licking with manic adoration.

Destiny caught sight of Toni, off to the side, recording it all. She'd have to thank her later.

"Whatever happens, you two promise me you'll keep taking care of each other, OK?" His lips were free to talk. They'd fallen into one another's arms, Destiny teasing Charlie's hair as the girl massaged her tits in return.

"Always," murmured Charlie.

"Always," echoed Destiny.

He observed their feverish makeout from only inches away; so was everybody else, getting their first taste of the roommates' true feelings for one another. Who cared. Ms. Sadler had been right. No more worrying about anybody who didn't love her and support her and lift her up.

"You two have fun," he said, but before he could slip away Destiny caught him with a handful of cock.

"Um, Spencer?"

"What can I do for you, Destiny?" He held his position, uninterested in escape.

"You're a boy, right?"

"Unless that's somebody else's penis in your hand, I'm gonna go with yes."

Charlie already saw where she was going, eyes sparkling. She closed her hand over Destiny's. "And boys like video games, right?"

"Sure. I mean, sometimes, yeah. I'm not really good at them or anything, but—"

"Would you like to play one with us later?"

Charlie nodded. "Play with us, Spencer. You'll like it. I promise."

"How about I stop by tomorrow and you show me," he said. "Is it a shooter?"

Destiny's roommate threw her head back and laughed. "Oh, you'll shoot something all right!"

"If you're good, it even has multiple endings," cackled Destiny.

Spencer rolled his eyes at their transparent double meanings. "I'll stop by. But go easy on me."

"Oh don't worry – I've been getting more into co-op games these days. We're all on the same team."

Charlie and Destiny were laughing their way back into each other's mouths as he extricated himself with a chuckle. "GG WP, roomie."

Charlie held her face softly in two hands. She knew the acronym. She wasn't just the hot gamer girl's roommate, after all. She was the hot gamer girl's BFF for life. "What can I say? I've been watching the MVP in action."