

The RA, Volume IV

An Anthology

ISAAC BYRNE



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By Isaac Byrne

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First Edition, 2023

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Part One: The Influencer's Tale

“Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug!” chanted the revelers at the kegstand. Erik “Ogre” Strewe guzzled what didn’t rain up his inverted face as his buddies, once teammates, now former teammates, propped him up. *Former*. Everyone former everything. Toni raised her cup to the guy. She didn’t like him, really, but she was glad to have known him. He’d asked her to prom – only a couple months ago, but it already seemed another lifetime. Toni hadn’t known what to say. She had a boyfriend; she and Erik weren’t even friends; again, she didn’t like him.

“Would you just hurry up and say no already? Fuck!” he’d snapped.

“I’m sorry. I, um, have a boyfriend.” The easiest of her excuses. No sense explaining they’d already agreed to break up after graduation (i.e. earlier this afternoon). They had fairly distinct friend groups, and both said they wanted to spend these final months with them before people went their separate ways, college or jobs or whatever. Really, Toni knew the sonofabitch would cheat on her again as time dwindled down and the opportunity to fuck girls he’d never get a chance to fuck again ran out.

“I know. Just... yeah, Chris is kind of an asshole. But I get it. I just had to ask, you know? You’re, like, the prettiest girl I’ve ever seen, so I... Anyway, this was stupid. I’m sorry.”

That was that. No sweet parting words by her, just an awkwardly blurted compliment that was mostly just “I think you’re hot and maybe this is my last chance to try to impress and/or sleep with you.” But that’s not what he’d said, and there were enough guys out there who couldn’t take no for an answer that this encounter with one who flatly demanded it was a gift. Instantly forgiven, if not quite forgotten. Toni tried to see the good in people.

It was why she’d come to this party in the first place. Niece had wanted to have a small get-together, just the five of them who’d been friends forever. Toni was surprised she hadn’t felt the same. She’d never much liked high school. Teachers who treated them alternately like toddlers or employees; handsy, creepy boys splashing their testosterone all over the girls; so much tedium, so much pointlessness. Mitochondria and the quadratic formula and subordinate clauses and goddamn pep rallies for the goddamn Academic Decathlon state runners-up, the only ones who might have any use for all that stuff.

Brianne had shown Toni a meme during the graduation ceremony earlier that afternoon, a pic of some kids playing the recorder with some text block complaining they couldn’t do their taxes. (Toni wasn’t on social media, so her friends like to force their posts in her face. She’d thumbs-up them and tap their noses; they called it Toni’s Like Button.) Her parents had assured her that taxes weren’t that hard, but the meme

had still spoken to something inside her. She was glad to be headed to college in the fall. Maybe there folks would be more focused on the real world. Maybe.

Still, tonight had a chance of being... something. It was in all those teen movies, after all. Whether it was the last party of the summer after graduation or the one kicking the summer off, it was a rite of passage. Toni had seen *Eurotrip* a hundred times, mostly owing to her raging crush on Matt Damon's punk rocker character. She'd actually lost her virginity while he lip synced "Scottie Doesn't Know." (She'd only had to rewind to the start of the scene once. Chris hadn't noticed.)

Ogre finally toppled, his friends too drunk to support his bulk. All around, the lights from dozens of cell phones recording the event like they were at a Rihanna concert lowered. Toni rolled her eyes. "Can you believe them?"

"They're football jocks, Tone." Niece shrugged. "Today's officially their last day to revel in their snack size glory days before it becomes unforgivably pathetic. Let 'em have it."

Toni shook her head. "No, not the dudes. Everybody recording it. That Jennica v. Danica brawl in the driveway earlier, I get. But so much of it is just... nothing. I saw some of Karla's friends recording her *walking through the front door*. Like it was some memory they were going to cherish or something."

Alexis gestured impatiently as she down her own contribution to keg depletion. "People record stuff. So what? Nobody's going to tie you down and make you like and subscribe."

"It's not me. It's the *principle*. They're all so busy recording things, they're not actually *doing* anything. Then they record themselves doing nothing! Their friends record them recording themselves doing nothing! It's this fractal spiral into social oblivion and we act like it's our generation's hula hoop instead of the death of human culture! Life is for *living*, you guys, not just being."

Her friends were used to outbursts like this from Toni, especially once she had a few beers in her. She got two eyerolls, two evaded eyelines, and then Brianne simply snapped a picture of her mid-rant. Toni had to hand it to her; that was a solid one.

"Dramatic much?" mumbled Niece. "Come on, Toni, it's a party. This could be the last time we see most of these people. You were the one who said you wanted to spend one last night experiencing all this dumbassery."

"And I am."

"But are you? Because all those people who recorded that keg stand, they have that forever. They're invested in their surroundings, you know? But you? You're already on the way to forgetting it ever happened."

"Do you even hear yourself? That's my whole point! Some staged, douchey stunt that you know he only did so he'd get tagged and liked and heart-emojied or whatever. And you think my life would be richer if I had a record, so I could watch it again

someday? I barely wanted to see it once, live, much less relive it. It's just going to be something his future HR department finds at the bottom of his instagram page when they give the mouse wheel a hard spin to make sure he's not a nazi sympathizer or whatever."

"All I know is you better get with the times before you run off to Lakeview this fall." Niece pulled her into a tight hug, and soon it was all five of them. "I don't think I can handle not seeing you all every day."

"I love you guys," said someone, and it didn't matter who because the argument was done and they were just lifelong friends whose paths were about to split forever. Then they were all saying it, all crying in a circle. The bonfire out by the tree line refracted in a million little sparkles in the tears in her eyes. That, and the arms of her friends held off the cold and dark of night.

"And see? None of you is recording this," Toni laughed through the choking tears. "Which only proves my—"

Niece pressed her forehead to her oldest, bestest friend's. "Shut up and let us have this your way, OK? I know I won't ever forget this."

"Can you believe this traffic? My god, the state ought to be paying *us* taxes to drive in this. Like sardines!"

"Oh my god, would you just shut up about the traffic already, Dad!" Toni exclaimed from the back seat. "I swear, I will get out and walk the rest of the way!"

"Probably beat us there," her dad grumbled.

Her mom gave his arm a little squeeze. "He's doing his best, dear. Remember, *you're* about to go on this grand adventure and *we're* going to go home to your brother and Nibs and an empty chair at the dinner table. After today we won't see each other for... for..."

"Twenty-four days, Mom. Just a few weeks plus a few days, Mom," Toni finished softly. Her mom was not taking the departure of her oldest child well. Not today, anyway. Until that morning, she'd said she wasn't coming, that somebody had to stay home and keep an eye on her brother and the dog, like he was six instead of fifteen. Toni's dad had been a step ahead though, anticipating his wife's regret for sitting this out, and had arranged for Aunt Sofia to babysit for the day. It meant that instead of making the four-hour drive to Lakeview in the front seat, basking in AC with her own cuprest, Toni was wedged in beside her boxes sweating her butt off and dreading meeting her future classmates looking like she'd crawled out of a gutter. Pictures would most assuredly be taken. She might not be on social media, but like it or not, today, as

thousands of freshmen descended on Lakeview University, she would wind up on social media.

Toni was glad her mom was here, though. She still remembered her mom dropping her off on her first day of kindergarten. They'd started this together; they'd end it together.

"See, dear? Twenty-four days. Just in time for Meemaw's birthday. Won't that be nice?" Toni's dad smiled reassuringly.

It was enough to stave out this latest round of tears. "Look, there's a scenic overlook up ahead. Why don't we stop there, stretch our legs a little, and let poor Toni breathe. Are you OK back there, honey?"

"OK? I'm *fabulous*." Toni beamed. Her mother reached her hand back with some difficulty. Toni gave it a sweaty-palmed squeeze.

It took them almost half an hour from the signpost to the actual scenic overlook. Only one more outburst from her dad. (Toni had opted not to walk.) All agreed, it was a heck of a view – a broad valley, glittering in the late morning sun with a spider web of creeks that ended in a small lake, blue mountains rising in the background. There were no parking spaces, but people were just parking along the drive. It was cramped, but Toni's dad wasn't wrong about the volume of traffic. All agreed a little squirming around was worth it for a break and a little splendor.

Toni's mom insisted on pictures. As always. She was as bad as Toni's friends – Toni's whole self-absorbed generation – and then some. She was one of those people who checked in at restaurants on facebook and took pictures of any meal that cost more than \$20, even if it was a chain. Dad made his usual crack about how he didn't get why his beautiful daughter didn't just demand a modeling contract, and instead wanted to blow fifty grand on an education she could get at home for a buck fifty in late fees at the public library. (Every member of the family had a crush on one Matt Damon character or another. Toni liked to squick him with jokes about *The Bourne Pregnancy*.)

Her mom took some shots of Toni with Dad. Toni suggested one parents only, since they'd have to get used to her not being in pictures. Mom started to cry, obviously, but Toni had done it low-key on purpose so she'd have an excuse to hug and be hugged. In a few hours she'd have to be bringing her A-game, moving in and making new friends and figuring out what the heck a college girl even did all day. She needed to start getting the goodbyes out of her system before she wound up a blubbery mess. The farewell walk with Nibs that morning had already almost broken her.

They weren't the only huggers. Some of the other people there were in her same situation, she supposed, a parent or two with a kid around her own age, cars filled to the brim. Lakeview was still pretty far, but it was a big school, so even more than a hundred miles down the interstate, the echoes of freshman move-in day were audible. Toni studied the other kids – young adults? that term somehow sounded even more kiddish –

as they traversed their own physical and emotional journeys from past to future. Lots of bleary smiles, lots and lots of pictures.

To think, her next best friend could be standing right over there. Her future boyfriend – or husband, even! Today was a day things started. Toni supposed, for once, that it might be worth taking the time to record. They had lakes and mountains at home to see whenever she felt like it, but home didn't have this moment.

Niece and Alexis were moving to their respective universities today, too, to meet their own new best friends. It was a bitter thought, but they'd still see each other on breaks, summers. For a couple years, at least. Probably. She'd see her friends again soon, though, if only online. They'd finally sat her down and made her, and over the past few days, had made a big dramatic production of tagging her in a million old posts and photos, some going all the way back to elementary school. Toni had promised to post at least once a month. Last night, they'd had a teary farewell get-together, and used one of Toni's farewell gifts, an ironic selfie stick, to get a picture.

As for their huddle at the graduation party, Toni still remembered even without the record. It was only that she'd forgotten she remembered.

“Holy *shit* are you pretty. Are you seriously the same Toni I talked to on the phone last month?”

Toni almost banged her head on the top bunk as she rose to greet her new roommate. Thankfully, the girl had arrived when she wasn't crying over missing her parents. It had started about the second she got back to the room after hugging them goodbye in the lot, and lasted until about thirty seconds ago.

“Um, yep, that's me.”

“Turn around.”

Toni arched an eyebrow.

“I'm serious, turn the fudge around.”

Not quite sure how to handle this but not wanting to torpedo a first impression, she humored the girl. Why she was making such a fuss over Toni's looks when she herself was freaking gorgeous, Toni didn't know. Toni knew she was hot; she wasn't blind or deaf. Still, she knew she was a little more niche, short and skinny with boobs that were unarguably disproportionate to her tiny frame. “Shortstack,” she'd heard some pervwads call it back home. She was rather vain about her crystal blue eyes, though the bright red hair was a dye job, and an accident she'd correct once she found a good salon hereabouts. Too much Wendy and not enough Jessica Rabbit to suit her. It made her freckles pop in a way Toni didn't like.

Her roommate – Theresa on the letter from Lakeview Housing & Residence Life, but she'd called herself Terri during that phone call – was plain old hotness. Tall, curvy in every single right place, long gorgeous hair, big boobs that were the exact right amount too big. She didn't have freckles. She didn't even have moles that Toni could spot. She wasn't a hundred percent sure this girl had pores.

Terri shook her head in disbelief, then looked around the room. "You are... wow. Delish. This is gonna be a heck of a good fit, I just know it."

Toni smiled the smile she'd been practicing for weeks now. "Yeah, same. And, um, just in case you didn't notice, you've got some 'wow' going on yourself."

Terri's smile said that this was not news to her. "Right? And hey, I guess since we're sharing this five by five dungeon, I'll find out soon enough if the carpets match the drapes."

"Uh...!"

"I'm kidding!" Terri laughed, patting Toni on the chest, much more familiarly than she liked. "Sorry, I come on strong."

"Just as long as you come on me, Mama!" said a burly boy as he rounded the corner, carrying not one, not two, but three boxes, each with "TERRI" written in Sharpie on the side.

"You know it, Daddy," Terri said, laughing. She dodged his attempt to pat her behind, and like that, the boy disappeared back into the hall.

"Is that your... boyfriend?" Toni wished she hadn't sounded so dubious. It was only that Terri was gorgeous, the kind of gorgeous that absolutely had made a stop somewhere near campus for her to touch up her hair and makeup. Or she was a townie, maybe. Nobody looked *that* good after a drive like the one Toni had been through that day. She'd had time to freshen herself up, but the prospect of taking a shower while the floor was flooded with male residents, dads, brothers and boyfriends was far too daunting. As for this particular boy, he was a three. A girlfriend's four, maybe. In Toni's experience, girls like *this* absolutely didn't date boys like *that*.

"Who, Ryan?" The girl threw her head back and laughed. "Oh *god* no. He's just a simp. I told him if he drove me to campus and did all my moving, I'd pretend to be his girlfriend for the day, that's all. Screw a dozen trips up and down four flights of stairs in this heat, ya know?"

Simp? The boy hadn't looked handicapped, Toni thought. Still, absolutely not a nice word to call someone with a disability. Maybe not much of one, if he was with-it enough to drive? They must be friends, though, if he was doing her all these favors, so maybe it was just their comfort zone. Some of her friends – her old friends – did that, called each other bitches and stuff. It was a thing.

“Oh. Um, well... yeah. I hope you don’t mind, but I put my sheets on the bottom bunk. I figured since I’m, ya know, short. I didn’t know if you’d be tall, but I figured I could switch. If you minded.”

“Hmm. Can’t say as I love top bunk either, but I’ll bet you can find a way to make it up to me.” Terri winked.

What was *with* this girl? Toni liked to think of herself as open-minded, but this was a bit much. “Are you flirting with me? I don’t mind or anything. Like, that’s totally fine with me if you’re a lesbian, or bi or whatever, but I’m actually straight. So.”

If she’d laughed at the idea of that poor simpleton boy Ryan being her boyfriend, Terri howled at that, then patted the front of her skirt. “As an arrow, my bazoomy roomie. Like I said, I just come on strong. I wasn’t going to ask you to do some hashtag experimentation with me or anything. But I’m a content creator, see. And you, my dear, are what old men pretending to be kids call ‘clickbait.’”

“I’m what?” Toni knew the term, but she knew it from news sites. Inflammatory headlines, celebrities with opinions, people in circumstances you weren’t in doing things in their circumstance you wouldn’t do.

“Freckled, redheaded, blue-eyed, I’m guessing F cupped shortstack?”

There it was. She really didn’t like that term. Toni didn’t think of herself as a feminist, but referring to someone by their height and bust seemed pretty far the other direction. She forced that smile, just like in rehearsals. “I’m, um, not really big on, you know, social media. Try to live in the moment and all, you know?”

This declaration only served to confuse Terri, though. “Are you kidding me? You’re ten thousand clicks in a top with even a little cleavage.”

Toni didn’t generally like to show cleavage. She’d splurged a little today – OK, a lot – because it was the first day of college and if she was going to have to endure guys staring at them all the time, for once she’d try to get some mileage out of them to help meet people, maybe get invited to a party or something. (She’d change into something more her usual style before she posted anything for her friends, though, that was for sure.) Regardless, if she was following half of what this girl was saying, Toni wasn’t about to solicit wardrobe advice from some attention-starved wannabe “instagram model” – a term for which there was literally no criteria, Toni had often pointed out. Brianne’s *dog* had over a thousand followers, for crying out loud, mostly because of Brianne’s habit of posing next to her, squatting in short dresses.

“I’ll, ah, take that as a compliment. I actually don’t do much social media. Not really my thing. Not a judgment, though!” Toni said, unintentionally making sure it sounded like one.

She had Ryan to thank for getting her out of that awkward moment, as he returned then with another load. This time it was a laundry hamper filled with clothes,

and another two boxes sitting atop it. “How many bikinis does one girl need, Mama? I couldn’t help but notice—”

Suddenly Terri’s smile was gone, her dark eyes darkening. “I know exactly how many there are and what each one looks like. See also: bras; see also: panties. Even the socks. If there is a single item missing I will make sure your mother finds out.”

The hirsute fellow stumbled over the first set of boxes he’d brought up, throwing his weight aside and landing on the hard tile floor rather than on the hamper and boxes he somehow managed to set down gently. “You know, I, um, kinda dropped the hamper in the lot? I’ll just make sure nothing, you know, fell out.”

Terri’s fawning manner returned in an instant. “Thanks, Daddy! Don’t forget to hydrate out there. Otherwise how could I get you nice and sweaty?”

Toni blinked. When had the girl gotten her phone out? Why on earth would she want to record that obsequious comment?

Terri explained, in fact, at least in regards to her second unspoken question. “Part of the deal, he gets to play the part on my feed. Plus, if I do have to rat him out to his real mama, it’ll be nice to let her know he was warned. Creep.”

Toni wished she could be surprised by the notion of not trusting male friends around her underwear, but she wasn’t thirteen any more. “Man. Oh hey, speaking of creepy, did you know we have a guy RA? Not sure what it stands for, but I guess that’s, like, the head guy on the floor.”

Terri frowned, though she managed not to look too annoyed at the suggestion she didn’t know what an RA was. (As for the acronym, she was unsure. The local narc, in effect, from what she’d heard.) Toni had met him already, if only briefly. Long enough that Toni’s parents had both liked him. Mom because he was cute and because he promised to take good care of her, and Dad because of his abiding faith in the character of men with firm handshakes. Toni just liked that Spencer’s smile was notably congenial, and he’d maintained eye contact despite the magnetism of her neckline.

Toni shrugged. “Well, it’s a coed floor. Coin toss, I guess, right?”

“That’s the thing, though. No it isn’t.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve been hovering around here since right around noon, and not one single guy has moved in yet. I’ve been making laps, you know, introducing myself and stuff. Every single room I’ve seen, all girls.”

Since noon? Why was she just now moving in? Later, Toni would find out Terri had been having lunch with her simp – his treat – and adding everybody she could find to her socials, but for now, Toni focused on the news.

Toni cocked her head to the side, mulling it over. “Uh, is that... legal? I mean, I know there’s rules up in here and everything, but there’s gotta be laws too, right?”

“Laws against men and women living in the same building? Won’t my Uncle Nate be pissed. He’s a landlord, sorry, don’t know why I thought you’d assume that. Anyway, not sure what gives here, though. Freaking weird, for sure.”

Toni nodded. “I bumped into him in the hall a little bit ago. He seemed nice. Kind of a looker, too, not gonna lie.”

“You, my ravishing redheaded roommate, are not wrong.” But Terri’s dalliance with flirty alliteration was short-lived. “Still, sucks we don’t have a real coed floor like they told us. Probably fire him or whatever once somebody notices. Plus the doofus misspelled both of our names, I noticed.”

“Yeah, I noticed, too. I met an Andi-with-an-I and an Alexis-who’s-definitely-not-an-Alex while I was moving my stuff up, though, so maybe it’s some kind of prank or something? I don’t know.”

Terri frowned. “Well, whatever. I’m not going to do twosies next to a dude – especially a hottie. And have you seen these bathrooms? I’m *definitely* not gonna shower next to one, not unless he’s shorter than you, Red.”

Suddenly, Terri was at her side, and the phone was out in front of them. Terri’s body was turned toward her, breasts pressed against her arm, her face smiling giddily at the camera. Toni didn’t jump out of the way or anything, but she squirmed back. “Um, what are you doing?”

“What? I just met my super cool new roommate and already gave her her nickname! The world must know!” There was some sarcasm to her tone, but not nearly enough. Was this girl famous? Did she have a million followers – or a hundred? It felt like every girl with a pretty face and a phone was calling herself an “influencer” or “instagram model” or something.

Nothing wrong with being hot, nor even being known for being hot, but don’t do it for the freaking clicks. Have a little dignity, for Pete’s sake.

“I prefer Toni,” she said firmly. “But, um, sure. You can... yeah. Nice to meet you.”

“Say that again.”

“Nice to meet you,” said Toni, only this time the video was recording.

“Nice? Oh it finna be more than jus’ *nice* having you in my bedroom, pritty gurrll!”

The recording ended. Toni made an excuse and fled to the bathroom. She sat on one of the toilets, wondering how obvious it would be to her friends – her *real* friends – that her first ever instagram post originated in a bathroom stall. She was in hell. Her entire home, a room scarcely bigger than her bedroom – her *real* bedroom – and she was trapped inside with a handsy vainglorious wannabe Z-list celebrity who used these dorks, dorks who thought clicking on her bikini shots was a form of friendship, as her personal valets.

Toni snuck in a quick cry. She was just getting to the part where she was telling herself to suck it up and get out there and make friends when Niece DMed her to say the same.

While she was down there, she took a gander at the showers. The walls went well over her head. That boy, the RA, he wasn't *that* tall, was he...? How did he feel about "shortstacks?"

And should she ask him if there was any way to get a new roommate...?

"OK, that was the craziest fucking thing I've ever seen. Am I crazy, or was that *literally* the *craziest* fucking thing you've *ever* seen?!" demanded the dark-haired girl. Joy? Joey? Jo? It was only a few days into college. She was still learning names.

"That was the craziest thing I've ever seen!" agreed Terri emphatically, snatching a bottled water from the bin as they took a place in line. A whole food court, like at the mall, but like, in a dorm. Freaking wild. Toni was glad it was at least across the street. Put all this over in Higgins, and she might just put on that freshman fifteen after all.

"That chick – Quinn – she was, like, insane!" Kendall nodded seriously. "I thought she was going to kill... What's her name? The blonde one?"

"Leigh," supplied Kendall's roommate, a Latina girl almost as short as she was whose name Toni didn't yet know. "We met on move-in day. Don't repeat this, but she seemed kind of... I dunno, bitchy? Like really full of herself. But man, I wouldn't have wished that on her. That was *nuts*."

"In. *Sane*," repeated Jo. Pretty sure Jo.

A sly grin crept onto Terri's face as Kendall put in her order. Toni's high school friends, when they'd had time to text, had been experiencing the same problem making new girl friends. Pretty girls had to put on such a damn show about things. Smiling brightly, laughing loudly, salad after endless goddamn salad. Toni had been a vegan for almost two years now, but apparently these girls hadn't reached the stage in their new affiliation where they could eat an appropriate number of calories in public with each other. For now, the alphas were asserting themselves, assigning the new Lakeview pecking order according to how many eyes trailed after their butts.

"What?" Toni asked of Terri's expression when no one else did.

Terri pivoted to the middle of the pack, leaning in. "Don't front, Red. We're all thinking it. Did you guys *see* that monster?"

There it was, the fit of giggles that was audible throughout the food court.

"I know, right?"

"And it was *hard*. Like rock, concrete, *man-dick* hard, the *whole* time!"

"*E-nor-mous*."

“If they fire him as an RA at least he can make it in porn.”

“The size of my freaking forearm!”

“I don’t know about that but I sure hope it wasn’t too big for the size of my somethin’ else, know what I’m saying?”

That last was Terri. Much as Toni wanted to chide her for being so crude, for one, she didn’t want to be the one who got the reputation as a prude. If she hadn’t already. Besides... Terri was right. That had been the hottest thing she’d ever experienced, including actual sexual encounters that she was herself involved in. Their hot naked RA heroically defending one of them in a tangle of wet slippery violence. Fetishes were awakening in her that she hadn’t even known existed.

“It was like Captain America meets Magic Mike,” she heard herself say, spawning more giggles.

“He definitely looked like he could do it all day,” said Georgia. (Toni had heard her give her name to the food service lady when she put in her order or she wouldn’t have known it.)

The girls ate their dinner, spending most of the meal joking about or else merely describing their favorite parts of the incident. For Toni, it had definitely been this moment where he looked up from the fight and saw everyone was watching, realized how embarrassing it should be, then went back in. It had been so... take charge. Mature. Manly as fuck. A real life knight in shining armor but without the pesky armor. Kendall and Jo agreed that it had been this moment where he’d managed to lift Quinn into the air to pry her off, his back to their audience, how fucking buff he looked. And that ass! Oof. Terri liked when their RA had been bent over, shielding Leigh with his body, how it had looked like they were fucking for a second. Georgia shrugged and said she’d liked the entire thing.

Somewhere in the middle of it all, Toni reflected that she’d only wound up going out to dinner with these girls because they’d all witnessed that fight. Dinner could lead to hanging out later, could lead to becoming friends – all because they’d gotten eyeful of their tasty RA’s cock. What a thing to kick off a friendship!

“I was thinking about dessert,” said Terri only after the girls started standing up to head back to Higgins. “Toni, you mind keeping me company? I’ll share! And I wanted to finish talking about that thing from earlier.”

Did she mean the fight? Toni would be happy to keep talking about that all night. Her brain had been churning out slutty comments faster than she could give voice to them. Without coming across like a total skank, anyway. *I’ll give any one of you \$50 to kick my ass if he’s ever in the stall beside me* was her favorite of them. She’d save that for later. If Terri was keen on discussing something else, though, she didn’t know what. They’d barely seen each other before that. Her roommate apparently streamed in the mornings – meaning she put on a cute outfit with some skin showing and talked to her

camera. For *hours*. The most inane, pointless babble she'd ever heard, white noise for creeps while they leered, probably with the sound off. (Their first morning together, Toni had clocked her at thirty-five minutes on how much she was jonesing for a Capri Sun. *Remember those, ohmygawd you guys just want to see me suck the straw!* *giggle!)

Toni had quickly learned to make herself scarce.

The other girls gave them their privacy, though plans were made to hook up later, maybe try to find an off-campus party or something. Friendships progressing, excellent. Toni followed her roommate out of the dining area and back into the food court. Terri picked out a piece of fruit and a piece of chilled chocolate cake.

"You looked earlier like you were going to drool all over dem titties if you didn't get this," Terri said, grinning.

"Am I supposed to apologize for liking chocolate cake...? Besides, I told you, I'm vegan."

"What? Hey, no – that wasn't an accusation. Sorry. No, I just meant... you looked like you wanted some cake is all. But fruit yourself, Red. "

Toni accepted the apple after a moment and they made their way to the checkout line. "Not many girls on our floor that look like they're big on cake, looks like. Deprivation loves company."

"I dunno, we got a few thicc bitches." This was where Toni's old friends would have added, however unnecessarily, that it wouldn't matter if they did put on weight anyway. Terri's silence on the matter said it all.

"So, did you really want to talk to me, or was this totally a mission of charity?"

"Since I made you pay for it, no charity. I actually did want to talk."

They found their way back to the same table, and strangely, Terri once more sat directly beside her rather than the more logical seat opposite her. It was awkward. It wouldn't have been, maybe, if Terri hadn't blatantly checked her out when she was changing this morning. "Um, maybe I should, like, move over–"

"I did something bad!" blurted Terri. She suddenly slapped her phone down on the table and tapped the white triangle to play a video.

Toni stared. Her conscience hastily attempted a desperate bid to make her look away, but...

"Oh. Oh my god. Oh, my god. You really... Holy... Oh my god. You... You did something... Oh my god. Bad."

Toni licked suddenly dry lips as she watched a surprisingly steady recording of their RA, naked and as erect as the steeple on Toni's church back home, attempted to separate the two warring, equally naked girls.

"How did you even...?"

“Get away with it? That black chick, Tori, I used her big-ass hair to keep that manager lady and that other RA – the stupid hot one? – from seeing me. Besides that, all I had to do was keep in the back. Nobody else was turning around.”

Toni nodded. Tori’s hair indeed blocked a frustrating amount of footage, but what was there... Spencer’s crushingly attractive coworker had been trying to keep people back, but she’d been looking behind her as much as forward. The manager lady hadn’t even managed to strike that balance. Not that Toni blamed her. A fantasy of Spencer as her secretary blossomed and flowered in an instant, beginning with him entering her office and pointing out how stressed she looked, and ending...

“You have to delete this,” Toni said, still staring.

“I know. I absolutely do.” Terri nodded gravely. “Or...”

“Or? No, no or!”

“Or do I have a moral duty to make sure all of our new friends who might have missed out on a historically hot event get to see it, too?”

“What? No way! Terri, I’m serious, you can’t show this to people.” The video ended. Toni hit the replay button – just to see if it was as bad as she thought. Oh fuck. His cock. Spencer’s superhero cock. Oh god.

“But don’t you think it would be weird that half of us got to see it and half didn’t? Dissension in the ranks, you know?”

“Imagine half your school saw you naked. Would you seriously want the other half to see you, out of ‘fairness?’” Terri had been right, it *did* look like they were fucking. Oh god. Oh wow. Oh fuck.

“Hey, if he gets to live on Higgins 3 with all of us and see us walking around in towels or PJs or whatever, surely it’s only fair that the rest of us get to share in seeing him. Right? That’s just math, Red.”

Toni forgot to scowl at this, the third attempt at tonight’s dinner to make that lazy nickname stick. That dye job had been such a dumb decision. Instead, she continued to rewatch. How much was Quinn fighting, and how much was she just rubbing her tits on him? It could be both, she supposed. Toni’s own breasts seldom factored into her fantasies, but there was something appealing in it here. So much friction, and so much slipperiness. “It’s... wrong. Plus, how would you even do it? If you email that out to everybody, somebody’s gonna rat you out and you could probably get in a ton of trouble.”

Terri shook her head. “No. No, see, I’m a let them come to me. I shouldn’t have to ask, but do you know what Discord is?”

Toni nodded at the sight of her RA pushing Quinn up against a wall. His hand slipped a little, and for a moment landed on the girl’s neck. For the first time, Toni wondered if it would be hot to be choked – by the right person, that is. Someone strong, but sensitive. “Discord. Strife. Chaos. Enmity.”

“What? No, not the dictionary—”

“I’m kidding. Yes, I know what the Discord app is.”

Terri let her watch the video on loop as she laid out her idea. A server for the floor. To create a male-free space for the women of Higgins 3. None of the girls they’d talked to or heard griping about it in their floor’s public spaces really liked the situation, having a guy in charge of all these women, but Toni could admit she did really like this particular guy. She’d thought he seemed sweet before this evening, but now? Ugh, her next boyfriend was going to have to really know how to work it if he wanted to compete with her fantasies of all *that*. For the first time in her life, she contemplated finding some random guy and just hooking up. Except some random guy couldn’t slam her against the wall of a shower stall and hold her there by the throat while he accepted her token of gratitude for saving her life.

She appreciated that in this creepy little scheme, Terri at least owned that some of her intentions were self-serving. She was serious about her little streaming hobby. Some of the girls on Higgins 3 had thousands of followers on Instagram and TikTok, she said, so it was a networking opportunity. Plus, it would also be nice to be able to communicate under the radar, share grievances, ask questions, and to bond. It actually sounded like a really good idea. Except...

“Tori already made one. I joined, but it’s like, official. It has rules and stuff, and not just the usual gag order on politics and religion. There’s only like a dozen of us on it so far, but... It feels more like a study hall than a coffee bar, you know? The vibe is off.”

“So you figure if you have this video, you can steal everybody into your cool coffee bar server,” Toni finished for her.

“I mean, kinda? Or maybe have Tori give me some admin powers on hers. Like she can be tech support, and I can be R&D.”

“OK, but like... why are you asking me?”

Terri sliced off a thin sliver from the plastic cake tray and shifted it Toni’s way. It was pointedly disregarded. “Because I think you’ve got it in you to be an influencer. I think the ‘cool’ girls will follow me, at least maybe. But you’ve got this kind of... wholesome, nerdy, my hotness doth not define me vibe to you. I think that’s what some of them will respond to. I tried asking that girl in the end room, Amy, similar kind of serious energy, but she pretty much slammed her door in my face. But you... well you’re on the same side of the door, I figured.” She grinned.

Toni wasn’t sure how to take that. Terri had a knack for describing someone vividly without taking a pro or con side. It definitely didn’t feel like a compliment. “I’m not sure I’m comfortable attaching my name to, um...”

Toni was having a hard time putting words to it. What she meant to say was that repaying a heroic act by sharing a naked video of them without their consent felt morally repulsive. Unfortunately, the sight of her RA sandwiched between the petite but shapely

vixen and the soapy Barbie doll that was Leigh had distracted her. The subsequent scene, once Tori got her damn hair out of the way and the action moved out from behind that bitch RA's attempt at concealing it, featured Spencer standing, hands on hips, cock throbbing in the misty air, as he interposed himself in front of Leigh like a solid wall of delicious man. At that, Toni forgot she'd been speaking at all.

"Help me out, and I'll send you a copy of it right now."

Terri reached out and paused the video. Water beaded all over his smooth, lean muscled chest, his expression nearly as defiant of Leigh's assailant as his cock was of gravity.

"I shouldn't. We would so go to hell for this."

"And I'll let you have the room to yourself while I finish your cake."

Toni sighed. The claw marks on his chest were visible. Maybe even bleeding. Would he have put himself in harm's way for her? Fuck yes he would. He barely knew his girls. Toni had been using the bathroom when it started, those hysterical shrieks, the shower stall door being kicked wide open. She'd seen almost everything. He hadn't hesitated. Maybe she could put her thumb over the part of the screen that showed Leigh's face and imagine...

The greediest parts of her brain twisted themselves in knots supplying justifications. For instance, that Terri would post it anyway no matter what she did. That Toni was no leader, no icon of wholesome whatever, that nothing would be different if she engaged or not. That there were still whispers, loud ones, of pushing to have Spencer fired and replaced with a girl, whispers that this video would go a long way towards silencing.

Besides, she already had a memory of it, so what was the difference in getting to remember it more vividly?

Also, how long would it take Terri to eat that cake?

"What do you need me to do?"

"Oh my gawsh, thank you buttsurfer! That's so generous! You guys, can I get a round of TerriHearts in the chat? Three gifted subs! Thank you thank you thank you!"

Aside from the username buttsurfer, it was words she'd heard from Terri a dozen times that morning. And every morning for the past three days. She'd get tomorrow off only because it was a Tuesday and Terri had an early class. Then again, so did she, so not like it would allow her to sleep in.

These past couple weeks had been grating, big-time. To be clear, she didn't *hate* Terri. She just hated what Terri was. Everything about her was superficial and calculated and with this air like if you didn't see the world in the same amoral, transactional way

that she did, you were some kind of chump. Or “simp,” as she now correctly understood the term. Not that Terri ever used it, not since that first day, but Toni had lurked on her roommate’s stream several times, just to see what the other side of the incessant dialogue was like, and... fuck.

How could any guy think any woman could ever respect such blatant, fawning, shallow, public servility? They must just not care about having an actual shot. Maybe these lonely guys were aware they were sacrificing their dignity with their cash. Toni couldn’t even pity the creeps. Anybody with money to burn helping their fellow pervs watch some barely nineteen-year-old girl bounce and giggle ad-free was a testament to what was wrong with their whole generation. The past several generations, if she was even close to estimating the ages of some of those gross dudes.

Plus, Terri kept getting bolder about it. Toni’s sense was that she’d been a pretty big ho before coming to Lakeview, scaled it back so as not to totally freak out her roommate, then let herself grow incrementally sluttier until she was back to normal. That was her way, after all, her behaviors forming not a personality but a strategy.

Saturday she’d started her stream with wet hair and a towel – hair Toni had seen her wetting in the bathroom sink, and the “water” on her chest above the towel was fucking baby oil. She apologized for not being ready on time, insisting she’d had to run back to her room from the shower, when in fact she’d been sitting in her chair checking to make sure the oil was even for twenty minutes when the stream went live. Then she stepped off camera but made sure to change (she was already wearing underwear) where her viewers could see her silhouette through the sheet she’d erected around her “work station,” as she called it.

(“Oh my god, you guys saw that? Oh frick, I’m so embarrassed! I should’ve run an ad break I guess, huh. Oh thank you, ‘trebutchet’ – am I saying that right? Thank you for the sub!”)

Simps. Ryan hadn’t been mentally retarded like Toni had first thought, just stupid and profoundly uncurious.

At least there was the sheet. She had Spencer to thank for that. Toni hadn’t been looking to rock the boat, but when he came around to do those roommate agreements, he’d sensed her hesitation on one of the questions. Terri had been treating the whole thing like a joke – she’d said she was fine letting Toni borrow clothes any time unasked, *including underwear*, just to get a rise out of him. Toni had played along, not wanting to look curmudgeonly. Even so, there had been a question about privacy concerns, and while it sounded like it was more about alone time, it had started a conversation. Toni had hesitated at first. Pissing off her charismatic roommate, a self-proclaimed influencer already friends with the entire floor (at least on social media)... It had smacked of the potential for social suicide. She was meeting people in classes, but there was no denying that Higgins 3 was the golden elevator to popularity, a home base for the girls everybody

wanted to be with and get with. Spencer, though, he'd taken the time and made her feel safe being open and honest, and by the time it was over Terri had agreed she'd prefer to have a little backdrop, too. They'd high-fived over it. So at least now she didn't have to look at all those fake smiles and skanky outfits.

She just had to listen to them.

As quietly as possible – Terri got pretty pissy if Toni made noise that interfered with her stream – she hopped down from her bunk and skulked out of the room. Hopped down, because before the sheet went up, she'd found out the hard way that most of her bed was in the frame of Terri's camera. So a few hundred random weirdos got to see her wake up, yawn, stretch, bend over with her butt in the air trying to see where she'd left her flip flops so she could go take a shower. At least she hadn't been stupid enough to drop her towel for them when she got back. No, Terri warned her then. Terri's so-called "clickbait roommate" might be a handy prop to have, but nudity meant demonetization.

Toni headed for the lounge, again. She didn't like it in there. People came and went at random; the couches were kind of uncomfortable, the fabric coarse and the padding inadequate; those triplets were right next door with their condescending looks, each of them just a Terri on steroids; plus it had kind of a painty smell from that upperclassman girl who was always down there with her canvas. It was fun watching Jordyn at her easel, but sitting there staring at a pretty girl performing her routine felt too much like her dorm room. If streaming were like *that*, it might not be so bad.

At least the lounge was respite from Terri and her simps.

The lounge door was propped open, allowing a pleasant late summer breeze to waft down the hall. Kim was in there, tablet in hand. Toni hadn't meant to disturb her, but she set it down and waved on her own. "Hey... Toni, right?"

"Yeah. And you're... Kim." Toni was sure of it, but didn't want to sound overfamiliar. Kim had made this really funny comment during their first floor meeting, and although Toni couldn't remember what it was now, it had put Kim on her short list for friend-making. Plus, while she'd never say it aloud in a million years, it would be a relief to hang out with somebody who wasn't jarringly pretty. Sometimes it was nice to bump into a friend and not have to start the conversation with the obligatory "oh my gosh you look so pretty today *squee*" bullshit.

"I'm not interrupting anything, am I?" Toni asked, gingerly taking a seat.

"No way! Just checking my portfolio. Stocks, I mean. Which I swear is not a humblebrag!" Kim grimaced before Toni could even contemplate a judgment, but then adopted a haughty tone, fanning her face with her tablet. "Oh spitzels, it seems the NASDAQ has fallen nearly a quarter of a point! I shall have to say fare thee well to one of my Mercedes! Not cars, of course, but as I'm sure you know the Germans make a surprisingly comfortable luxury U-Boat."

Toni giggled, genuinely amused. “My great-grandpa actually sailed on a submarine in World War II.” Stupid thing to say, but after two weeks of getting-to-know-you conversations with other freshmen, it was hard to track what info she’d shared with whom, so esoteric facts were all she had in the tank.

“A Mercedes? Or did he have to settle for, ugh, a Jaguar?” She even pronounced the “u” as its own syllable, which made Toni laugh even harder.

Neither of them seemed to be going anywhere, so it led to less silly conversation. They started with the usual safe, familiar topics – intended majors, hometowns, did you see that photo somebody posted on discord of their RA doing curls at the rec center oh my *god* – and slowly became more familiar.

“So you’re Terri’s roommate, right?”

Toni nodded. “Guilty as charged.”

“That must be *so* cool, you know? Like, I know it feels like half the girls on this floor are internet famous. I mean, the triplets! They’re freaking surreal, right? Almost eerie.”

“I bet that’s not a word they hear very–”

There was a sudden rap on the frame of the lounge’s entrance, and there was... one of them. Toni had no idea which, didn’t even remember the list of names she could guess from. The girl was in a robe, shower caddy in hand. “Were you saying something about us?”

Holy fuck they’d gotten there fast, whoever they were. Allison, Addison, Maddison... there was no telling which. They weren’t merely identical, but they *dressed* identical. Different colors sometimes, but always the same style and cut. Regardless, it was an accusation, no mistake. Kim shook her head frantically. “No! No, not at all.”

“Oh. Because I know I heard ‘triplets, bleh.’ But maybe you were talking about some other triplets I guess.”

“No! I mean OK, yes, but we were just talking about her roommate Terri, who’s an influencer, like you and your sisters, and I didn’t mean ‘ugh’ ugh, just like ‘ugh’ you three are, like, *so*...”

The awkwardness of it finally got to her and Kim fell silent. The skinny blonde in the doorway waited, finally nodding in satisfaction. “So your roommate’s an ‘influencer,’ huh? Like us.” She smirked. Toni had a distinct impression of how Malala would look if she heard someone say they were “sort of into politics.” If she were also a giant bitch, that is.

Toni, however, had spent years being hot enough not to be pushed around by the hot popular girls. She might keep her head down in her dorm room, but she wasn’t about to sit for this. “I mean, not exactly like you.”

The girl failed to see the trap. “Oh yeah?”

“Yeah, I mean, Terri actually has tits to show off, so.” Toni shrugged, smirking. If the shrug called attention to her own, far larger, breasts, so be it.

Kim’s eyes shot open. The triplet’s only didn’t because she was the sort not to give the satisfaction of seeing a burn land. “I’ll bet both of her followers really appreciate that,” was the best comeback she had at the ready. Still, she’d lost, and had the sense to retreat before Toni burned her again. Her flip-flops flipped and flopped somehow angrily as she departed the scene of such a vicious arson.

“You did *not* just say that to her!”

Toni shrugged, failing to avoid smirking. “The only reason she’s even internet famous is because there’s three of them. On their own, they’d be the same as the rest of the girls here.”

“Some of us,” mumbled Kim, and Toni was glad for her naturally reddish complexion when she blushed. There were a lot of pretty girls on the floor, and Kim was, well, not. It wouldn’t matter except for how conspicuous it was. As it stood, the “Three,” as Toni had heard some jerks call them, stood out on Higgins 3 almost as much as Spencer. And not in that same delightful way.

Toni thought fast. She’d meant to flex a little, show off for her hopeful new friend, but somehow she’d made things worse. “Hey, um, are you doing anything this afternoon?”

“Um, I have a 4:15 class, but otherwise... no?” She sounded nervous. Toni’s fault, she knew.

“Oh. I just figured, if you wanted to peek behind the curtains, Terri’s been begging me to help her out with some shots. Shoots? Taking pictures, whatever you call it. I don’t really know anything about that stuff, but I was thinking it could be fun, but I’d feel weird doing it by myself I think.”

Kim brightened, but hesitantly. “I mean, I’m sure *you* could... you know. Sorry, just... yeah. Look at you, huh?”

Toni smiled. “Thanks. But I actually meant behind the cameras. She’s always asking me – or anybody who’ll listen – to help her with all the lighting stuff, filming, feedback before she posts. She doesn’t really listen to the feedback, though. I think she just likes to tell people saying she looks great that she’s ‘ohmygawsh such a mess, blergh.’”

Kim laughed. “You’re sure? I don’t want to just barge in there and pretend I know what I’m doing. I’m pretty much at the ‘sharing funny cat videos’ tier of TikTok posting.”

Toni stood and extended a hand. Holy crud, it had worked. She hadn’t really been thinking, just seizing on how impressed Kim had sounded over the whole stupid hobby. In hindsight, she wished she’d just suggested they go do their own thing without involving Terri, but it was too late. Besides, posing while Kim snapped some pics

sounded incredibly narcissistic. At least with Terri there to suck the air out of the room, they could laugh themselves stupid later over how absurd the girl was.

“We’ll never know what we’re doing if we don’t do at least a little bargaining. C’mon.”

“I am *not* wearing that.”

“You said you wanted to collab!”

“I.. what? I don’t even know what that means.”

Terri doled out the syllables “Co-lab-urr-ate...?”

“I definitely didn’t say I wanted to do that.”

“Sure you did! You said, and I quote, ‘Sure, that sounds fun.’ And it will be! Just try it on. Once you see yourself in it, you’ll change your mind.”

“Nobody is *ever* going to see me in *that*. No way. No offense, but I’m not like you, Terri.”

Terri finally paused, pulled the objectionable item back. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Toni winced. Easy to forget sometimes that saying “no offense” usually just primed people to take offense. “Nothing! Really, nothing. You just like to show off all that, which is totally fine, and I just... don’t. I’m... private.”

“Private? Toni, when we moved in, you had 7 Instagram followers, and two of them were your parents. You didn’t even have a TikTok.” Terri’s expression was more like she’d said Toni didn’t have a left leg or something. “Now you have almost three thousand.”

“So...? It’s just people from high school, half of whom are dudes who only followed me because they’re hoping I’ll take a pic in something like *that*.”

Terri folded her arms, cocked her hips to one side. “How big was your high school?”

“Uh, like, the regular size? Three stories, most parts. What does that even—”

Terri pinched the bridge of her nose and rubbed it irritably. “Damn it, I mean how many kids went there.”

All right, that was a little embarrassing. “Like 1400, 1450, something like that? I think? Why?”

“OK, so you’re kind of a nerd, right? Let’s do a story problem. Three thousand followers, and let’s be generous and round to fifteen hundred followers. Got your calculator handy?”

“Calculator? What are you—”

“By my math, that means your whole family, every single person you went to high school with, and everyone in all of your classes here are following you, *and then* some of their buddies saw who their friends are following and *they* decided to follow you. Then the algorithm picks that up, realizes you generate clicks from strangers, and puts you in front of more strangers. Ripple effect, follow?”

“Uh...”

Terri rolled her eyes at what was evidently an obtuse expression on her roommate’s face. “It means you’ve got It, bitch! It means you’ve got so fucking much of It that randos took a look at you, clicked, clicked some more, beat off to that shot where you’re like humping the tree or whatever and decided that whatever else you wanna show ‘em, they wanna keep seeing It!”

“I never humped a tree, god.” True, Toni had pressed herself up against a tree and raised one leg, which, yeah, was a little sexy. Still, it had taken place on their campus tour; Spencer had offered and she had thought it might be fun to tease the guy a little before they replaced him. Which, thanks to the massive shift in Spencer’s popularity rating brought on by that glorious horrendous video, had not happened. Thank god. That was it.

No way *Spencer* beat off to that.

Was there? He’d liked it, after all. Toni would die before admitting it, but sometimes when she was masturbating while Terri was occupied with her stream, deaf to the world behind those stupid pink headphones, she browsed her own feed and imagined Spencer looking at her pictures, imagined what he might be thinking when he tapped that Like.

“Call it what you want, Red, but you were rocking it. Come on, just try it on. See how it feels.”

Toni shook her head emphatically. “Oh yeah? Well if I’m such an influential ‘influencer’ with all of my clothes on, maybe I’ll keep at it. That’s what us ‘influencers’ do, right? Establish a ‘brand?’”

“First off, ease back on sarcastic finger quotes. Second, there’s nothing wrong giving your fans expectations of what sort of content you’re gonna provide. Or do you just pick a random channel on TV and watch whatever’s on?”

“No. Especially not if the show had girls wearing things like *that*. I can’t believe you think I’d—”

A soft tap at the door alerted the quibbling women to the building’s one and only and wonderful male presence, but too late. “Hey, Terri, and heeey Toni.” She beamed at having been given the longer hey. “How we doing?”

It was an innocuous question, a “sup,” not a probe of the pair’s bickering. Good. To Toni’s mind, the man had a talent for keeping his nose out of drama – another point in his favor. Not that he needed more. Day by day, he was running up the score on every

other boy at Lakeview. If he ever decided to lower his knightly shield and take advantage of his living situation, he could probably fuck half the floor in a weekend. The girls were, to put it mildly, enamored.

“Spencer, what do *you* think of this?” Terri asked hastily, holding up the offending so-called garment.

Their RA squinted, reared his head to inspect from another angle, squinted harder. “Um, is that... a handkerchief? That got chewed up by a dog, or something?” Spencer peered around. “Tell me you two don’t have a dog in here.”

“Just you, dawg, and us two bitches,” Terri quipped. Toni frowned. It wasn’t fair that a girl as attractive as her roommate should also be quick-witted. All those hours talking at her followers must have sharpened her conversation skills. “But no, it’s a swimsuit, ya goober.”

Up went the same eyebrow Toni had raised when her roommate had tried to tell her the same lie. “It is? I thought swimsuits had, you know, pads and stuff. This thing fits in the palm of your hand. Is it for a baby or something? Didn’t you say at our first floor meeting you were going to be an aunt soon?”

She had said that, but for one, Terri’s sister was only just entering her third trimester; for two, even if she’d popped the minute that meeting had ended, they didn’t give swimming lessons to six-week-olds; and for three, Terri was on a mission, and she wasn’t about to be put off by his impressive listening skills.

“It’s for Toni! I think she’d look so hot in it, don’t you?” She held it up, pinching and tugging in various places to try to illustrate its shape. It was fairly straightforward, a sheer white one-piece swimsuit. A *thong* swimsuit. Toni held little hope for it concealing much of her breasts, either. Her areolas were big; she’d had to be careful to keep them out of public view in normal bathing suits, much less this flimsy thing.

“I, um, yeah, for sure. But two models like you, you look good in everything. Sometimes I feel like I ought to have to pay for a subscription just to stop by for a knock-and-talk.” He laughed.

Toni loved his laugh. So gentle. Sammi had uploaded a reaction video to the Hottie Haven, the floor’s discord server (renamed thusly by Terri). It featured Spencer chuckling at this dumb dad joke she’d found online. Likely the first one that had come up when she googled it. Sammi had ambushed him on his way back to his room from the shower. That was always a good time to seek him out for chit chat or esoteric dorm-related requests. For those who liked to share in-the-wild sightings, it was hands down the most popular. Terri had called her roommate “clickbait” when they’d first met, but Toni had nothing on Spencer. A candid of that man in a towel – or *god*, his boxers – was sure to get a react from pretty much the whole floor. Even the lesbian couple down the hall at least hit the thumbs up. Some sights transcended sexual preference.

In the video, his towel had slipped, and if you froze it on the right frame you could just make out the base of his cock before he caught it and pulled it back into place. Toni had watched Sammi's video so many times that the joke was burned into her soul.

"Hey Spencer, what kind of a bear is the most condescending?"

"Um, I don't know. Is that recording? You really should record someone when—"

"A pan—DUH!"

His laugh may have been merely pitying, but try telling that to what it did to those peccs. Toni felt like she could grind herself on those peccs for days.

Spencer eyed Toni askance, eyes flitting between the nominal swimsuit and the body for which it had been purchased. "You're really thinking of trying that on, huh? Because... dang. Fearless."

"Fearless?" Toni heard herself ask. For perhaps the first time, she regretted that Terri wasn't recording, like she seemed to be half of her waking life. Perhaps just as well. She didn't know if it was true that masturbating could make a girl go blind the way it could boys, but being able to listen to Spencer Lawrence himself pay her that compliment, in that impressed tone, on loop...

Toni supposed she could get contacts. Her mom wore contacts.

Ah, well.

"Sure. Takes a lot of confidence, right? I couldn't imagine, like, walking down the hall in my boxers, much less... Yeah." There was no polite way to point out that every last woman on the floor knew full well that he did exactly that any time he needed to use the bathroom in the middle of the night. Casey had captured evidence of it more than a few times, mostly low-grade pics taken through a crack in her door. Terri had created a whole channel for her to post them, #nightowl. It had been Danielle who quipped that it was because Casey wanted to wrap her "hooters" around what was only somewhat concealed behind the slit in that underwear. She forgot how Casey had replied, but it hadn't been a denial. Some incomprehensible stonerism, knowing her. That chick was *always* high.

Fearless, he'd said. *Fearless*.

"Actually," Terri cut in, "Do you have a minute?"

"A minute? For you, I have three." Toni wanted to kiss him. He was *such* a cheesy dork sometimes, but *so* adorable at being one. More than kiss, maybe. No, definitely.

"Awesome. Because we were just saying, if we're going to collab on a couple saucy swimsuit shots, we obviously can't take the picture ourselves, but now that you're here...!" She bounced excitedly. So did her boobs.

Spencer blinked. Somehow he never seemed to anticipate that any of his residents might flirt with him. Or, Toni granted, perhaps they just kept flirting harder because of his resilience to it, so he never quite caught up. Toni loved that blink. "You... want me to take pictures of you, in your swimsuits?"

“Yeah! You have a good eye for photography. I mean it! I refollowed you, remember?” (Was that the term, refollowed...?) “And we’re just doing it here in our room with the green screen.”

Toni pointed to the huge green tarp that was, as usual, pulled down in front of Toni’s closet in the morning. At least it was supposed to be Toni’s. The other side had so much of Terri’s streaming gear – lamps, mics, stands for each, cheap backups in case of equipment failure, cosplay accessories, and more makeup than Toni had ever believed one woman could ever need – that she’d only somewhat grudgingly offered to let Terri hang her clothes on Toni’s side.

Her roommate had reciprocated by offering to let Toni wear her clothes, unasked, whenever. As if she weren’t half a foot taller and two sizes bigger.

Spencer mulled it over, but finally gave a shrug. “OK, sure. That is, if you’re sure you wouldn’t be more comfortable with one of the girls doing it?”

Terri turned to her roommate, a coy smile on her lips. She knew damn well what Toni was doing, and only a total chump would believe it was innocent.

But at the same time... Maybe...

Toni felt it, somewhere deep inside. Deep, and dark, and damp. Maybe, for once, it would be Spencer would be lying in the dark in his bed, his phone held up over his face, as *he* pleased himself looking at Toni.

“I think if anything I’d actually feel *more* comfortable with you,” she said. Somehow. Her parents were going to see this. *Guess what, Daddy, I’m a model, like you always said I should!*

He didn’t ask why. The girls liked him, trusted him, and he was used to it by now. Never mind that it made no sense that having a single hetero male record her in a micro bikini would be more comfortable than having a hetero female do it, or better yet not putting that obscene scrap of spandex in the first place. The heroic Spencer had been told he was needed by one of his Hotties, and it was, as they’d all learned, his kryptonite.

Terri asked for a minute so they could change, and he stepped into the hall. They could hear him out there talking to Charlie. Toni personally couldn’t stand Charlie. Nobody was that... nice. It was such a transparent act. Spencer politely pretended he didn’t see through it.

(All right, maybe one person was that nice.)

Meanwhile, Toni donned the swimsuit. Terri had sponsors; they’d sold her the swimsuits for 30% off. Toni suspected they were less “sponsors” and more opportunistic marketers preying on girls with delusions of grandeur. But it was 30% off, and better yet, Terri had paid the other 70. Free to a good body.

Standing there in that thing, Toni gaped at her reflection. Nudity felt less naked than this. She kept tugging and tugging, but no matter how she adjusted it, it was designed to sneak up her slit, showcasing the two plump, lewd labia. To be fair, some of

that could have been avoided, some, except to do so meant jerking it down so that the shoulder straps, which comprised most of the upper half of it, failed to cover the entirety of her nipples.

Terri finally told her to stop messing with it and try to smile, have a little fun looking out of this world hot. “He’s going to remember you, in that, for the rest of his life,” she whispered into Toni’s ear. It was too sexy, to say nothing of the little pinch she gave Toni’s butt, but she was too horny over the idea of it to care. As Terri no doubt knew.

When Toni opened their door and invited Spencer back into the room, the look on his face when he took in Toni’s shortstack body in this walking advertisement for easy, effortless sex, she silently conceded some of Terri’s point. Looking this sexy... it *did* feel pretty hot. Maybe she did have a little bit of “It,” whatever “It” was. Not that Toni was looking to use It for anything.

He was hard, she realized somewhere in the middle of it. Right around the time Terri stopped posing *near* her and started posing *on* her. His tongue slid out, held for a moment between his lips, slipped reluctantly back in. Toni let the molestation slide.

Maybe encouraged it. Just a little.

Spencer was hard for her.

“You could just ask him out, you know,” Terri said later that evening as she experimented with different backgrounds in her image editing software. Toni had insisted on final approval before anything was posted. Terri hadn’t bothered putting up a fight. No background she selected was going to make her butt less bare. Spencer had actually had to interrupt the shoot to notify her that her butthole was visible around the string that called itself a bottom.

(Would he want to fuck her ass? Toni had never been even a little curious, but then she’d seen the way he looked at her. Perhaps it would be interesting. She’d been asked out by six guys since coming to Lakeview, and she’d trade a night out with any of them to pose for Spencer in that slutty thing.)

“No, I can’t. Even if he were interested in me, he’s dead serious about that not dating residents policy. He’s rejected Casey and *Leigh*. Both of them total Barbie’s. Probably rejected others who wouldn’t cop to it, too.”

Terri continued speaking distractedly, her back to her sulky roommate, focusing on her task. “Well, if you want to keep getting eye-fucked by him, I’m happy to oblige.”

“Oblige? What do you—”

Toni’s cell phone rang. *Mom*, it read. Her stomach lurched.

Eye-fucking. Such a crude term, but... Terri wasn’t wrong. Polite eye-fucking, but still eye-fucking. If it was the only fucking she could get from him, she’d take it.

“Fine, let’s ‘collab,’” Toni said, laughing with her voice but scowling daggers through Terri’s back with the eyes.

Right before it went to voicemail, she finally answered the phone. This wasn't going to be an easy piece of news to break. Nothing for it but to push through.

"Hi Mom."

"No, I know."

"I'm glad you called; I was gonna call you pretty soon anyway."

"No, it's nothing bad."

"No, Mom."

"I said *no*, Mom. Would you just let me...!"

"Sorry. I didn't mean to raise my voice. I've got news, though."

"I just... well, I've been doing like you said, trying new things, and well... I tried something today."

"Ta da! The t-shirts are in, you guys!"

Like everybody, Toni brightened at the news. Not only because she liked the design, but also because she wanted to make sure Jordyn saw her doing it. Jordyn was a good next door neighbor, Toni thought. At least, she never complained about the endless, high-pitched prattle of Terri's streaming at early hours, or the two roommates prancing with their boobs and butts spilling out of their clothes, trying to trap Spencer into photographing them. Some days they reeled him in; most days, Toni tried not to imagine how she must look to whatever floor member they snared instead.

"Kinda short, don'cha think?" opined Kendall as Jordyn held one up from the box.

Toni's eyes widened. It was fucking *short*. Not "look at my cute little muffin top" short. No, it was "short people won't have to wonder if my tits are real" short. But Jordyn was already yelling out sizes and tossing shirts. Toni tried not to notice the stricken expression on Kim's face beside her when she accepted a Large. Not like she was even the only one – except the other two were Casey, whose waist was an XS but whose tits were an easy L, and Kyu-Ri, the freakishly round Korean girl. Toni had never even spoken to her for more than an "excuse me" in the bathroom, but Terri was forever salivating over the chance to get her behind the camera with her. As if standing next to an Asian girl was going to help her break into the Asian market or something.

Which... hmm. Toni had been reading up, since she was somehow helping her roommate do this stupid thing. Maybe it would.

As for Toni, she had signed up for a Small, not having expected it to be missing half the shirt. She'd figured it would be tight, cute. Not... *this!* Maybe she should be thinking less about breaking into markets and more about breaking out of her t-shirt.

“Let’s try ‘em on!” Jordyn exclaimed, the shirts distributed. She was plainly proud, and rightly so. They were an instant hit.

Dana squeaked, likely louder than she’d intended, “There’s a boy in the room!”

“Turn around or don’t, baby!” Casey yelled, already lifting her shirt up over those things. She hadn’t even been wearing a bra!

(Toni wasn’t either, but only because she’d been trying on tops for her next shoot with Terri, and she’d had little choice but to concede that clicks went up easily 35% when she skipped a bra. Ugh, there she went again, thinking in terms of metrics.)

Spencer turned around, blushing as red as the shirts. Toni saw him looking in the girls’ reflection in the window, though, and in spite of herself, took her shirt off, right there in the middle of the room. The shirt wasn’t sexy, it wasn’t revealing. It was just plain *slutty*. Not even. She owned a couple slutty outfits, stuff she’d bought over the summer figuring it might help her reel in a guy playing hard to get. They weren’t even in the same ballpark as these things.

These were... porn. They were soft-core porn, nothing more.

Using her phone camera, Toni studied her tits. (Somewhere along the way Terri had gotten her using the term, but in this, it undeniably applied.) The bottom third was exposed. She was nervous to move her arms; if it rose over the halfway point, it was going to snap up all the way. Then again...

Spencer turned, eyes wide, right as his own shirt whipped at him. Peer pressure – or mob rule, maybe – played out, and soon he was changing while the girls hooted and applauded.

Toni made sure to capture the whole thing, watching the literal man of her dreams take his shirt off for her through the display of her own camera feed. The girls could thank her in the morning.

“Can I ask you something?”

Toni nodded. Kim’s question had a serious sound to it. That was good. Higgins 3 was not a serious place; Kim’s new floor had a much homier feel to it. No harem vibes. It felt like so much of her time was spent in deliberate, cultivated silliness that a little serious was a relief. Sadly, reels of hot girls lip synching other people’s jokes out-performed reels of hot girls talking about their thoughts and feelings. At least she wasn’t like Terri, exploiting the potential for reels of hot girls wiggling and jiggling, then giggling at their own wiggle-jiggles. It was whorish. Plus Spencer didn’t even react if it was just thinly veiled softcore porn. Flirting with him was the whole reason she’d let herself tumble so far down this rabbit hole in the first place.

Kim sighed. “What’s it like to be crazy, stupid, insanely hot?”

Toni's eyes popped, and she burst into laughter. "What? What on earth are you talking about?"

"I'm serious! I'm not being a hater or anything. Like, I've known pretty girls. One of my friends from high school was really really cute. But I'm talking about hot-enough-to-be-famous hot. I've never had a friend *that* hot."

"You mean, like, Terri?"

"No, I mean the mad hot redhead lounging on my futon pretending she's not a mad hot redhead."

Kim chuckled. "I'm going to start holding up fingers. When I get to the number of zeros after your follower count, stop me. And don't pretend you don't know it as of this morning."

Embarrassed but flattered, Toni stopped her immediately. "OK, OK. But I'm *not* famous, not even close. Pretending you're famous for followers on social media is like pretending you're a master chef because you cook at a fat camp. But sure, yeah, I guess I'm... hot. Or whatever. OK." It was weird to say it out loud, but she hadn't spent an hour this past weekend wading through pervy comments to decide which ones crossed the line and come away from it not feeling like she was pretty hot. It was like that dumb movie where that guy could read women's minds, except Toni wasn't a neo-nazi, she was only seeing men's thoughts, and they all thought the same thing: various iterations of how badly they wanted to fuck her. (Or occasionally, they wanted to see more of her feet, which... ick.)

"So?"

"I don't know! I mean, you could ask me what it's like to be really, really freckled, or something. It's just... part of me, I guess."

Kim snorted. "Oh, bullshit."

"I mean it!"

"OK, hold up, lemme just..."

Toni waited awkwardly as Kim browsed on her phone until finally she held up a picture of herself Toni didn't even recognize. Definitely in high school. She was in Brianne's kitchen wearing this huge black hoodie and a dress that clashed with it horribly, her face a mixture of a snarl and a massive concussion. Her hair hung in wispy clumps. "That's you last fall."

Toni thought she remembered the occasion, carving pumpkins to decorate Brianne's family's corn maze. She'd been having a blast, but as usual, when someone aimed a camera at her, reflexes kicked in and she made her distaste known. "OK, and..."

A few more taps and she was back in the present, sifting through Toni's most recent posts. Her in a t-shirt that covered her panties by an inch. Her in a dress that didn't cover them at all. A video of her "jokingly" pretending to be surprised at discovering she wasn't even wearing any. She'd gotten Spencer to take that one. She'd

come so fucking hard, watching that, remembering the way he'd tried not to leer at her ass. He pretended he hadn't seen when she'd let her pussy make an appearance, but they both knew it. He was too much of a gentleman to admit it, and she wanted to fuck him too much to risk embarrassing him out of another shoot. So long as she pretended she was just another Terri, the game could go on.

"And this is you now," Kim finished after swiping to a reel of Toni doing the instagram "desperado" act, holding her fingers in front of the lens for ten seconds before moving it aside to reveal her tits bouncing like crazy in her bra and panties. Maybe someday she'd even get Spencer to be comfortable filming her like that. Or less. Nothing, if he wanted. Oh, the dreams she'd had of nothing.

"What, are you trying to say I'm a skank or something?"

"No! I swear, I'm not." Kim took her hands, squeezing reassuringly. "My literal point is that I think it's cool and I want you to talk about it. Terri, ugh, I can hear her talking about her shit by proxy, just sitting near you. I don't even need to hear her say it. But you hardly ever talk about it. Come on. If you were my super rich friend, you'd give me a ride in your fancy shmancy car, right?"

"Well, sure. I mean, you're basically my super rich friend when it comes to having a car."

"Um, it's a Jeep, thanks." Kim grinned. "So reciprocate already! C'mon. What's it like to wake up to a hundred notifications of dude-bros begging to see your ta-tas?"

Toni sighed. "Is that what they're saying? Half of them are in Arabic or use Cyrillic characters."

Kim giggled. "I'm sorry, I meant to ask, what's it like to wake up to a hundred notifications of dude-bros *all over the world* begging to see your tits. Feel better?"

Toni laughed with her. "I dunno. I mean, at first it felt really creepy, you know? Like having guys do it online is less gross than having them do it to your face, but still. But I guess after the millionth time, you just sort of ignore it? Like, half of them are just so pathetic – the guys who try to shame you, guys my grandpa's age who flirt like it, the ones who analyze you like they're critiquing a painting and not a person, the guys who just go '8/10, would fuck but not bareback.'"

"They do that?"

"Oh yeah, they do that."

Like that, the floodgates had been opened. She never talked with Terri about this. Terri loved absolutely every level of attention her online persona attracted. Even the most horrendously crude ones, it was an opportunity to do reactions on her livestreams, to sit on a throne of judgment as a half-naked queen, complaining about all the guys wanting to beat off to her content to hundreds of guys who wanted to beat off to her content.

Toni rambled on to Kim, who somehow couldn't get enough. It *was* kind of interesting, objectively, she supposed. The intersection of feminine empowerment— her body, her choice — and the horny randos lining up to objectify her. The increasingly delicate conversations with her family, who were trying to split the difference between supporting her new side hustle and encouraging her to remember that it wasn't *only* strangers watching. Wondering whether someone was being nice to her because they thought she was pretty, because they'd seen her online and wanted to fuck her online persona, or were just being nice.

Kim listened, and listened, and asked for more. At some point, though, it stopped being curiosity and became letting a friend vent. Toni heard herself saying things she hadn't even known she'd been thinking. About how her high school friends had gone from *oh shit look at you!* to *whoa there, Trigger* to *yeesh, who is this porn star and what did she do with my Toni* to just not reaching out. The tone she heard in her parents' voices that made her wonder who all back home had seen her stuff. The contemplation of how this might echo through the years. Would her future husband come home from work someday and demand to know why his coworker was taunting him about a video of his teenage wife in her underwear?

Most vexing of all was her worry that she was beginning to actually *like* it. It was sexy. *She* was sexy. The raw power of knowing how easily she could satisfy the sweaty, masturbatory fantasies of tens of thousands of men, but... *shrug*, nah. The exhilaration of instead going *shrug*, why not. Orgasms were good. Great, even. The ability to dole them out en masse was some heady shit, but was she just behaving like a dumb kid? Was there anything more to it than just showing off?

When she was younger — too young, but old enough — she'd gone through a very brief phase where the practice of changing with the window blinds cracked had been weirdly appealing. She didn't think anybody ever saw anything; the angles to her neighbors' houses were bad, and she'd been too chicken to do it at night when she'd be easily seen. But it had turned her on, at least until she had a sit-down with her libido and reminded it how unsexy it would be if anybody recorded it. Was she just reliving that impulse, getting off on the high of having been born with the genetics for big boobs without thinking of the pitfalls?

How stupid was it to let herself get *this* carried away by a dumb crush on an RA who'd flatly said a hundred times that he didn't hook up with residents? Even if Spencer *wanted* to fuck her, he wouldn't let himself do it. That was part of what made it so hot. And so pathetic.

"You know you could just... stop, right?" Kim pressed softly as Toni threatened to cycle into a third round of introspection into how she'd ever wound up posing in her underwear just to get some attention from this hot guy she didn't even have a chance with.

“I know. I mean, I guess I know. It’s just... I don’t know. It feels so...”

It made her horny as hell, was the truth. Living around the corner from the sexiest fucking guy she’d ever met, a guy who was obviously attracted to her, who any day might get a little tipsy or see her in exactly the right costume or hear her espouse interest in exactly the right niche fetish, and just... *ungh*, drag her back to his dorm room and fuck out every last brain cell in her head.

There were rumors he’d done that with Kendall and Georgia; Terri had been partying with them in their room when it got written up, and she said that evidently they’d managed to sneak their way into a sleepover by feigning anxiety over it. Other rumors even said that sad-sack redneck girl Andi had gotten a pity fuck only a few days ago. Not the most impressive way of going about it, but it signified that it was possible.

If that girl could do it, Toni definitely could. Right? *Thousands* of men wanted to fuck her. She only wanted the one. Wanted him so fucking badly. Even if it wasn’t a relationship, sneaking around, finding hidden places to fuck, surprising him in the middle of the night by sneaking into his room and waking him with a slow, sensuous blowjob. He didn’t even lock his door, everyone knew. An invitation, some girls on the floor said, but Toni knew that it was trust. Spencer loved his girls, and they loved him. Toni wasn’t honestly sure whether she meant “love” in a platonic sense, or in the same way she’d said it to Chris, or something deeper. He was everything she’d ever wanted in a man, after all, beautiful and strong and compassionate and empathetic and those shoulders and *oh god* that dick, the silhouette in her mind that was the origin of every flutter of her eyelashes in every slutty TikTok, and she just wanted, just *once, needed* to—

“So...?”

Toni blinked. “Sorry, lost my train of thought. Anyway, it’s just for fun. It’s not like I’m trying to make a lifestyle out of it like Terri or the triplets or something.”

“So you are having fun, then?”

Toni shrugged. “Most of the time.”

“Good.” Kim sighed. “I’m glad I got out of there and all, but sometimes, I miss...”

Toni sidled up next to her friend and swiped on her phone. It was on the same screen she’d left it on that morning when she’d gotten so caught up low-key masturbating in her bunk, glad for Terri’s sound-canceling headphones. An AI-edited shot Destiny had created, depicting Spencer standing in the center of a room that was a recognizable likeness of the Higgins 3 floor lounge. Naked. Hard as fuck. *Angry* hard. A cock that demanded service, *now*. Silhouetted girls rimmed the room, some of them fucking each other, some of them fucking themselves. The picture would have been better without it, but it certainly captured the essence of Higgins 3 better with them there.

Kim licked her lips. She'd left the Hottie Haven when she'd left Higgins 3. "He's not as hot as you guys act like he is, you know."

"Right, I totally get you. I'll stop sending you this stuff."

Her friend giggled. "Let's not go crazy."

"What? No, Dad, I'm not 'being a lesbian.' And that's not how you say that! Why would you even think that I'm--"

The sound quality on the phone call didn't convey it well, but her father did apologize, albeit mostly for saying it wrong. The man didn't seem comfortable talking about what had prompted him to say it, though he didn't have to. Toni's mom had DMed her – via her Instagram DMs, the fastest way to reach her these days – about how guys from Dad's work had been razzing him about his hot daughter flaunting herself online. Evidently she hadn't needed to wait for her future husband to embarrass someone at work.

Terri had apparently been right about what she'd said a few weeks back, the ripple effect. Most of Toni's followers had usernames and avatars that meant nothing to her, but not all. She recognized some of the ones who didn't, or pieced them together from clues. Her father's coworkers, relatives of people she'd gone to church with, non-Lakeview friends of her Lakeview friends. She was pretty sure that her creepy anthropology TA was following her, but maybe it would give her a nudge when he scored her paper next week. She was really close to straight A's, something she'd never done before. All the girls said Spencer was into smart girls after meeting his grad student girlfriend at that sex talk program. It was almost comical how quickly the study groups and tutoring requests and offers had flooded the Hottie Haven.

Toni appreciated why her father was upset. Theirs had never been a hyperconservative household, but conservative enough that having to watch their daughter try to bounce her boobs out of her top copying some new viral TikTok dance trend crossed a big fat line.

The reactions of her high school friends' – the few who'd been in town last weekend when she went home for Meemaw's birthday – had been mixed. None of them went so far as to slut shame, but in between marveling at how much of a following she'd accrued in so short a time had come more than a few quips at her expense. *I can't believe you found a skirt even shorter than you, or So what's your average follower per cup size?*

They sure hadn't complained when Toni tagged them in the pics of their rendezvous, though.

Toni spent hours sulking that evening, her father's accusation ringing in her ears. It had stiff competition, though. Terri and that disturbing binaural microphone. She knew how it sounded on stream from her own research on ASMR. It sounded hotter than sex. Toni hated how much it turned her on. She was almost always turned on these days, it felt like. That sound, a constant ambient blowjob, a tongue lavishing endless unadulterated affection on whatever bits you wanted to imagine it was licking... It was fuel on the fire. Toni thought for the thousandth time that she *needed* a boyfriend, someone to help her scratch that itch. What was it Nikki had posted about hers, though? Her ex, that is. That it was like trying to scratch a mosquito bite with a feather.

"Mmmm." Terri, between those sloppy, wet licks on her ear mics. She was so absurdly good with those things. Spencer was her muse, she said. Terri wasn't into him like Toni was, which was to say she'd give her left tit to fuck him but didn't want to chain herself to his bed as a live-in cock receptacle. Still, Toni believed her when she said she was channeling him when she worked. Whenever her eyes slid closed on stream, those creepy rubber ears became Spencer's ears. Sometimes she said she streamed with a vibrator inside her, just to stir up her viewership; sometimes she did it for real. Toni seldom knew which was which until she observed whether or not Terri needed to change her panties after a stream.

She'd wondered aloud at dinner the other night about whether she ought to stop making it a laundry issue and just sell the soiled things. "*We could pay down our student loans with those things, you know?*"

"I'm not selling my panties to perverts, and if you have any dignity at all, you won't either!"

Terri had let it drop. Toni hadn't stopped thinking about it, though. If how wet Spencer made her pussy could enable her to graduate debt-free. If someday she would have a husband who would never know that the down-payment on their house had been paid for by how sticky juicy wet her pussy got just thinking about a better man. Toni already disrespected him, and she hadn't even met him yet.

"Of course they're not fake. Do you see these things? Do they look fake? How dare you," whispered Terri into her mic with a sultry giggle that was basically just buttery girl-cum in audio form. Referring to her tits, no doubt. Their followers were forever asking if Terri's or Toni's titties were authentic as an excuse to bring them up conversationally, though both knew Toni got it ten times as often. Her roommate giggled for her stream, a throaty purr of a laugh that only made Terri contemplate probing her own nipples. She lifted her shirt up, raised one to her lips.

No. She forced it back down. This wasn't her. She wasn't like that, wasn't like Terri. She wasn't a slut. She wasn't some horny, shameless e-thot whose whole life was performance art for pushy incels and lonely untouchables. She wasn't. She'd posed for some pictures to get a boy's attention, nothing more. She wasn't... that. That delectable,

worshipful tongue-bath that was making a mess out of eight hundred and forty-two pairs of men's underwear, plus one roommate's soupy thong. She was not.

Before Toni quite knew what she was doing, the impulse took root. Her phone was out and in moments, all of her accounts were switched to private. No more of this. She was more than two incredible tits, a waist as big as Spencer's bicep, and then an ass you could bounce a whole handful of quarters off of. (He'd refused to try that when Toni had offered during their shoot last weekend, but he had conceded that he believed her about the outcome if he had.)

No. She combed through the comments, blocking anybody who'd said something she'd have slapped them for face-to-face. In an hour – an hour of listening to Terri slurp, slobber and grind herself to orgasm (feigned or no) – she had barely made a dent.

Her brain did the math of how many followers she'd just lost. Over a thousand. A thousand total strangers to whom she was nothing more than a sex object on a screen. So why did that feel like such a gut punch?

She closed her eyes and sought refuge in the one thing that always made her feel better. One hand between her legs, and one hand also between her legs.

Suddenly there was a voice speaking beside her, and she nearly jumped out of her skin. "Wanna join me? I've got an ear for you, Red."

"I told you, stop calling me Red! And just because you get off on being some internet slut doesn't mean I want to! God!"

Terri was still sputtering a mixed apology, excuse and expression of concern when Toni stormed out of the room, tugging her shorts back up over her panty-less pussy as she strode down the hall of Higgins 3. No need to be embarrassed; it would hardly occasion comment around here.

That her roommate had taken Toni's outburst so sweetly only made her angrier. She couldn't live like this any more. It was bad enough that living down the hall from sex made flesh was basically 24/7 edging; having to hear Terri put those feelings into her so-called artistic expression, and invite her to channel all that lust – that bottomless, unslakable lust – with her?

It was torture.

If she stopped treating it like having fun teasing the boy, and started using it as an excuse to work out all those feelings? She was afraid she might never stop. She made for his room. Toni didn't know what she wanted to happen, but Spencer would know. Everybody knew that if you had a problem, he was going to make it his mission to solve it. He'd done those roommate agreement forms with them, hadn't he? Surely something on there said Terri couldn't lick and moan and touch herself, and that vibrator, and leaky pussies and dirty panties, and undisguised masturbating without even covering herself with the sheets, and...

Spencer obeyed her summons. He followed Toni back to her room and dutifully started a conversation about the noises originating therein. For him to fully understand, though, it first required educating him on exactly what ASMR was.

Toni knew she had mostly just been pouting. Lashing out. Letting two months of Terri's constant, progressively sluttier behavior erupt in a flash, an excuse to go to Spencer and beg him for comfort. Two months of becoming something she'd thought she despised, except every time she had a chance to commit harder, she took it, and relished it.

Seeing the way he melted into those soft, erotic sounds Terri poured into the binaural mics, Toni had no choice but to lean in and help.

His eyes were closed. Terri even tested, waved a hand in front of his face, but he was in a world of pure sound. Heart in her chest, her roommate took a leap, and confided in him.

"I love your cock, Spencer," she whispered. Her eyes were on Toni, though. It was for her.

Terri smiled at her from her place at the other synthetic ear, the sound pumping from their lips to his. "I can still taste you from massage night."

Could he tell which girl was which in a whisper? The anonymity, albeit a coin toss, emboldened her, as did the memory of that brief salty savoring of Spencer sweat. "I want to taste you again," she whispered to him. And she did.

Toni moved on his zipper while Terri undid the button. Both girls licked their palms, eyes sparkling at one another, as they grasped his shaft in unison. It was long enough for each to have a handful, if they moved carefully. They were nothing but patient. They'd been working together for over a month now, but each for their own purposes.

Tonight, they were united around that shaft, throbbing in their twin grasps.

"You're so fucking *hard*," Toni whispered with a soft moan. He was. How bad did he want to fuck them right now? It couldn't be as badly as they wanted it. They needed to get him there.

"I've wanted this since the day I moved in," whispered Terri.

"Your cock? Is my *favorite* cock." The girls nodded at Toni's assertion around their respective slut stations.

"This is what I imagine when I touch myself at night," said Terri, rubbing her thumb softly over his glans.

"When I touch myself in the shower," agreed Toni. She couldn't bear to admit it out loud, but more than once she'd used the Discord thread for alerts when Spencer was showering to treat herself to a slow, delicious come at his side.

The girls went on, whispering whorish truths and licking the fuck out of those fake ears as their RA fought to remain standing, dizzied by their dual assault.

Toni and Terri's lips met for the first time (aside from that one shoot, but that didn't count) around their RA's cock. The girls both knew it was being recorded, and both knew he didn't know. Toni didn't care. She wanted to be able to remember this, relive this, forever. When Terri kissed her over the top of his shaft, their wet, drool-sodden chins sandwiching it as they made out, she was glad for it. If not for Terri, she never would have been able to do this. Nothing that felt this good could be bad. Nay, anything that felt this good had to be divine.

There, with his cock throbbing in my hand, Toni's doubts evaporated in the light of clarity. This was *good*. *He* was good. His *cock* was good. All this time, worrying she was "degrading" herself, when really, all she had to do was gaze up at the intensity of his pleasure. There was no conflict there. None in Terri's eyes. None in her heart. Being sexy, learning to manipulate and heighten and satisfy the male libido, was no mere hobby.

For the first time since she'd created her instagram account the night before moving to Higgins 3, Toni felt like having these big sexy tits wasn't just a fact. It was talent. Eroticism was a skill, and she was mother fucking skillful.

She leaned in, the mic pressed to the space between her breasts. Her heartbeat thundered in his ears as Toni extended her tongue on her RA's shaft. All he'd done for her, creating this safe space for her, for all of them. Never judging them. Supporting her experimentation. Rewarding her fearlessness.

Misconceptions evaporated. Lessons about the iniquity of female sexuality from her minister and his vow of chastity. Guilt at pursuing her own pleasure. Embarrassment over using her body to get it. Judgmentality at her roommate, who'd done nothing more than monetize that pleasure, taking something she wanted to do anyway and using it to get by. Terri's dream: beauty and sex and lust and flirtation and all these wonderful things that had brought Toni to this perfect moment.

A dream she'd never realized she shared, coming true before her eyes. She licked that perfect cock with almost religious zeal.

She held nothing back. Toni poured her heart and soul into that blowjob. She could feel, *feel*, that Terri was doing the same. When their tongues met, there was no sense of wrongness, no sense of homophobia or territorial sentiments. They'd done this together. Would Terri teach her to use these things? She'd ask. From now on, no more holding back. No more pretending she didn't want this. No more pretending she didn't love this.

The next time her parents chided her, she would tell them in no uncertain terms that she *was* a model. When her old friends teased her for her shamelessness, she'd look them in the eyes and tell them she was proud of her body, that there was nothing shameful about enjoying it. When Kim asked her what it felt like, she'd tell her it made

her horny and she loved feeling horny. That she got men off and there was nothing wrong with getting off.

That she finally understood the comfort in having a permanent record of precious memories. If she sucked Spencer off a thousand times – and she hoped to – she wanted to be able to relive every dribble of his precum down her thirst-trap of a throat.

She made sure the next time her lips brushed against Terri's, they held. The roommates' drool-sodden chins gently sandwiched their RA's cock between them as they wordlessly resolved their quarrel – then right back to this unbelievable tandem blowjob.

It was Toni who retained the presence of mind to retrieve her phone from her pocket and sneak a few quick selfies of the two of them sharing this perfect moment. She tucked it away right in time for Spencer to speak, his eyes finally open, if heavy-lidded.

“So Toni, it looks like you feel a little more comfortable with it now that you've gotten to try it yourself, yeah?”

She answered him into her side of the binaural mic, red lips brushing the ear as she whispered her answer. “So comfortable. I'm sorry, Terri. I should have said something weeks ago.”

“I should have invited you on the first stream,” Terri answered on her side.

Toni sensuously jacked her RA off with her spare hand. “We should have invited *him* on the first stream.”

“I love you.” Did she mean Spencer, or Toni?

Toni didn't care. There wasn't enough love in the world. If she was learning one thing from Spencer tonight, it was that the world could always use more of it. “I love you.”

Terri giggled, seizing the binaural mic and murmuring into it. “Mmm, god, I love you.”

Toni giggled. “I fucking *love* you.”

The roommates dove at their RA's cock, slurping ecstatically as they helped one another liberate needy pussies. They didn't masturbate one another, but they were each wondering if they ought to, if they would, when they would. It wasn't long before Spencer's cock absolutely erupted, the girls catching what they could in open mouths, sharing between their lips, kissing their gratitude back into the shaft that had so generously gifted them so much cum, kissing their shared passion back and forth between brightly glazed lips.

Then it was time for the girls to come, even while somehow that poor, neglected mammoth dick was still spurting its dregs. Some of it landed on Toni's exposed breasts – when had she taken her top off? – but Terri sucked it clean without hesitation. *The clicks*, Toni thought, laughing to herself. *Such a waste.*

The girls licked his cum off the mic, and finally settled down on their bare butts on the rug Terri had bought to help control the tendency of sound to echo off the tile floor. Toni considered that she should help repay her for it, if she meant to join her.

Spencer, always looking out for his Hotties, returned to the conflict, but any enmity was forgotten. The girls agreed to his every suggestion and then looked for more ways they could come together. Terri could do her ASMR whenever she wanted. Toni could join whenever *she* wanted. Toni proposed they amend their agreement so that masturbation was always fair game, so long as it didn't disrupt the others' streaming. Spencer insisted roommate agreements weren't meant to include such details, but Terri was already seizing on the notion of masturbating on camera to wonder aloud if the two ought to consider creating a joint OnlyFans account.

Spencer slipped out while they were still giddily brainstorming. Terri asked if they should upload the recording to the Hottie Haven, and Toni pressed the button for her. "Good idea, T."

Suddenly a pair of hands were squeezing her tits from behind. "You are the baitiest, clickiest clickbait, TT."

Toni giggled. "You did it."

Her roommate cocked her head as the file was uploaded. "Mm?"

"You nailed the nicknames. T, and TT." Toni hefted her breasts. Terri was far from flat-chested, but nobody would doubt between the two of them which had earned a nickname a vowel away from "Titty."

"You are such a ho, Toni! I knew it."

"Right, like you didn't drop down and suck that D just as easy."

Terri grinned, then suddenly blinked. "Wait. Wait wait. Say that again."

Toni settled into her lap. If it was weird having a bare female butt on her, bare female tits touching hers, all she had to do was listen to that file replay, the two of them absolutely ruling Spencer's world. She could still taste his cum on her breath. It made her want to kiss Terri all over again.

"Oh my god, that's so it. See, you're a fuckin' *ho*." She emphasized the slur oddly.

Terri took her hand and extended the index finger, using it to type. *H. O.*

"Uh... What are you..."

T. Terri paused, tapped each of Toni's exposed nipples with a finger of her own, then another *T.*

Toni gasped as she comprehended, and typed the final letters herself. *E. Z.*

"Hotties," they breathed in unison.

Toni kissed her. God, Terri's mouth tasted even cummier. "The heck with stopping at paying for college, T. We're gonna retire next summer on our own private *yacht*."

The faint sound of Spencer's voice suddenly came through their shared wall with Ellie and Tori. Terri hastily typed a reminder in Discord to keep their headphones on while they enjoyed the content.

"Retire?" giggled Terri. "Only if you can make me stop, TT."

Toni already knew she wouldn't. She wouldn't stop until Spencer was taking turns fucking her and Terri on a pile of spreadsheets of monthly earnings for how much the so-called men of the internet were shelling out for the privilege of watching her get stuffed by her RA.

"It's so good to have you home again, sweetheart," Toni's mother told her as they respectively washed and dried the dishes. Dad had cooked, only half-heartedly complaining about having to prepare a vegan option for his daughter, same as he had all week. The boys at Penderdast food court were followers of hers on Instagram. Ever since she'd tagged them in a pic, kissing one chubby, bashfully grinning boy on the cheek and thanking them for keeping her fed and happy, they'd made it a point to learn her schedule and have her meals ready and waiting. Not a word of discontent. She loved her dad anyway.

"It's been good to be home." Toni leaned her head softly on her mother's shoulder until she got a peck on the forehead. Luckily, she got her height from her mom. Dad's shoulders were way too high. "College has been so crazy. It's good to be back where things are nice and casual."

Her mother smirked pointedly at Toni's outfit. "That's 'casual' for you, is it? 'Tee Tee?'" She enunciated each letter distinctly.

"What, this old rag?" It was a gorgeous cornflower blue dress decorated in a daisy pattern. With her eyes and her hair – as of Monday freshly dyed red as Red could dye it – it was technicolor vibrant. Mom was no doubt referring to the way it tended to flash a little butt cheek when she walked, or maybe the way the neckline always looked like it was about to let her tits burst free any second. It wasn't, but it looked it.

"You're really sure about this? This whole... social... influencer... content creative–"

"Creator, Mom."

"Oh you know what I mean!" Her mom flicked some soapy water at her.

"I'm sure, Mom. It's going to be great. And if I get in over my head, I'll stop. I promise."

"I know, I know. My Antonia can handle herself."

She'd finally told them last night, sat down in the living room after Vinnie was in bed, Nibs curled up contentedly in the middle of the room, surrounded by his favorite

people. Toni hadn't been completely sure she meant to go through with it before then, but a long heart-to-heart with T had convinced her to stay the course. Coming home had sobered her up a bit, given her time and space to rethink things. Back at Lakeview, it was so easy to get swept up in things. Their floor was always so crazy; someone was always doing something weird and sexy. Her and T as much as any.

They'd done their homework, though. This wasn't an impulse. Girls their age, with their looks, their follower base on their other platforms, could do very, very well. Girls like them bought their own houses at 23 and wore beautiful clothing and traveled the world. There were precautions they could take to keep themselves safe, physically and financially. (No guard dogs allowed on Higgins 3, but they had Spencer, so who needed one.)

Plus, weird as it was to think it, much less act on it... she *wanted* to. Modeling was fun. She got to look cute, be goofy, act sexy, wallow in her tiny sprinkle of celebrity, cheap though it had come. She'd opened up to T about her own first impression, how Toni had thought she was vapid and fake. Like T had said, though, a lot of people had to act fake at their jobs – as if the 7-Eleven clerk gave a shit if you had a nice day. But the 7-Eleven clerk made \$10 an hour, whereas the proprietors of HOTTEZ LLC could do a shoot of the two of them making out for five minutes and sell it for \$40 to scores, hundreds, maybe eventually thousands of guys.

Her idle fantasies that it would convince Spencer to give her a shot like he had with Andi were silly, she'd accepted, but that wasn't a bad thing. Silly fantasies were actually, when you thought about it, pretty great. The real world was drab and dull and hard; giving people a space to imagine a place where a couple of gorgeous girls got off to the idea of being gotten off to was a kindness. Just an unconventional one. Her fantasies about Spencer had awakened parts of her she never knew were in there. It felt *good*, just lying around *imagining*. Now it was her turn to go spice up some imaginations herself.

Mom and Dad had taken it pretty well. They weren't surprised, or at least not as surprised as Toni had figured they'd be. She supposed watching her feed grow steamier and steamier had primed them. Mom had taken some convincing, and yes, a couple slick lines about empowerment and the economic benefits. Dad less so. He'd always teased that she'd wind up using her looks to make a living, though he'd meant it to be annoying (and to goad her out of joining her cousin Charlene at the Hooters out by the mall). Still, he was enough of a Guy that he liked living in a world with boobs on display, and enough of a Dad that he loved and supported her no matter what.

The doorbell rang. "Go on," her mom said, bumping her with an elbow. "Text me if you're going to be late."

Old enough to do porn, but still checking in with her mom if she came home after 10. Toni kissed her mom's cheek and dashed off to the door, waving to her dad as she hastily strapped on her designer shoes. \$300 retail, free to her as a promo. If the link on

her post wearing them sold even one pair, they broke even. And they did wonders for her legs.

She followed Niece to her car, where the gang was waiting. It was their last night of fall break, and they were going to a bonfire at Will's place. He was Brianne's ex-boyfriend, and their breakup had been a nasty one; Toni had only learned of it once they'd reconnected this week. Both had moved on to happier relationships, though, and their amiability felt genuine. Chris was there too, not single, but likewise happier with his own someone else. Good for him.

God, it felt good to be back in the loop. The Hottie Haven had been so vitriolic over break, Tori (and a few others, to lesser degrees) trying to get everybody to reimagine the whole past two insane, amazing months as something bad just because their RA was a dude. Because the dude had fucked Andi and Casey and not her was more like it. Toni had been a little bitter there before break, jealous of Casey getting to play shower games, but now that she had some distance from it, she was cool. The way they teased the poor guy, it was a wonder he hadn't fucked every single one of them. Good for Casey. Good for Spencer. Maybe they could talk Casey into talking Spencer into doing a shoot for their OF. Maybe they could re-enact the Quinn and Leigh fight, only this time when Spencer intervened, he made sure they all kissed and made up. Girl bodies were actually pretty fun, Toni had decided.

That night, though, all those things were distant considerations. She danced to last year's hits and she drank skunky beer, she told her friends how much she'd missed them and hugged them when they told her how impressed they were with the new leaf she'd turned over. That hadn't been their initial reaction, but being together all week, they saw she was happy. Happier than she'd ever been, maybe. And that was all they wanted for her. As the flashes flashed as they took pic after pic, it felt like maybe college wouldn't be the wedge that slowly drove them apart after all. Or if it did, that they'd have a lot of great shots to remember each other by as their lives drifted away along their separate vectors.

The football boys were, as predicted, being pathetic, has-beens reminiscing over their glory days. It was pretty adorable, Toni thought as they invited her to help hold up Ogre for another keg stand. They tumbled over together, laughing hysterically, and he helped tug Toni back to her feet.

"Your turn!" Ogre – Erik – declared.

"No way! No way!" Toni protested with patent insincerity.

Moments later, she was upside down, legs flailing in the air as Erik did his manly best to keep a grip around her thighs that kept her dress from flying up. Or down. Whatever. He didn't need help, nor did he want it. She sucked down beer until she was coughing it between gales of laughter, Erik depositing her back on her feet with dutifully gentle hands. A new song was just starting, one she liked, and she treated the guy to a

dance, the light of the bonfire blazing her hair like it was all a part of the same conflagration.

“So are you really doing, um... You know, like an...”

“OnlyFans,” she finished, nestling into his lap. They weren’t close enough to listen in over the din of the speakers, but dozens of envious eyes followed every wriggle of her hips. “Yep! Me and my roommate, T. She’s so pretty. Here—”

“No, I know.” Erik’s blush shined in the darkness. “I, um, yeah. I follow you. On your stuff.”

“Yeah? How am I doing?”

“So good. I mean... Wow. I don’t even... Wow. The hottest girl in my high school is, like, suddenly one of the hottest girls on the internet. It’s really cool.”

Toni knew full well that there were, statistically speaking, many thousands of girls the internet had deemed hotter, but she’d learned how to take a compliment. “I like it, too. Hopefully the new thing works out, too. We have a lot of ideas for it. We even have merch, already waiting for us back at school. Nuts how fast you can have that stuff made these days.”

Erik asked, so she showed him, swiping through the pics of what the HOTTEZ merch would, hopefully, look like. “So... yeah. That’s just for fun, really. Some of our friends at school said merch would be cool; we tried to tell them our fan base wasn’t likely to want to wear belly shirts, chokers and strapon, but they swore they wanted to support us.” She shrugged, laughing. Frickin’ Hotties.

“That’s awesome. It sounds like, um, you’re, you know, living the dream. Or whatever.” Erik tugged his collar with thick fingers. “Would it be, um... No, never mind.”

Terri shook her head. “No, would it be what?”

He shifted, delicately so as not to displace the strumpet on his lap. “No, just... Yeah. Would it be weird if I, you know, subbed? I don’t wanna creep you out or anything.”

Toni smiled. Without thinking, her phone made its way into her hand and swiped on the camera. It recorded her leaning in and dragging her tongue up the length of a very surprised, very pleased Ogre neck.

“Only if you let me post that,” she said, wrapping an arm around his bull shoulders and showing it to him. He licked his lips, head flopping listlessly to one side. “I can send you a copy, if you want. They make it kind of annoying to download—”

“Don’t worry about it,” he said firmly. “I’m not going to forget that. Ever.”

“HAPPY HALLOWEEN!” the Hotties cried out in unison. Their RA, their beloved, belusted RA had at long last arrived. He was carrying a box, too. Snacks? Toni craned

her neck, raised her phone to try to see over the throng surrounding him, but it appeared to be sealed. She wasn't the only one curious, though; after a moment of pestering, he pulled the flaps open and revealed, of all things, their Higgins Hotties t-shirts!

The girls, predictably, lost their collective friggin' minds. They were in costume, so for now there was no putting them on, but hugs and kisses of gratitude rained down on him from every angle. He tried to explain that he had next to nothing to do with it, that Mrs. Tinsley, the hall manager, had saved them in collaboration with Tori for when the time was right.

"And is the time right, Tori? It's your call." He smiled at Tori in her costume. It was a bikini, basically, and a skimpy one. The "costume" part of it came in the form of a small metal ring by the rear clasp on her bikini top, attached to the end of a thin cord. Toni didn't understand what mechanism operated it, but when pulled, it retracted quickly. She looked like a slutty baby doll, the kind who only cried for her daddy.

Tori turned, shook her butt, and after a moment Spencer understood what he was being invited to do. He tugged on the ring, recoiling as it sucked back in more quickly than he'd been ready for. It made Toni nervous, but Tori tilted her head to the side, eyes vacant, and exclaimed giddily, "Whatever you want, baby!"

Spencer stared, then broke into laughter along with half the floor. Chokers especially. "Oh my god, you're a toy! That's hysterical. Very nice work."

Tori smiled, flattered. "A fuck toy!" She gestured to the way her tits were sloshing around in the utterly inadequate bikini top. "Get it?"

The RA winced a little. Sweetheart that he was, he was probably still processing that whole crazy spectacle from the night before. A triple blowjob, uniting his detractors and supporters? Say what you want about the guy's propensity for sticking his foot in his mouth, he knew how to bring people together. Unconventional? Sure. But effective? Hell yes. T had been too busy jilling herself cross-eyed to remember to record it, but her business partner/bestie had done her work with the shower fight way back in Welcome Week. Toni hadn't skipped a beat recording that one for posterity. It had more reacts on the Hottie Haven than there were Hotties, which only meant that once everybody had finished the eggplants and flaming hearts, they'd started getting creative.

It was the first time she'd decided not to send something to Kim. Not that she bothered her with every last sneaky over-the-shower-stall pic that went up on the Haven, but this felt different. It was the beginning of a new day on Higgins 3, Toni thought. Hoped. It was anybody's guess what this new regime would look like, but it had to be better than the way it had been the past few weeks, everybody at each other's throats. A Higgins 3 where people just fucked when and where and how they felt like it? It felt... *right*. Wrong, too, but if Mrs. Tinsley didn't see fit to intervene, Toni sure as hell wasn't going to complain. In the meantime, she was happy to keep her friend's spank

bank flush with deposits, but it felt increasingly like Higgins 3 was becoming its own thing that only made sense if you were inside it.

At Tori's urging (pleading, really), Spencer gave the string a few more tugs.

"I've been bad. Spank me?"

"Good governors are good girls!"

"I just *love* my RA!"

It was a bit much. It was making Spencer uncomfortable, too, which Casey rectified by pulling the string and crooning, "Vote for Tori! She's a whorey!" Tori frowned, but everyone was laughing, and soon so was she. It was a pretty big transition from earlier in the week, but better to swallow her pride and get on with things than drag her feet over it. Either way, if it was some humiliating punishment someone had meted out for what a cunt she'd been lately, Tori hoped she felt it exactly as it had been intended. The days of divided leadership were over. Time for the days of divided thighs.

Spencer mildly rebuked Casey, as if her barb had been any worse than how Tori had been presenting herself, and turned to the assembly. "So it looks like you all get your shirts back! I just got handed the box, so just grab your size before you go, or swing by my room later and pick it up."

Katrina, looking adorable in her sexy black vinyl kitty cat costume, volunteered to run back to her room and print a sign-up sheet, just to be sure everyone was taken care of. Her tail swished behind her, her ear headband bouncing, painted-on whiskers distending over brightly smiling cheeks. Not the most original costume, but at least her name gave her the right. Spencer and some of the Hotties thanked her, and with that, Angel shoved a cup of punch into his grasp, and the party began in earnest.

Toni kept mostly to herself. T made sure she'd caught the shirt reveal on camera, which she of course had. Beyond that, she kept her camera at the ready, clicking away, liberal with the switch to video whenever games or competitions were underway. Dancing was a given, the Hotties passing Spencer around like molly at a rave. More hugs than one might expect at a Halloween party. More kissing than one might expect at a party with one male and no alcohol. A lap dance, even, though it seemed like it had more to do relationship drama than seduction. Toni was just glad to see how Spencer was easing into their new age. Maybe last night really hadn't been a fluke. He was making the rounds, making it a point to have a moment with everybody. Whatever was between their RA's legs, Toni couldn't imagine a better leader for the Higgins 3 family.

It took Spencer most of the night before he finally made it a point to single her out from her perch in the corner, though as ever, savoring only made it better.

"Hey, you." He grinned. *Oof*, that grin. No way she was going to get to suck his cock again tonight – he'd already firmly announced that there was to be no repeat of the pre-Halloween party's funtivities – but she would have sunk to her knees and done it

then and there if he asked. How had she gotten so lucky to have the coolest floor, with the coolest RA, at the coolest college in the world?

“Hi, Spencer.” She grinned.

“Hey, Toni! You doing OK? Feels like I hardly saw you hanging out. Just sitting back here with your phone in hand.”

Toni shrugged. “Just taking pictures. You know, we’re already a quarter of the way through the school year? It feels like we just got here. I don’t want to miss anything.”

He sat down beside her. Being this close to him always made her think back to that incredible blowjob. His cum. That desperate, unleashed look on his face as they whispered their siren song into the mic, into his ears. They *had* to get him to collab on some OF content. They wouldn’t even need to show his face, just her and T worshiping that rod of his. She had dozens of fantasies she wanted to act out with him, and plenty of them were easily achievable and would even permit anonymity. If he wanted. Toni would be proud to show herself fellating the Hottie head honcho himself.

“Yeah? Because I think you missed a really cool party while you were back here wowing your followers.”

“What? No, I was taking pictures for us! See?” She opened her phone and let him scroll through, basking in his little smile as he relived memories that weren’t yet hours old. He was in nearly every shot, if only because with only one boy, the action tended to fixate around him. After a minute, he reached the end of her feed of the night’s festivities and to the most recent pic prior.

“Oh. Shit, sorry, I... wow.” He handed Toni her phone back, but she pushed it towards him. On the screen was a side-by-side shot of Higgins 307’s occupants, trying out an idea Toni had had for an OF banner. It was a zoomed in shot, a rectangle boxing in four mouth-watering tits. On Toni’s chest was an H on the right boob, an O hovering over her natural cleavage, and then a T on the left. T’s tits featured a T, E and Z in the same configuration. God, it made for good branding. There was pretty much no way to arrange those letters on those bodies that didn’t spell cash money.

She held it up for him. “I don’t mind. Actually, T and I were thinking, we could use a male eye sometimes before we upload. If you’d be willing to give us a little feedback. Some direction.” More like give them some *e*-rection, the way his pants were bulging, but she didn’t want to be too slutty about it. Not until they had him on the hook.

He glanced down, then back up, then back down as Toni’s smile reassured him it was really all right to stare at her digital tits. She swiped again when he looked ready to hand the phone over again, and there on the screen was the content she had created after last night’s pre-party – or as T had named her folder of pics of it, “the Unification Orgy.” After things had finally wound down in the lounge, the undersexed roommates

had gone back to their studio, as they now called it, in 307. Nothing fancy, just a simple, straightforward side by side masturbating on T's bed. (Now that the two were going to be gushing out their pussies all the time when they recorded, T finally regretted driving Toni off of the bottom bunk.) Spencer was seeing the 28-second teaser. The full video was 11 minutes long and, thanks to the recent boost they'd gotten after that collab with the triplets the other day (which they'd half-heartedly pretended Spencer hadn't ordained), it would pay for next semester's textbooks.

"Oh. Well, um, looks like you two, ah, know what you're doing," he said as it began to replay. She let him watch it one more time before allowing him to return her phone.

"So, I'm going to make a butt of myself and admit I have no idea what your costume is. You look great, but...?"

Toni crawled into his lap sideways and snapped a quick selfie before returning it to her front pocket. The phone didn't want to stay in. The tiny yellow coveralls were, well, tiny. A romper, really, but it had a pocket like coveralls, and the fabric for it. It was unzipped low enough to show where her panties would be if Toni were wearing any, her wax job last weekend preventing confirmation of whether the carpet matched the drapes, as the simps liked to ask. Small as she was, it was still barely big enough, framing her vulva handsomely, the bottom of her butt cheeks creeping out in the back. It hadn't wound up showing off her tits as well as she'd hoped; tight as it was, the open zipper would only split a few inches. Still, her titties were determined.

"April O'Neil!" she announced. She'd gotten it for a cosplay shoot, but figured it worked for the party too. It had been T's idea, but Toni had latched right on. It checked all her boxes: authentic familiarity (her brother Vinnie loved the cartoon); hot and busty redhead (neither wig nor bra required!); and most on brand of all, it was a woman whose job was to stand in front of a camera and look good.

"Oh! Oh yeah, totally! How did I not...? Dang, you nailed it."

With his cock pressing into her butt, Tori wondered if that wasn't the only thing she'd nailed tonight. "I figured if I was going to sit back and record things, I may as well dress up as the hottest reporter out there. Suck it, Lois Lane."

Spencer grinned. "Lois who?"

"Exactly."

Over the next seventy-two hours, the photo Spencer took of his Hotties on Toni's phone received over sixteen thousand likes. (Toni took her first step to forgiving Tori for the boost her fuck-toy costume surely provided.) The pic T snapped of her nestled on Spencer's lap, his eyes wandering as his smile held fast, received over fifteen orgasms, all of them Toni's. That night, still in costume, the girls logged into their HOTTEZ account and live-streamed the announcement of their new site.

Their first subscription was a gifted one, from them, to him. He gave the notification a Heart react, and Toni knew she'd carry the memory of that little red icon to her grave.

(Still, she screenshotted it and filed it away. Just in case.)

END, PART ONE

Part Two: The Slut's Tale

“Well you're a pretty little thing, aren't you?”

“And she knows it, too.”

“Good luck keeping the boys away from that one!”

“Fat chance of that, right?”

“Holy shit, she's actually...”

“She's... oh fuck, she's...”

“Oh my fucking god, what a...”

“She's so...”

“I can't believe she's actually...!”

Airtight, Shauna thought, a bit peevishly. *Spitroasted*. How could it be she was trying to split her attention between meeting the thrusts of her boyfriend's cock in her pussy *and* not choking to death on his buddy's cock meekly infiltrating her throat, and yet *these* idiots couldn't even come up with the words for what she was letting them do.

The words for the act, that is. What they were also doing to her could less succinctly be called “making her come her fucking tits off.” Ruining her voice for a day or two at least. Making her google if her birth control was still effective against a gallon of baby batter flooding into her from both ends.

It was too bad they didn't have a third. This would have been such a hot way to bust her anal cherry.

She grabbed the ass of the guy plugging her from the front and pulled him in as hard as she could, eyes flooding with tears, throat burning, lungs confounded as they tried to breathe in dick, something they for some reason hadn't been designed to do. *Nice one, god, you fucking dickhead*, she thought, trying to snerk down the snot threatening to bubble out her nose. That would be pretty unhot of her. Although she couldn't snerk if she couldn't breathe, evidently.

Thankfully, he busted a nut before Shauna had to risk ruining the moment for him. Oh god, it shot right down her throat. She didn't swallow; it just *went*. That was fucking hot for some reason. Reasons didn't matter. His cum had actual goddamn velocity to it. Her stomach could actually feel it hit land, though partially because she hadn't eaten anything that day. This was her breakfast, lunch and dinner. Shauna had hit her freshman fifteen by mid-September. She'd felt repulsive. Half her clothes didn't fit right, including pretty much all of the hot thot shit she'd bought for her new life here

at Lakeview. Two months later, she'd starved most of it off just in time for fucking sweater weather. Fuck.

Fuck.

Oh fuck.

Oh fuck, she was..

She was... Fuck.

The cock in front of her slipped out, still spurting into her face. A blob got her right in the eye. That made her come harder. Being jizzed on was hot as fuck, and having a guy come so hard for her he couldn't even control where was hotter as fucker. That cock in her pussy was a fucking jackhammer. Between gasping for air, coughing up precum and postcum and not a little spit, she pleaded for him not to stop. Whined. Begged for it, like a little slut bitch. Her boyfriend – at least that's how he saw himself, same as the other two guys she was seeing – had a really nice cock. It was why she put up with the rest of it. Presently, she was grateful for every lame pun, cheapskate move, and trashy pickup line. She was coming.

Better yet, so was he.

Shauna lay there in this stranger's bed – her boyfriend had told Shauna his brother's name, but she couldn't remember, and didn't especially care – basking in the glow of so much cum. (Frat brother, to be clear. Not that she'd care if they were for real brothers. That would probably be even hotter.) Plenty of the cum was hers, sure, but *theirs*. God. She *mmmmmed* into the pillow at the sensation of it trickling out of her pussy. Cream motherfucking pied. There was no feeling the gobs and gobs of it that had gone down her throat, but her throat... Nothing like a take-no-prisoners approach to fucking a girl's throat. This was hands down the best party she'd been to since coming to Lakeview. Even better than the one where she'd hooked up with that hot international student with his hot accent and his entitled assumption that American sluts like her would spread their legs for him the moment they heard it. Which she had, gladly.

The boys were talking, but Shauna was barely listening. The stranger guy was marveling that she'd let them do that; her boyfriend was sheepishly defending her virtue. Sweet. Too bad she hated sweet guys. She hadn't enrolled in a university on the opposite end of the country because she was worried about her rep, seeking out some doucher to defend it.

“Do you think she'd let us swap?”

That, she heard, loud and clear. Shauna raised her hips, opened her mouth, and waited. She could be a heckin' good bitch when her pussy wanted her to be. It was pretty good about getting what it wanted.

“Did you wear my blue top, Shauna?”

Shauna glanced up from her desk. Tracy was holding up the garment in question, a pissed-off look on her face. “Oh. Um, yeah, I think so. You’re sure that’s yours?”

“Uh, ya, I’m sure *my* top is *mine*.”

“Oh. My bad.” She turned back to her laptop. Would this chick hurry up and fuck off so she could get back to swiping through tinder. It was hard to find the appropriately horny frame of mind with that shrill cunt taking up so much space.

“There’s a freaking *stain*, Shauna. Do you see this?”

Shauna didn’t bother looking back. Give a mouse a cookie, it was gonna want some milk. Then wonder what the particularly milk-like stain on its top was. “Oh, my bad. Put it in my hamper. I’ll wash it.”

“Like you washed my sheets after you and your flavor-of-the-week...?” Tracy couldn’t get the words out. Or maybe she didn’t know them. Shauna wasn’t sure.

She pivoted once again, adopting an expression of empathy. “Come on, Tracy. You know me. We’ve been living together for what, four months?”

“Yeah. About that.”

“Do you really think I’d waste a whole week on some guy?” She had, on several guys, but not by a lot. There were a *lot* of guys at Lakeview.

“You’re nasty. Like, seriously nasty.”

Shauna was already turning away from her. “You know it, baby. Woo!” It was a half-hearted woo, but enough to send Tracy storming out of the room.

Their RA, Aerial, was in their room, Tracy on her heels, not ten minutes later. She knocked, as if she wasn’t being escorted in by one of the room’s residents. Shauna set down the textbook she’d picked up when she’d heard Tracy’s voice in the hall and looked up innocently.

“Hey, Aerial. Oh wow, I love that skirt. You look super cute.” She smiled.

Aerial gave herself a once over. “Really? It’s just a...” She caught herself taking the bait. If there was one thing that won over mediocre-looking girls, it was physical compliments from hot girls. “Thank you. Actually though, I came down here to talk to you. Do you have a sec?”

“Oh sure.” She acknowledged Tracy. “This is about borrowing her top, isn’t it. I’m really sorry. It’s embarrassing.”

Tracy shook her head, not accepting the apology. She knew better by now. Good for her. “Since when did you get embarrassed?”

Aerial held up her hands to the petitioning party. “Hey now, let’s dial it back, OK? Obviously, there’s some emotions happening here. How about the three of us sit down and see if we can’t figure out how to improve the situation a bit. Is now an OK time, Shauna?”

“Aw, you learned my name.” She projected gratitude, though really, this chick had taken over a month of living here to stop calling her Shana. It was a small thing, but coming from someone she had no reason to like, it hadn’t helped. “Sure. Do I sit here, or...?”

“There’s fine. Tracy, you want to have a seat? And I’ll just...” Aerial plopped down on Tracy’s bed, the lower bunk. “Great. So since Tracy is the one who came down to me with some concerns, why don’t we start with her, then Shauna, you’ll get the same opportunity to respond, air your own issues, whatever. Tracy, talk to me about your concerns. And if possible, try to avoid accusations, name-calling, et cetera. What you’ve seen happen, how it makes you feel.”

It was a dead giveaway that Tracy had been making all manner of accusations and no doubt calling some names down in the RA’s room. Shauna turned to her roommate to listen patiently.

Tracy had been thinking about this for a while now, clearly. She had a litany at the ready; somehow, today’s little cum stain had dredged it all to the surface. This was the second time they’d had a dialogue like this, after the Labor Day incident when Tracy had gone home for the three-day weekend and returned to find Shauna in her bed with a boy from her comp class. They weren’t even doing anything when it happened, but they had been naked. What were they supposed to do, fuck on the top bunk? It was Tracy’s own stupid fault for staking out the bottom one in the first place. So she’d tattled, and Shauna had promised not to do it again. She’d even been sincere about it when she said it.

Except that same weekend, she’d found out from a sophomore girl at a club that if your roommate left, you got the room to yourself until they filled it, no extra fee.

Tracy laid it all out there. Shauna having guys over, sometimes overnight. (This category went on in various levels of detail for some time, until Aerial finally asked if there were other concerns.) Shauna borrowing her clothes. Shauna leaving an unwrapped condom on the floor. Shauna leaving a used condom on her bed. Today’s incident had simply been the straw that broke her back.

“It’s just... *disgusting*. She’s *disgusting!*”

“Easy on the judgments, Tracy. Feelings.”

“OK, I *feel* disgusted! My friend told me I should get a black light and see what all she’s contaminated in here, but I’m honestly worried I’d go blind from it. I don’t think I could sleep at night if I saw what all she’s—”

“Objection, your honor, speculation,” muttered Shauna. But she laughed and held up her hands apologetically. “Sorry, Aerial. I just don’t want to get in trouble because of what she guesses I might have done.”

“You won’t. Although, I’ll be honest, some of these accusations, if they’re true, are pretty serious.”

“Do I get to tell my side of things?”

Ariel nodded. “Yes. Go ahead. Same deal as Tracy. No name-calling, focus on your feelings and not assuming anyone else’s.”

Tracy folded her arms haughtily, refusing to make eye contact with her lecherous roommate. Shauna studied her, then sighed despondently. “Ariel, I honestly don’t know what she’s talking about with half of that stuff. I’ve never—”

“What?! You freaking liar!”

Ariel raised a hand. “Let her talk, Tracy. She let you talk.”

Shauna nodded. “Thank you. I mean, yes, I’ve had guys over, and yes, I used condoms. Tossing them all over the room, though? This is the first I’ve heard of that. Yes I’ve borrowed her clothes a couple times, but only because I saw her borrowing mine, so I figured that was just how she wanted to do it, which was fine with me.”

“What?! I *never*—”

Ariel gave Tracy a stern look. “Tracy... Come on now.”

“But she’s not telling the truth!”

“That sounds like an accusation,” Shauna pointed out softly.

“It is! *Ariel!*”

Ariel, however, was refocusing on the roommate who was supposed to have the floor at the moment. “All right, so we have some differing accounts. Now Shauna, Tracy showed me the shirt you borrowed today, and I’ve seen the, erm, spot. On it. Do you have anything to say about that?”

“I told her I was sorry. I swear! But if you need to hear it, then I’ll say it again. Tracy, I’m very sorry I borrowed your top without asking, and I promise as long as you don’t borrow any of my stuff any more, I won’t borrow any of your stuff.”

“And the stain?”

Shauna arched an eyebrow. “I mean, I don’t think milk stains, but like I told her, I’ll gladly wash—”

“Milk?! Ariel, this is such freaking bull! You know darn well what that is, Shauna, you... you *slut!*”

Ariel gave Tracy a stern look. “Name-calling...”

Shauna gave her roommate a sympathetic look and shook her head. “What is it...?”

“It’s... It’s...!” Tracy had to really dig to get that one out. “It’s *semen!* From a *boy!*”

Shauna gasped, supposedly mortified. She’d been perfecting her indignant gasp for a while now. “Is *that* why you’re so upset? Oh my gosh, no wonder! No, it’s just...” She gestured to where, in the minutes since Tracy’s departure, a styrofoam bowl sat with a plastic spoon, a bit of milk with chunks of corn flakes clinging to the side. She’d prepped it that morning; not the most hygienic thing to leave in a drawer all day, but at least she’d finally provoked Tracy enough that she’d tattled. The last four bowls had had

to be thrown away unseen. Shauna had started to think that fucking slob was never going to realize that blue shirt was somehow always at the top of her hamper. “See?” she pressed.

“YOU’RE NOT GOING TO GET AWAY WITH THIS YOU FUCKING SLUT!” shrieked Tracy.

Their meeting ended with Aerial promising to sit the two down with the Penderdast hall manager. Their RA recognized her limits, and this was bigger than she was cut out for. In fact, she suggested that such a meeting might be exactly what Shauna needed. A female role model to mentor her, to teach and support her as she transitioned from high school to college to the real world.

“No, totally, that’s exactly what I need,” she concurred.

That night, Shauna feigned sleep while Tracy did the predictable thing and swiped one of Shauna’s condoms from her drawer and dropped it, used, on the floor. In the morning, she went to Aerial and told her what she’d seen – the truth this time, which was refreshing – and had her come in to check it out.

Unlike her roommate, however, Tracy hadn’t been rehearsing her bullshit for weeks on end. Faced with Shauna’s accusation, she soon broke into tears and confessed. Aerial wrote her up, eyeing Tracy with plain suspicion.

Tracy was assigned five hours of community service, which she served after moving down to Wilkes Quad on the far end of campus.

As she hefted her last box, Shauna held the door to apologize. In a few minutes, someone at the Penderdast front desk would hit a few buttons, and Tracy’s key card would never open the room again.

“Just so you know Tracy, it wasn’t personal. You didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Get bent, whore,” sniped Tracy, brushing past her.

“That’s the idea.”

“Oh hey, Aerial. How’s it going? Your hair looks different. I really like it.”

“Yeah. I just had a very interesting talk with Cecile. Among other concerns – familiar ones – she told me... Well, no sense beating around the bush. She told me you had sexual intercourse with her boyfriend.”

“She said... what? Oh my god. I mean, she got in a big snit telling me I was flirting with him, and ever since then I never even spoke to him, much less–”

“She showed me their texts. So either he’s lying about cheating on her and begging her to take him back, or...”

“Oh.” Well, shit. The single room had been good while it had lasted. Going to work on Cecile had been greedy of her. “So now what happens?”

Shauna sniffed in disdain. This place smelled nasty. The outside was ugly, too, one of the only brick buildings on a campus full of pristine limestone. Not technically on campus – right across Roberts Ave – but close enough.

It was quiet, too, she noted as she walked around, looking for a stairwell. There were lights on in most of the offices, dimly emitting from behind frosted panes of glass. That none of them had doors open, and all of them with those opaque windows concealing what was inside, gave it all a very closed off look. At the beginning of fall semester when she'd still been learning the campus, it had always been easy to just ask someone for directions. Here, in this fortress of sexitude, she was a little afraid of what might be behind those doors.

Not that Shauna didn't like sex – a lot, actually – but there was fucking, and there was *studying* fucking. Compared to most people she knew, Shauna felt like she had some insights on pleasure. But these people, they *knew* things.

At last there was an elevator. Only as she pressed the button, then repeatedly mashed it, no response. “God damnit. Well, maybe this'll get me out of this counseling shit.”

“I wouldn't count on it,” said a voice from behind her.

Shauna nearly jumped out of her skin. Or at least, out of her khakis and Lakeview hoodie. Not the sort of clothes she often wore out and about, but when you were ordered to counseling for sexual misconduct on pain of some vague but very inconvenient sounding consequences, it didn't hurt to look chaste.

The voice had come from a man standing in a now open doorway across the hall and down a little ways. He was an older guy, 40-something she guessed, with thick-framed black glasses. He was wearing a sweater vest and nice slacks, projecting a general professorial vibe. Not bad-looking, either, for someone her dad's age.

She grimaced at her squeak. “Oh crap, sorry, I didn't see you there. I, um, guess the elevator's out of order, huh?”

“Yeah, sorry about that. It actually happens all the time. I try to leave my door ajar so people don't have to stand there waiting for a lift that isn't coming. Where are you headed? I can steer you in the right direction.”

“Oh, thanks. I'm looking for the counseling office?” That felt awkward to say, a euphemism for “*I got caught being enough of a ho that they're punishing me for it.*” She tried not to sound embarrassed. “Um, Dr. Faraj? I probably said that wrong.”

“No no, you actually nailed it. Though he's out today, unfortunately. Did you not get some kind of email?”

Shauna shook her head. “I don't think so...”

The man frowned sympathetically. “Oh. That’s... egg on our face. Usually he has impeccable communication with his patients – as I’m sure I don’t need to tell you.”

“Actually, this is our first meeting. Or would have been. We’ve never actually spoken – they just sent me, um... Well it’s a long story. But that’s good to hear.”

“Really?” The man tapped his chin. “I hope I’m not being intrusive, but if I’m reading between your lines, this is an assigned counseling, not requested?”

Shauna nodded, embarrassed.

“Well, if you like, I’m available.” The man stepped forward, extending a hand. “Call me Austin.”

She shook his hand. Firm. Still something she was getting used to at college, calling old people by their first names. “Oh. Um, you’re a counselor? And... is that, like, OK? No offense or anything, really, just I don’t want to do this and have to redo it because they needed me to talk with Dr. Faraj specifically.”

“Astute. But no, we deal with this kind of thing not altogether infrequently. When your case came through, one of our interns randomly assigned you to someone, which I can easily re-assign. If you’d rather contact Dr. Faraj, though, I’d be happy to take a message for him. I don’t know when he’ll be back in, but–”

Ugh, the longer this dragged out, the more humiliating it felt. That nosey cunt Aerial was giving her the stinkeye every time their paths crossed, and though she denied it, she’d told the whole damn floor. The bitch was just pissed Cecile decided to move out instead of waiting for the poky campus judicial system to schedule a hearing and force Shauna to do so instead. Apparently another week of cohabitation had been more than she could stand.

(Funny. Her boyfriend hadn’t seemed to object to Shauna’s company.)

“Hey, if you’ll take me, then call me grateful.”

The man – Austin something – smiled. It was a confident smile. *Don’t go working on a crush on your therapist, Shauna!* Fuck, that was next level. “All right, Grateful, let’s get the ball rolling then, shall we? Come on in.”

“Welcome back, Shauna. You look well.”

Austin extended an arm, and after a brief shake, invited her to take a seat. He had three couches in this surprisingly spacious office. They sat in a U-shaped configuration, the faded carpet betraying lines where his desk chair had rolled to and from the open side until they were basically grooves. She picked a sofa and plopped herself down as he maneuvered his chair into its familiar spot.

“Thanks. Um, do you mind me asking... Is this a pullout bed?” It clearly was. Her parents had had one when Shauna was little. Her ass remembered the lumpy feel of it, her ears the creak of the support springs.

“Yes it is,” he answered. “When you’re furnishing an office on a budget and you find someone giving away a free sofa, you don’t trouble yourself about the innards. You just buy a pizza for your friend with a pickup truck, then haul ass to get it. If it’s uncomfortable, feel free to use one of the others.”

She held her ground, though addressed the next itch of curiosity. “Why three? For group therapy?”

“Sometimes. The department also meets in here sometimes, so it’s handy for that.” He grinned. “More furniture questions? I’ve got all the furniture answers you could ever want.”

Shauna smiled politely. She thought she liked him, but she was still making up her mind. The metaphorical gun to her head forcing her to be here was hard to forget. “I’m good.”

Austin crossed his legs, steepling his fingers. “So. First meeting’s over. Paperwork dealt with, i’s and lower case j’s dotted, t’s crossed. You told me why you’re here, and now I’ve had a chance to look over the documentation provided by our good friends in the Lakeview housing office. This week, I’d like it if we could start to get a better picture of you, Shauna.”

Her lips pursed to one side. “I told you where I’m from, basic upbringing stuff, my major, and you’ve read what I did to wind up here. What more could you want to know? I ain’t that interesting.”

“That’s just it. All those things, I don’t think they explain anything about what you’re doing here.”

“I mean, I slept with my roommate’s boyfriend. It was stupid, and I’m sorry, and... what more is there to say? I still don’t know why I had to talk to a shrink just to say what I already said. No offense.”

“None taken. I actually admire a person who’s frank with me. I tell you what, though, Shauna. I’d like to do an association activity. You know those survey questions you see on the internet sometimes, where it makes a statement and you mark one for strongly disagree, three for neutral, and all that?”

She shrugged. “Yeah, sure. Whatever you wanna do. You’re the counselor.”

Austin shook his head. “I’m your therapist, Shauna. Not your counselor.”

She held her palms up. “What’s the difference? Like, a PhD versus a master’s?”

“No, you’re probably conflating the distinction between a therapist and a psychiatrist. I do have my PhD, though. Several, actually.” He laughed. “Sorry, my mother passed years ago and everybody I regularly talk to has at least one of their own, so my juvenile need to be praised must not be being met.”

“Um, sorry to hear about your mom,” she said, lamely. “But multiple PhDs? In what?” Shauna was only barely interested, but the more he talked the less she had to.

“Human sexuality is the primary concentration of my work, along with sociology and psychology. I’ve got degrees in biochemistry and human biology as well.” There was a finality to his response, though, some subtle unspoken tone conveying that he knew very well what she was doing, and would play along, but not to try gaming his system.

Shauna pressed it. “That’s a lot of things. You use all that in your counseling?”

“I use all that in more ways than either of us want to sit here talking about. Counseling is one of them. To your original question, however, a counselor is someone a person someone sees for help with life challenges. A marriage counselor, for example. Your guidance counselor at Lakeview. A therapist is someone who treats mental health disorders. The difference between the guy at the gym who can tell you how much weight to put on the squats, and the physical therapist you get sent to when you ignore him.”

It wasn’t not funny, in his dry, charming way, but she was still stuck on one word in particular. A word she had not liked hearing. “Disorders? I don’t have any fucking disorders, asshole.”

He nodded, her barb bouncing off his sweater vest. “And I’m not saying you do. Though I’m sure a young woman bright enough to be enrolled at Lakeview understands that many people with mental health disorders don’t think they have mental health disorders.”

No sense pretending to be the happy, docile patient now that she’d snapped at him. “OK, so you want me to take your survey, and then you’ll tell me I’m a schizophrenic or whatever. If it counts as one of my sessions, do what the hell ever you feel like, I guess.”

“You’re not schizophrenic, Shauna. I can see you’re eager for me to get on with it though, so... let’s just begin, see how it goes. So I’ll read a statement, you give a numeric answer. One is strongly disagree, five is... yep, I already said that. Moving on.” He swiveled, retrieving a piece of paper from a nearby table. It was crinkly, looked like it had been held plenty in the past. “First statement, nice and easy: ‘I am a girl.’ They’re first person, so just... you get it.”

“Five.”

“Second: I am a woman.”

Shauna frowned. “What? I mean... Six. I didn’t... change my last answer to a three.”

Austin smiled. “It’s all right, Shauna. Though the purpose of these initial questions is to encourage you to slow down and think before you respond. Noted, you perceive yourself as a woman, not a girl.”

Damn straight, she thought. She hadn’t thought of herself as a “girl” since she’d lost her virginity in eighth grade to a high school guy at a party. Her tits had sprouted

early, and plentifully; she'd convinced him she was actually the older of the two of them. Evidently she'd fucked well enough in her first at-bat not to disabuse him of this belief, which she still wore as a private badge of pride.

"Next: I have a vagina."

It was weird hearing a man say that, exercise or no. "Five."

He nodded, eyes on his list. "I have a pussy."

"What? You're not supposed to say... that."

"I have a pussy," Austin repeated.

"I mean... five. Again. And vagina retro to I guess, like, four? I don't know. Are these all going to be trick questions?"

"It's not a trick, Shauna. It's to help me understand how you internalize your sexuality. There aren't any right or wrong answers. Really."

She folded her arms. "Fine. What next, you want to ask if I have breasts or bazongas?"

Austin set the list down, but upside down. Was there some secret on there, some kind of instructions that said *vagina good, pussy bad* or something? "All right. What term do you prefer to use for them?"

"Seriously? I don't know. Depends on context."

"Inside your head."

Shauna knew the answer. It was just creepy to say out loud to some old guy, though. Like, this Austin guy was older than some of her professors. But hey, if he was supposed to be some hotshot sex doc...

"Tits," she said confidently. "Big. Hot. Tits. How 'bout that."

She was impressed. The guy didn't seem fazed in the least. "Tits, then. So, if I said, 'I have big hot tits,' you'd say..."

Shauna smirked. "Six." This was starting to get a little fun. Naughty. A little creepy still, but naughty was fun.

"I like it when men acknowledge that I am as sexually attractive."

"Five."

"I like it when men pursue me for my pussy."

"Five."

"I like it when men notice my big hot tits."

"Five."

"I enjoy sex."

Shauna hesitated. "Five, when it's good."

"When it's not?"

Another moment to consider. "Four and a half."

"I have a lot of sex."

“Four. It would be a five, but, I dunno, this crap with Cecile has been harshing my vibe.”

“Mhm. I have sex with men out of habit.”

She frowned. “Habit? I dunno. Like, sometimes, I guess. I go on dates to set it up, and yeah, once in a while I kinda, you know, do it, even if they’re bleh. So, I guess four...?”

Austin smiled, amused, but quickly apologized. “I’m sorry. It’s just the transition from the phrasing of ‘big hot tits’ to ‘ya know, do it.’ Perfectly natural, it just caught me off guard.”

Shauna chuckled with him. It *was* kinda funny. “Fine, sometimes I fuck guys because I’m bored.”

Austin regained his composure. “I have sex... Sorry. I’ll restrict myself to your phrasing. I *fuck* to pass the time.”

“Five.”

“I fuck as a way to meet new people.”

“Hmm. I guess four? There’s some cool guys at Lakeview, I guess. And I get invited to a *lot* of parties. I’d need a twin – two of them – to make it to all the ones I get invited to.”

“Not sure one person can have two twins,” Austin observed dryly.

“Triplets then, OK boomer. Actually, did you hear the thing in the paper about those three triplet girls who rushed Sigma Chi? Outed all their hazing shit. I heard they might lose their charter from the national–”

“I often feel horny,” Austin said instead. It took a moment for Shauna to remember the exercise, and another moment to force down the feelings her misapprehension had engendered. God damnit, this was no time to develop a Daddy kink.

“Eh. Three.” She didn’t need to be horny to want to fuck. The fucking was what made her horny. His stupid little game didn’t seem to accommodate nuance very well.

“I fuck men even if I’m not attracted to them.”

“Two.” She wrinkled her nose. “All right, three. Sometimes it’s just proximity, you know? Besides, looks aren’t everything. My chemistry tutor in high school was a girlfriend’s five at best. But I told him I’d give him a handy – a handjob, I mean – if he let me copy his homework for the semester, and it turned out he was fucking *hung*.” One eye squinted shut bashfully. “And I cannot believe I just told you that.”

“You can tell me as much as you feel comfortable sharing, Shauna. No judgments. I did a study once on people convicted of engaging in sex acts with animals to better understand bestiality as a fetish. I promise, whatever you tell me, I’ve heard more sensational.”

“Fuck. That’s... Jesus.”

Austin moved on without further comment. "I enjoy rough sex."

"Five."

"I enjoy sex with multiple partners."

"Simultaneously? Or like—"

"Simultaneously."

"Five."

"I enjoy sex more when I feel it pushes my limits."

"Oh fuck, five. For sure five. Ten. Fifty." Was she supposed to be turned on at therapy?

"I enjoy sex more when my partner practices unfamiliar acts, kinks, or fetishes."

"Five."

"My partner's sexual satisfaction – i.e. 'coming' – is important to me."

"Three. No, two."

"My satisfaction in sex depends on the quality of my own orgasm."

"Three. It's pretty normal for me not to come." She frowned. "Is that weird?"

"To quote a wiser man than myself, it's normal for it to be weird. I did a case study in graduate school on a woman whose kink was to have her husband dress her up and do her makeup like a lifesize doll and take her out in public, where she'd sit there, comatose but with her eyes open and smiling. Which I *still* don't consider 'weird.'"

"Sounds pretty damn weird to me." Shauna craned her neck. "So, you haven't written anything down. Aren't you supposed to be evaluating me or something?"

Austin uncrossed his legs, tilted the paper down. Now that she could see it, Shauna realized it was some kind of meeting agenda or something, just bullet points about nothing she understood. It definitely wasn't the source of his survey statements. She didn't bother disguising that she'd noticed. "What the hell? You've just been making this up as you go?"

"Does your dentist use a checklist?"

"Well, no."

His lips spread knowingly. "I've found eye contact can make people uncomfortable during this stage, so I wanted to give you space. Really all I wanted was to get you talking. We succeeded. I learned a lot about your sexual psychology just now. It's premature to make a diagnosis, but I can say, I'm glad they sent you to us."

"Why? Is something... wrong with me?" *Please don't be a disorder*, Shauna thought. *I'm way too hot to have to be drugged into not wanting to fuck.*

"I tell you what, Shauna. I'm going to give you two more statements. I don't want you to respond to them right now. I realize we're a little early, but I'm going to send you out now."

"What about—"

“Your j-board sentencing, right. Don’t worry, you still get full credit. Let them worry about hours, and me worry about my patient.”

Shauna smiled. She decided at that moment that she liked him. “OK. Thanks.”

Austin nodded. “Now I want you to think about these, and next time we meet, I want you to have numbers for me.”

“OK...? I don’t know why I’m nervous. Like you said, there aren’t even wrong answers.”

“There aren’t.” Austin leaned in. “First: I am in control of my pussy.”

Shauna’s eyes shot wide. “I’m...? What?!”

“And second: My pussy is in control of me.”

“Sorry about back there. A guy on my floor said the show was really good. I thought it’d be... I dunno. But sorry. At least we got out before the second act. Are you mad?”

Shauna slipped his hand into her back pocket by way of answer. “Mad? Pff. At least now if anybody asks me my opinion on the opera, I’ll have an informed opinion. Sound like a real college girl, you know?” Girl? Or woman? One of so many conversations she’d been having with herself since that therapy session.

Her rump received a squeeze for her tolerance. The opera had been awful. The bar was lower for collegiate performers, but it was hard to imagine anybody squawking out Italian gibberish at that volume without it being fucking irritating. “You know, I thought you had kind of a classy vibe when we first met in class. Don’t know what I was thinking dragging you there.”

She elbowed him playfully. “I do try to clean up if I’m having to pretend to like culture.”

“I’ll say.” He looked her over, just short of a leer. “Seriously, you look incredible, Cecile. That dress... Like a movie star or something. I’m not just saying that.”

Shauna smiled. Fake names for random dudes was an old trick. Kept them from getting clingy – hard to track someone down when you’d only chatted through the app and they only had a name and a face. “Thank you. You look.... Mm. Sexy.”

It was hyperbole, but not by much. The guy looked pretty decent. The suit helped a lot. Probably the only reason he’d tried that dumbass opera stunt, so he’d have an excuse to wear it. It was working for him, though.

“Thanks. So, now that we have the rest of the evening open, what do you want to do? I don’t know if you want to stick with the audience-style thing, maybe catch a movie? Or take advantage of our snazzy attire and find a club, get sweaty?”

Shauna wasn't twenty-one, though she had an ID that said otherwise. Not that bouncers tended to care much when someone looked like her. They usually didn't even ask to see it. Still, this dude wasn't much of a conversationalist, and she wasn't in the mood for talk. She hadn't had sex with anybody but her electric toothbrush in over a week. She didn't know if it was Austin fucking with her head or if there really was something fucked up with her, but her brief dry spell made her feel... Unattractive. Bored. Sad, a little.

But... was that her pussy talking? Or her? What was the difference?

She really ought to know the difference between thinking with her head and thinking with her pussy. That was a thing everybody knew, right? It had to be. She *really* ought to know.

Right now, though, she had a decision to make. Movie, or club?

"We could go back to your place, if you want. I wouldn't mind just... hanging out."

She jerked him off on the drive to his apartment, and fucked him bent over the armrest of his living room couch. She didn't even make it in far enough to need to take off her heels. Her ass looked better in them anyway. His roommate walked in on them, spazzed a little, and darted into his room.

She fucked the roommate over the breakfast table while her date slept off the vodka he slurped up as it poured down her tits.

Her big, hot, tits.

Her therapist might be a little bit of a creep, but she had to admit: he'd gotten her thinking.

*Shasha babe! Hey girl I'm in town
wyd?*

Shauna studied the text. Again. Six times now she'd read it, and it kept saying the same thing. She knew what she wanted to write. Instinct. But was that her thinking, or... Fuck. Fucking Austin! Getting in her head, making her feel like some kind of slut. Which, she supposed, she was, but still, she'd never felt bad about it before him.

(Should she have felt bad about it...? He hadn't *said* it was a bad thing. But he had made her say it. God that had been hot. Therapy wasn't supposed to be hot, damnit! But it was. She was such a slut.)

Fuck!

Only three more sessions and she could move on, stop feeling like she was damaged because she liked sex. Tomorrow, to tell him off, and then for the last two maybe she could do like on TV where she just sat there and blew him off until the

session was over. Would she get in trouble for that? Shit, probably. Fucking Cecile and her douchey fucking ho of a boyfriend. Ex-boyfriend.

Because of you. Because your pussy told you not to care if you wrecked things for them. Because your pussy controls you.

Shut up!

She shook her head. The text was still there. She could just type, hit send, have a good little night. He'd been a fun lay in high school. What he was doing all the way out here, she had no idea. He'd gotten an athletic scholarship, she thought. His school was probably playing Lakeview or something. Those fucking abs, god. She could lick those things for a day.

Because your pussy controls you.

She growled, which became a rage screech halfway through. Damn it! There was nothing wrong with having some hot, casual sex – especially with a guy who was gonna be a thousand miles away in a day. There was no reason to feel like she owed her therapist an explanation for who she fucked and when. It was none of his business. Tomorrow, she'd just lie to Austin, the same way she'd lied to her mom and dad, to that dick Aerial, to all the guys she promised she'd call back.

Because your pussy controls you.

Well, fuck it. Shauna picked up her phone and typed a response.

You, I hope

Where might a pussy like mine find a cock like yours on a night like this?

SEND.

His cum was still a little wet on her tits when he fell asleep. God, she'd needed that. Opera douche had been such a let-down. All foreplay, no fun. Like the opera. The biggest thrill had been ditching him for his dork roomie. When she came, that had been all she could think about. Not cocks and pussies and tongues and tits. Just how fucking hot it felt to twist these little shitheads around her finger for a game. Sex-wise it had been nothing special. 6 out of 10 for her date, 4 for the roommate. So maybe her disorder was some kind of power thing, not sexual?

But damn, speaking of sex, tonight? That had been the good shit. No bullshit romantic pretense. Just I'm here, you're here, we're hot, let's fuck. He was even more jacked than he had been in high school. Hadn't won him the game, but who fucking cared. He wasn't a winner or loser based on some scoreboard. He was a goddamn winner because he'd ditched the team pity party to stuff a hot chick's tight wet pussy. She'd done it because just the idea of fucking some random in-town-for-a-night NCAA basketball player made Shauna leak down her thighs.

Because your pussy controls you.

She frowned at the underside of what had once been Tracy's bunk, then Cecile's. It was like she couldn't get those words out of her head. Part of her thought it was kinda hot. Who would have ever expected a therapist to talk in terms of tits and pussies and fucking? He got it, kind of, even if he was being a judgey prick about it.

(Not really, but if he diagnosed her with Way Too Fuckable syndrome or whatever, she was bracing herself not to agree.)

The cum was dry by the time she gave up on sleep and made for the bathroom. There was enjoying sex, and there was being a full-blown skank.

Shauna hadn't bothered with a shower; the sink was plenty. She lifted her shirt and dabbed at the impacted area – namely her big, hot, tits – inspecting and admiring them in the broad mirror mounted over the row of sinks.

She heard voices in the hallway, a man and a woman. The latter she was sure was Aerial. Shauna perked up her ears.

“I told you, I have to escort you.” Aerial.

“Seriously? You worried I'm gonna jump somebody?” The man.

“No, but it's policy. I can't write them up for letting guests wander around on their own if I don't escort mine.”

“But, um, what if there's somebody in there?”

“It's two in the morning, babe. But sure, I'll check. Take your shower, and I'll camp out here and make sure nobody goes in. There's another bathroom around the corner.”

Aerial called out from the bathroom entrance. “Hello...?”

She received no response. Neither did she see Shauna, who had ducked into one of the shower stalls.

“See? Empty. Go on. Just don't take forever, OK babe?” A smooching sound followed.

“I'll be fast, babe.”

Male footsteps approached. They walked right past her stall, at which point she silently opened the door and padded along behind him. Fuck. He was pretty much the type of guy one would expect to date an RA. Shorter than either Shauna or even Aerial, doughy if not totally fat, his dark skin showing signs of poor maintenance, and hairy as all fuck. The towel wrapped around his waist was putting that fact on horrifying display.

Not that she hadn't fucked some hella hirsute guys. They were *hot* guys though. Most of them. Huge difference.

She only had to follow him a few steps, but he didn't notice until he turned around to close the door to his shower stall and found an equally topless Shauna. Even though she had the decency not to have any body hair in evidence, he yelped in alarm.

“You OK in there?” called Aerial from the hall outside the bathroom.

Shauna knelt, and without a word, jerked his towel to the floor. Fuck, he was already getting hard before her eyes. In *seconds*. Her tits were that big, that hot. It wasn't fair that her ass was cute at best, but she knew how to emphasize her strengths.

"I'm, um, yeah," he called. That was all it took. "Just, uh..."

"Tell her you slipped," Shauna said softly when he didn't finish. She managed to fit two hands on his modest, if not useless, cock, jerking him fully hard.

"I, yeah, slipped!" His voice broke. It actually fucking broke. That was so hot.

It didn't take long before there was no more point to jacking him off. She rose, turned around.

"I, um... Who are you?"

Instead of answering, she cocked out her butt and said, "You can take my underwear off, if you want."

They were only boxers, but still, there was something appealing about that word. *Underwear*. It wasn't as hot as *panties*, but these weren't that, so *underwear* would have to do. Still, that was where her pussy was. A fact he seemed keenly aware of, considering how hastily he jerked those suckers down to her ankles.

She turned on the water, let it pour down her body, and planted her hands on the wall. The boy stood back, staring. Droplets of water occasionally splashed far enough to reach him, or at least that organic sweater of his.

"Don't leave a girl hanging," she said.

"I, um, have an, a, um, a..."

"A golden opportunity?" She kept her laugh low. This was a place of echoes.

He came up behind her. "I, ah, I've never actually..."

Shauna turned, looking concerned. "Don't tell me she doesn't know how to take care of you?"

"She... She..." He shook his head. "I'm sorry. You're just so *hot*. Like, is this even—"

Shauna shut him up and got him moving. Got him inside her. Less than a minute later she watched his virginity swirl down the drain with his cum as it dripped out of her. She left him panting and dirtier than he'd been when she found him, strutting out of the bathroom still damp. There was Aerial, gaping at the sight of her wet naked resident, holding her clothes in her hands.

"Shauna...? Where did you...?"

She put a hand on Aerial's chest and pushed until her back was against the wall. She kept her voice to a whisper. "If you interfere in how I conduct my affairs ever again, I'm going to go to your boss and tell her it was assault."

Aerial stared uncomprehending. "If... what...?"

Shauna reached between her legs and fished out a little blob, then smeared it on the RA's forehead. "That. Good night – and by the way, you might want to do a better job escorting your guests."

She rounded the corner. One of her neighbors, Alayna, saw her and rushed to her with concern. Apparently Alayna had overheard, but completely misunderstood the exchange. "Shauna? Oh my god, what happened? Did I hear... assault? Are you OK?"

Shauna sniffled, wiped her tears on her arm from when she'd deep-throated . "I'm fine. I just... I need to get back to my room."

"Oh god. Did something happen? Should I get Aerial?"

"Do *not* get Aerial." Her voice was hard as ice. "I'm... I'll be fine."

Back in her room, she was relieved to find that her first lay of the evening had used her brief absence to depart. There was a note on the bed, the paper ripped from her notebook. *Bus leaves early, thought I'd scoot so I wouldn't wake you. Tonight was amazing, Shasha. I knew it would be – you never disappoint. Thanks, and double thanks to your sweet ass pussy ;)*

She read as far as the first three words, and collapsed into her bed sobbing. What the fuck had she just done? No, she knew. Ugh, she *knew* what she'd done, but... fucking *why?!*

Because your pussy controls you.

"So yeah, a five." Shauna held her head in her hands, as if not being able to see her crying would trick Austin into not hearing it in her voice. "What the hell is wrong with me? Why did I do that?"

Austin tossed a box of tissues from his desk over to her couch. It bounced off. "From what you've told me, I think I might have an idea. Are you familiar at all with the term 'nymphomania?'"

"Yeah. Is that... this? Is that even real? I always thought it was just a search term for finding gangbang porn or something." The words were out of her mouth before she realized she'd just told him more than she normally cared to say aloud about her porn browsing.

"It's a dated term; nowadays it's called hypersexuality. There's not a lot of data about it. Like just about anything related to sexuality, especially where it pertains to women," he said with a mildly irritated sigh. "Hypersexuality means a frequent and pronounced heightening of the libido, or sex drive. The neurological activity behind it can be so severe that hypersexual individuals can have their judgment impaired and act in ways contrary to their more developed desires."

"That sounds like an excuse for being a ho."

Austin shook his head. “It’s not entirely dissimilar to some eating disorders. A person might recognize they’re overweight, sincerely want to shed the pounds, but their brain is producing chemicals that instruct the body to eat.” He tapped his chin. “I meant that mostly as a metaphorical framework, but it almost makes me wonder if there’s a connection there. Two of our most primal instincts there, food and sex.”

“Yeah. Um, so... I’m a nympho?”

“It’s more important to me to use terminology that speaks to you and makes sense to you, so if that’s what you want to call it, sure. I mean probably. It’s a good starting point at least. Though I want to stress, it’s not just what you might have heard in popular culture. It’s not just having a strong sex drive. Plenty of people get horny but don’t seduce their RA’s boyfriend and try to hold them hostage with it.”

Shauna’s chin quivered, and then she was sobbing again. Having to say it all out loud had made her feel even worse about it, and she’d felt fucking awful for days. That look in Aerial’s eye when they passed in the hall...

Austin was still speaking. “It’s often associated with bipolar disorder, which we’ll also want to screen you for. Periods of greatly elevated moods when your sex drive is active, and symptoms of depression when not. Worse, hypersexuality can exacerbate matters.”

“It... what?” She looked up and saw he was crouched in front of her, holding out the box of tissues. She accepted gladly, and he returned to his seat.

“It makes things worse. During sex, the brain’s logical centers exhibit signs of suppressed activity, weakening inhibitions. Then during orgasm, the brain is rewarded with a nice yummy blast of dopamine. The jury’s still out, but preliminary studies show that both of these effects are substantially stronger in nymphos like yourself.”

“So, like, my brain tells me to stop thinking and start fucking, and then it feels good so I just ignore how I feel like human garbage other times?”

“More or less. Hypersexuality can also be associated with sociopathy. Myself, I find the evidence persuasive that the sociopathy is symptomatic of the hypersexuality. Orgasms chisel away at the brain’s ability to experience regret or hesitation, you see. We’re literally designed by billions of years of evolution to come – coming is basically the ultimate meaning of life, when we can get out of our own way enough to come. If you want to be philosophical about it.”

“Maybe later,” she muttered.

“Anyway, coupled with the tendency of hypersexual individuals to engage with many partners, it also hinders emotional intimacy. The power of that reward, your orgasm, in a hypersexual brain, it can be more powerful than any neurochemical rewards from what most people think of as healthy relationships. It’s probably why you’re feeling so low right now. Addressing your condition head-on like this is allowing a lot of suppressed memories and emotions to all bubble to the surface at once. You could

think of it a bit like a drug addict suddenly getting clean and reflecting on their behaviors under the influence. Chasing your next orgasm kept your mind busy, but now you're being given a moment to think about your behavior in another light."

"Fuck. Fuck! Like, I knew I was kind of a slut, but... fuck! You're saying I'm some kind of cock junky? Fuck!"

"No, Shauna. What you're feeling right now, it isn't clear either. Remember, I mentioned that stuff about bipolar disorder? Right now you're at the other end of the pole. If you're sitting there judging yourself, angry with yourself, don't forget that this isn't any more clear-headed than you are with a cock in you telling you you're on top of the world."

Shit did it feel weird to her therapist so casually say those words. At the same time, though, being able to actually talk about it all with someone who didn't judge her, wasn't merely pretending to listen so he could fuck her...

Whether they'd intended it or not, the j-board had been right. She needed him.

Shauna sniffled, dabbing at her eyes again with the tissues. "So what do we do? Chastity belt? Is there a pill or something?"

Austin issued a sympathetic smile. "I'm sure it won't surprise you that the pharmaceutical industry hasn't done much R&D for treatments that *weaken* the female libido. It's not uncommon as a side effect of some drugs, that Micro Machines speed spiel at the end of the drug commercials, but it's not predictable."

"What the hell are Micro Machines."

"Anyway," he went on, grinning gamely at her jibe at his age, "your sex drive isn't necessarily the problem either. Even if we were able to give you a magic pill to suppress it, the more likely case is that you'd lose your surest source of pleasure and happiness and be left feeling like you are now most of the time. And I wouldn't want that from you. There's nothing wrong with having sex. Nothing wrong with having lots of it, with lots of people, so long as you're being safe."

Shauna slumped back into the couch. "I don't want to be some... pussy zombie. Wandering around like, '*cawwwwcks...!*'" Shauna did her best zombie impression. It wasn't good. "There has to be something. My RA sucks ass, but she didn't deserve *that*. Cecile and Tracy, either. Like, I can hear that voice, telling me it's their fault they couldn't hang onto their guys. That if they were more like me, they never would have lost them. That they had it coming. That if they stick somebody else in my room, I'll do it to them too, so I can keep having my own room, so I can keep..."

Austin moved to the seat beside her on the couch, patting her back softly. Oh great, now *that* was making her horny. Fuck! Fucking fucker fuckity fuck!

"We're going to help you resolve this, Shauna. You can be stronger than you know."

She moaned into her hands. “Tell that to my pussy! Because that thing is God-fucking-zilla!”

“We just need to find to get your pussy under control. This is the Hancock Institute, Shauna. This is what we do. With time, with discipline, with... well, some unconventional methods, I think you’ll be surprised at how well you can bring it to heel.”

Shauna grasped at Austin’s arm. That look on Aerial’s face was burned into her mind – but no more so than her high school buddy growling out that thick salty sex gravy all over her big hot tits, the way it had set her pussy on fucking fire. She was so, so lost.

“Anything. Whatever it takes.”

“Is it weird if I say I love your office?”

“Oh? Why’s that, Shauna? I mean, I like it here myself, but ‘love’ is overselling it. I love the work I do here, but the place...” He shrugged.

Shauna sniffed. There wasn’t a scent. Except there almost was. It was like whenever she took a deep breath in here, her pussy thrummed along with her lungs. Yeah, that was it. It was like Austin’s office was fucking her lungs. She didn’t know how to say that, though, so instead she said, “I just do. There’s something... nymph-friendly about it.”

“I suppose I’ll take it as a compliment from the nymphiest nympho I know.”

Shauna rolled on her side. Her tits flopped along with her, bouncing inside the plunging neckline in the slutty top she’d worn for her therapy session. She dressed sluttier for these appointments...

No. Be honest with yourself, like he taught you.

She dressed sluttier for *Austin* every session. He never made an issue of it. The man noticed, yes (he was a man after all, and she was *such* a woman), but never with more than his eyes. Even when it got conspicuous, when she wasn’t just wearing a v-neck and some flesh-toned leggings but a skimpy little dress with her thighs bared to the buttock and her tits bouncing out of the neck. Now that spring was here, the legs of her shorts rose with every degree on the thermometer. For Austin, she barely pretended she wasn’t dressing herself as his little sex kitten. Anywhere else, she’d be judged. Fucked.

What was she going to do, say no? She was way too horny to say no at this stage of her therapy.

“You know I’d sleep with you if you asked,” she said softly, licking her already moist, glistening full lips.

Austin regarded her for a moment. "So ask."

"Fuck me?"

Her heart caught in her chest. She missed sex so much. Her pussy loved these sessions as much as it hated them. This was the man who kept it on a firm leash, but it turned out the thing wasn't so hostile towards leashes.

"I'd rather not," he said. Like she'd known he would say. Shauna didn't deserve that much pleasure, she knew. "But I want you to know that it's not because I don't want to."

"Then why not?" she whispered, slipping a hand down the front of her skimpy little shorts. Austin understood that sometimes she was too overwrought not to touch herself.

"Because I can help you better if I don't, and I want to help you. I like you, Shauna. More than a therapist ought to like a patient. I want you to know that you're special to me, that you're more than your gorgeous face and your incredible tits and your wet little pussy. But I also want you to know that I appreciate that you are those things, too."

Shauna nodded. She knew she was tits and ass and cunt. And face. It was nice of him to mention her face. "You could just pretend it's not me. Like... roleplay, or whatever. I could just be a hooker or something. Or one of your interns who needs to be taught a lesson. Or—"

"You don't need to sell me on your merits, Shauna. I *want* to fuck you, the same as you want to fuck me." He let himself smile. "Well, I might not quite be able to match your intensity."

She moaned, humping her fingers in her snatch, inserting a third. "You really can't," she pant-giggled.

"But that's the real question, isn't it. Even if you can get past the hurdle of attraction, if you can gain or manufacture mutual consent, even if two people – or three, or thirty – are so turned on by one another they can't stop thinking about it... There's still more to us, isn't there. Something deeper than flesh."

Shauna whimpered. "I don't understand."

Austin crossed the short distance between them and squatted in front of her. Her thighs parted automatically. He put a hand on the crotch of her shorts, over where her hand was busily diddling. His grip was feather-light, an easy signal that he wasn't asking her to stop. Just touching her hand, blessing her needfulness, granting her poor parched pussy a momentary reprieve.

"I don't understand it yet, either. But you're helping me get there, Shauna. And I promise you, I'm going to make sure you and that wondrous, wet, willing and wanton womanhood of yours find peace and lasting satisfaction. I promise. Now be a good girl and come for me, and we'll start our session."

“Yes, sir.”

Austin rose and greeted her with a hug. “Shauna! Great to see my favorite nympho. How was your summer?”

She laughed, hugging back. Mm, she wanted to fuck him. Just like old times, back in freshman year. “Not bad. I missed it here. I missed *you*! How was yours?”

“Busy.” Austin sighed, but with a smile. “Lots of work on a really exciting new research project. All very hush-hush, but between you and me, I think this could go beyond making my career.”

“Yeah? I like the new office, by the way! Very groovy. And you finally got somebody to fix that elevator, huh? I didn’t even know this place had a basement. Though between you and me, kinda creepy down here.”

He ushered her to a place on the only one of the three couches that had survived the office move into this veritable dungeon. He’d tried, but gray cinder block walls in a windowless underground room were hard to spruce up. “Tell me about it. And sorry about the security. The people I’m collaborating with, they’re... particular.” He rolled his eyes.

“What, some kind of top secret research? How to get laid without really trying?”

Austin laughed. “I already have you for that.”

“You are so bad. You’re just lucky Dr. Faraj wasn’t in my first day here or you never would have gotten a taste.”

“You’re lucky I enjoy brunettes with big hot titties.” They laughed together. How long since she’d gotten used to the both of them calling her breasts that? At some point, *tits* hadn’t felt slutty enough. “Anyway, enough about my boring job. Tell me about your summer.”

Shauna glossed over the bulk of it. Hanging out with her friends. Selling her childhood toys and books at a garage sale, which had hurt more than she’d thought, which she thought was a good sign of her progress. A relapse in the bulimia she’d developed during her treatment last winter. And of course, thrice daily masturbation. No more, though. (Except a few times.) Once in the morning, once at night and a third spontaneously as the day’s activities permitted, to keep a leash on the greed of her pussy. To keep it under control. At least a little.

“That’s very good Shauna. Very good.” She brightened. How she’d missed having someone to support her through all this. It was a lot to endure on her own. “I want to come back to some of that, particularly the purging. First, though, I noticed a distinct lack of men in your summer. Is that how the story unfolded, or is that just how you’re telling it?”

Shauna fidgeted. This was hard. "I..."

When she didn't manage more than that, Austin joined her on the couch.

"Shauna..."

"Please..."

"How many, Shauna."

"T-Two."

Austin heard the lie immediately. He knew her too well. "How many really?"

She looked down, ashamed. Aroused. She'd forgotten how much it turned her on, letting him dissect her behaviors and motives like she was a lab rat. With a cunt.

"Seven."

"Seven loss of control incidents, or seven men?"

Shit. He noticed. She found herself sliding off the couch, down to her knees.

"Men."

"How many incidents?"

"I'm... I'm not sure. At least... ten. I think. Once, I sucked a boy's dick at a party, and then I went home with him later that night and fucked him. I don't know if that counts as one or two."

"It counts as three," Austin explained. "Once for sucking his dick. Once for the fucking. And once for letting your blowjob drive you into his car in the first place. You know you wanted him to fuck you there at the party, didn't you. You were frustrated he made you wait. Weren't you."

She nodded. "Yes."

"So at least eleven. Twelve, counting right now."

"Yes."

"Are you in control right now, Shauna?"

"No. My pussy is controlling me. It's so *pushy*..."

"Do your exercises. I know we haven't had a session since last semester, so if you need help—"

She shook her head. "No. I remember. Are... are you sure you don't want to just...?"

"Not yet. If you need my help, I'll help, but the goal is still for you to control yourself, without assistance. Go on."

Shauna took a deep breath. In. Out. Again. Again. It helped, a little. All right.

"I am not a slut." So easy to say, so hard to believe. "My pussy is powerful, but I control it. It does not control me."

Austin patted her on the head. Her suggestion, that. She responded extremely well to physical expressions of support. During her exercises, it made her feel like *she* could know pleasure, not just her pussy. *Fuck* was she wet. She hadn't been this wet

since she'd seen that fubar shower fight back in her new dorm the other day. She really needed to talk to him about that. For now, though, on with the exercises.

"I am not a slut. I look like a slut, I've acted like a slut, I have a slutty pussy, but I am not a slut. I..." It had been so long. She'd gotten so lazy about her exercises over the summer. Back in May she'd said them to herself the whole time she was masturbating, but before long she'd shrugged it off, focused on the pleasure and not the purpose.

Because your pussy controls you.

"I..."

Your pussy controls you.

"I..." She looked up at her therapist. "Help?"

Austin sighed. "All right. Come on." He patted his lap.

Shauna shed her shorts while still on her knees, her thong along with them. That was a concession she'd allowed her pussy. Nothing but thongs. Her friends had teased her so hard, how she had those little strips and straps and ribbons always creeping out of her shorts. Then she at last draped herself over her therapist's lap, ass presented. One man who saw her as more than a set of big hot titties.

"Tell me what you want."

"Spank me. Spank me into submission. Make me be a good girl. Touch me. Fucking touch me, please Austin, please, I *need*—"

"That's what your pussy wants. What do *you* want."

Shauna's whole body trembled. She'd forgotten how fucking horny these therapy sessions made her. That war between her will and her disorder. That rotten little nympho fucking whore that her pussy wanted her to be. The good girl Austin was helping her become. The touch of a man who wasn't using her. A healer's touch.

"I want to control my pussy."

"Then why aren't you?"

"I've... I've been away all summer," she said, wriggling her ass hopefully. "When I'm with you, it feels so possible. I feel supported and cared for. Safe. Like I can talk about it all without feeling like such a fucking bitch slut. Over the summer, I was all on my own. I wasn't ready."

Suddenly there was a sharp smack on her ass. She moaned delightedly. Maybe today he would finally fuck her. That's what her pussy wanted. Like if she got him to fuck her, he'd have to send her away and she'd be cut off from any hope at controlling herself. Everyone would see her as nothing but Shauna the cheating, sociopathic nympho fuck slut. No, not those labels. Just the slut part. Nobody cared about anything else about her. A woman couldn't look like *this* and not have people immediately peg her as a slut.

Mmm, peg me.

"Stop touching yourself, Shauna."

“But—”

Another smack. It really stung. Her ass was already on fire. She remembered the first time he'd spanked her last spring, when she'd been so horny that she'd begged him to fuck her, taken her clothes off and thrown herself on his mildewy office carpet and pleaded and promised to fuck him on command, at the literal snap of her fingers. Only the spanking had jerked her back to reality. It only forestalled her pussy though, never defeated.

Another slap, and she only then realized she was still masturbating. “I said stop.”

“Yes, sir.” Like she did during her really bad outbursts, she repositioned her hands on her big, hot, titties. Her pussy was easier to ignore if she was pleasuring herself elsewhere. Hard to slip her top off draped over Austin's lap like this, but it was worth a little squirming and grunting.

Plus, if she squirmed enough on his lap, maybe he'd finally, *finally*—

Smack.

No he wouldn't. He never did. Austin was in absolute mastery of his cock. It was the hottest trait she'd ever witnessed in a man. There was never an instant where he even hinted he would lose control, take her up on one of her thousand and one offers to fuck every last one of her holes and a few parts without. He'd made it clear he would never, ever fuck his patient, no matter how easy she made it. No matter how much she begged him.

His rejections were high tide for her pussy. Nothing else made her that wet — though the wetness was very familiar. Hell, Shauna had been wet the moment the Hancock Institute came into sight. Higgins was about the same long walk off-campus as Penderdast had been last year. The whole walk over, she'd felt her latest piercing rubbing, grinding, edging her poor swollen clitty.

It was all part of it. She couldn't control her pussy if it wasn't fighting her control. It was easy to tell herself she wouldn't fuck any of her little brother's friends; not so easy to resist when she came home and found one of the barely-legal shitheads snooping around in her bedroom, sniffing her dirty panties. All well and good to promise herself not to cheat on her summer boyfriend when they were hitting the gym together; not so easy when she was smuggling her trainer into the locker room to fuck him in a shower stall. And then harder yet not to cheat him with his whoever, then their whoever, until her whole summer had been a chain of cocks she needed her therapist to help her properly count.

Not being able to count all the cocks you've pleased, Austin had helped her understand about herself, was a five.

“Does your pussy control you, Shauna?”

She shook her head. “No.”

Smack. Moan. Splash.

“No *sir*.”

“And who does?”

Shauna’s back arched, gifting her pussy the sweet feel of cool air. It was very comfortably cool down here in the basement. “You do, *sir*.”

“Only until you’re ready to take the reins.”

But the truth was, she didn’t want to.

“Hi, Shauna. You got a sec?”

“For you, Spencer? I’ve got two.” She grinned. Like a normal girl would grin, she hoped. Not like a slut. “Everything OK?”

Spencer smiled that bright wholesome smile of his. Fuck, but she wanted to sit on it. “You are in *such* big trouble!” He laughed. “But seriously, you’re fine. I’m doing roommate agreements and RCRs with everybody this week. You don’t have a roommate, but I still wanted to check in, make sure everything was satisfactory, see how you’re doing.”

“Oh. Um, everything works, I guess. I need to sign something, right?”

“Yep.” He handed her a clipboard. She vaguely remembered filling out one of these with Aerial last August, and again with her replacement, Molly. She still felt shitty for her part in Aerial’s transfer. Sure, she’d done all the stuff they said she did, retaliating for that hanky panky Shauna had pulled with her boyfriend. It wasn’t her fault. Shauna knew she’d started it. She hadn’t even been allowed to apologize after the restraining order, or whatever the Lakeview j-board version of a restraining order was called.

She signed it without bothering to inspect and handed it back. Inwardly, she was trying not to think very hard about him having been alone in her room inspecting it for damages. Having Spencer alone in her room inspecting things featured *very* prominently in her morning come.

“Are you sure you don’t want to double check? I’d feel bad if I missed something and they tried to charge you for it on checkout.”

“You’re going to fret if I don’t look it over, aren’t you.”

“I am.”

Shauna patted his shoulder. “All right, just for you.” She made a show of looking around the room for scrapes, stains, scratches and scuffs. “So, how are you settling in, now that they’re letting you settle in, bud?”

Bud. Super casual. If she gave the guy even a hint of how thick and juicy her pussy oozed when she so much as saw him heading into a bathroom stall to take a piss,

he'd flip his lid. After what she'd gone through last year, a little domestic tranquility was important to her.

"Great, actually. I know this is a weird situation, but this is such a nice group of people. Now, you're a sophomore, right? How does our little kingdom measure up to..." He winced. "Crap. Pretend I didn't just call it a kingdom and that I used some other word that doesn't imply a king. Sorry."

"Forgiven, your majesty." She playfully swatted his butt with his clipboard. She'd eat that tight little ass of his in a heartbeat if he'd let her. "No, it's cool. The girls seem pretty chill. Little rowdy, though, some of 'em."

"You're telling me. Did you, um, see... it?"

"You mean your cock? One of three man-made structures visible from space, Spencer. Yeah, I saw it." Well, shit. There went her pussy, trying to claw back control of her mouth.

He sighed. "I know I apologized to everybody, but again, from me to you, I'm so sorry. I didn't have a lot of choice, but I regret it happened."

Shauna sidled up, way too close. Her big hot tits brushed his pecs. "I don't."

"I... Err..."

"I mean, you saved that girl, right?" She smiled. Sweetly. Innocently. Like a nun in porno, right before the priest started stuffing candles in her holes.

"Oh, right. I mean, I guess so, yeah. Some of it anyway. Quinn had eight arms and a hundred claws. I've broken up fights with guys time and a half my size before who didn't give me half the trouble getting them to back down."

There, she'd managed to reassert control. Talk about normal stuff, not- "Are you really not allowed to hook up with residents?"

Spencer stepped back - again - and cleared his throat nervously. "Um, no. I'm really not."

She followed - again - and dropped to her throatiest, most fuckable tone. "Well just so you know, I can be very, *very* discreet."

Shit. Shit! Austin was going to be so disappointed. Her first test of control being alone with the guy, and she was already waffling. *You weak easy slut. You nympho fuck toy. You hot big-titted anytime anywhere all-day fucking gutter skank.* It didn't help when her pussy made a valid point.

Shauna forced a laugh as he fidgeted with his clipboard toward the door. "Kidding! I mean, obviously. Just messing with you. I know a lot of these girls are boy-crazy, but you have nothing to worry about with me. I got your back."

Spencer laughed, less awkwardly than her offense deserved. Some of these chicks were authentic sluts themselves, she'd observed. Her pussy wasn't sure whether to resent the competition or be grateful for the appetizers to warm him up for her main course.

“Appreciated. Yeah, these freshman girls can be a handful.” His eyes went wide with embarrassment. “Oh god, I mean, not *handfuls*, obviously, not that, you know, handfuls, are um, what...” He pried his eyes off her out-thrust big hot titties. “My god, what is wrong with me? I am so sorry. Just... good grief. Truly, my sincere—”

“It’s OK,” she laughed, harder than necessary to make sure her titties bounced as much as possible. *Because your pussy controls you.* So big. So hot. “I’ll take it as flattering. And yeah, these kids...” Shauna rolled her eyes. “Nice to have another upperclassman around.”

Spencer looked relieved. “Likewise. So where’d you live last year? Big campus, but maybe we know some people. Your RA at least, probably.”

Shauna carefully avoided naming Aerial, just in case. She invited him to have a seat on the edge of her bed and the two talked for a while. Get-to-know-you stuff, superficial. He complimented her galaxy light, which she’d gotten to help her facilitate her fantasies of fucking him outdoors, like at the beach or on a camping trip or if he chloroformed her and dragged her into the woods and tied her to a tree and fucked her to death. (Only a fantasy, of course, not something she actually wanted. She was a nympho, not a psycho.)

Whenever she caught herself doing it, she forced her thighs still, and made her fingers stop twirling her hair. She could control herself. He was just a cute, sweet, hot, hunky, gorgeous, big-fucking-dick-swinging-between-his-hot-fucking-thighs guy. That was all.

I am not a slut. I look like a slut, I’ve acted like a slut, I have a slutty pussy, but I am not a slut. Total bullshit, but Austin hadn’t told her to stop.

Before long, she was too distracted by her stupid mantra thing to hold his attention and he stood back up to head over to the next room. She heard enough bickering through the wall to know he had his work cut out for him with that flat-chested nudist and her bitchy roommate. She was simply glad he was leaving. She could control herself, but... for how long?

“All right, well unless you have anything I can do for you, I’ll get out of your hair. Which, by the way, you’re like a walking shampoo commercial. Gotta say, if you’re looking to put these kids to shame, nice work.”

Shauna grinned. A nice, relatively innocent compliment. A little flirty, maybe, but not like her hair wasn’t amazing. It was earned. “Thanks, Spencer. I think I’m good. Later, skater.”

She dove for her shower caddy, prying up the false bottom hiding her suction cup dildo so frantically she almost broke a nail. Would it stick to the walls in here? Fucking garbage fucking cinderblock bullshit *fuck!*

No, the mirror. It would do, right? It fell off instantly. God damnit! Fucking Windex fucking greasy fucking fuck!

The wood paneling on the closet door held it firm. Shauna jerked her thong aside and slammed herself down so hard she worried Spencer would hear the boom and double back. That would be fine. She'd give him a proper look at her big, hot, hanging, suckable slappable fuckable titties. Get his dick between them. Get his dick in her mouth. Get his dick. His dick. Fuck. *FUCK!*

Unless you have anything else I can do for you, Spencer had said. The shampoo shit was sweet, but those words, they would echo in her pussy for a thousand years.

"FUUUUUUUUUUCK!" she howled.

"Shauna, holy... are you all right?!" He pounded. Again. She'd had just enough time to be able to see straight. Thinking straight would be a moment.

"C-come in," she moaned. She was on the floor somehow. Good. She raised her ass to a good fucking height. "Break me in half. Break me like a fucking brood mare. Fuck me until I'm your fucking pet," she babbled, incoherent even to herself.

"Shauna! Are you...? I can't hear you. Are you OK? What was that?"

That was the most potent come she'd ever had outside of therapy. More, maybe. No, there was that time in February when she'd almost let herself stoop to fucking her anthropology TA just to see if he'd boost her grade for it, and Austin had kept for that divine overnight appointment, every tool and trick in his arsenal but his dick, never his dick no matter how much she begged, begged until she was hoarse, a whore, a horse, a rocking horse, a weak little toy, no control left in her, no control, completely his, owned earned bought and paid for and sold again to his day job.

She'd thought he'd had her down there for a week. Just the one night, though. It had helped a lot even so. Shauna totally blew off her appointment with her TA and just sat in her room eroding the veins off her dildo collection. (A birthday present from Austin – they were always his, in her mind.)

"Shauna, hang on, I'm gonna get my keys – unless you tell me you're OK."

"Is she OK?"

"What was that yell?"

"Should we call an ambulance?"

"It sounded to me like she was–"

"All right, everybody, back to your rooms. Everything's under control here, just relax. I'm–"

Shauna opened the door. "I stubbed my toe," she said. "Reaching for a box in the storage over the closet, just... WHAM. Sorry."

Spencer let out a sigh of relief. "You had me going there. Your toe OK? Do you need to get to the health center? I'm not supposed to give you a ride, but I will if you want me to."

Another glorious phrase to be deposited in perpetuity in her spank bank. She carefully held her ground, obstructing his view of the probably still jiggling suction dildo on her closet door.

“I’ll be OK. Like you said, everything’s under control.”

Because your pussy controls you.

“I understand you’re feeling overwhelmed, Shauna. Maybe there’s another way of looking at this, though.”

“What other way? My pussy is molten lava every minute I spend on that floor. If he looks at me I can barely stop myself from ripping our clothes off. Whenever we—”

Austin nodded, holding up a hand with a little chuckle. “I was listening, I promise. You know, I think this might be the first time I’ve ever heard you use another man’s name in one of our sessions.”

Good to know he found this funny, trying to suppress her nymphomania living down the hall from a guy who pushed every single one of her buttons and then started in on her levers and dials. She didn’t even understand why. Spencer was nothing like her usual type. Usually she went for easy guys, dumb sluts, pretty idiots. Guys with nothing to redeem themselves – as far as she bothered to learn – but the possession of a cock and a general instinct for where to shove it. At least, with a willingness to be instructed.

Spencer? He was... a *dork*. He showed dorky movies in the lounge so he could crow about his woke politics. He walked the halls of Higgins 3 with a bubble wand, like some fairy dork princess. Half the girls on that floor – at least – would fuck his wholesome dick until it grafted itself into their pussies, but he made fucking *eye contact*.

He *cried* when his girls cried. This was a thing she knew some guys did. Just not a guy she’d ever crush on. Shit, she never crushed even on guys her type!

For the life of her she couldn’t make sense of it – and she’d tried. Diddling her leaky insatiable pussy raw, she’d tried and tried and tried. Was it *because* he was so different? Her lizard brain pushing her after the decent, sweet, respectful, beautiful, fuck lord of Higgins Hall in some unconscious hope he’d save her from her worst impulses. Or was it some sort of alpha female thing? A drive to take the man all these little brats were pretending they weren’t fighting over.

Whatever it was, it was fast becoming an obsession.

“So what do I do? Should I just... fuck him, get it over with?”

“From what you told me, it sounds like that isn’t an option. For now, anyway. I can imagine the constant presence of such temptation would erode any man’s resolve.”

Shauna shook her head. “Not Spencer. I’m telling you, he gets off on this RA shit. Except he doesn’t. The way you get watching me beg and telling me no, he’s like that with all of us, except he doesn’t go back home and beat off to it afterwards.”

Austin gave her tits an affectionate stroke. Should she tell him she’d had her first nipple orgasm after the floor’s beach excursion the other day? It had always seemed like a contrivance for porn, girls mewling in arousal as some musclebound dude pawed their boobs. She liked being touched, reveled in seeing a man beside himself at the opportunity to touch her, but she’d sure never come the least bit close to getting off to it. Apparently all she needed was to imagine Spencer ripping her bikini off and titty-fucking her big, hot titties right there on that shitty beach. The exhibitionism of it was barely part of it. Wherever, whenever, however he wanted to fuck her, she was up for it. She played her part of the casual dude-bro buddies up with him, but she’d fantasized over it so many times that if he ever actually did snap his fingers and point at his feet, she’d be kneeling with her balls nestled against her chin in a heartbeat.

Austin, however, wasn’t about to let her accusation slide. “Now Shauna, I’ve told you. I don’t masturbate to the thought of you. I don’t think about you when I fuck other women. When I fuck someone, that person or persons are the only thing I’m thinking about. You are my patient, and have nothing to do with any sexual satisfaction I have.”

“I know.” Shauna twisted her nipples, groaning. Even knowing it was at least partially bullshit didn’t help. She’d seen how his cock responded to her pleases and sirs. It was an involuntary reaction, but it was a reaction. Not that it did her any good.

She twisted harder. Austin was good at funneling her sexual anxieties into something useful. Maybe he could show her how to titty-come again.

“It’s important that you keep this in mind. I’m here to help tame and channel your nymphomaniacal urges into a productive direction. To help you get a handle on your condition. Even though objectively you’re a gorgeous young woman, fuckable as they come, I’m your therapist. I will never, ever fuck you.”

Shauna whimpered. “I know.” She could use a good fuck. She hadn’t fucked a single guy since coming back to Lakeview. Not even sucked one off. Every time she thought about it, she compared them to Spencer, and suddenly it was like imagining fucking a... a... a hat rack, or a lobster, or a wet bag of potting soil. Something that just... didn’t even make sense.

What she felt for Spencer didn’t make sense either, but try telling that to her pussy.

“Now, as for this RA of yours, this Spencer...” Austin stroked his chin. “Maybe this is the test you’ve needed all along.”

“Well it feels like I’m flunking it pretty fucking hard, no offense. I was literally changing my underwear twice a day, they got so soupy.”

“Was...?” he prompted.

“Sure. Now I just don’t wear any and sit around on a paper plate half the time. They got this kind with a wax coating so they don’t get soaked through.”

Rather than regard her with the disgust such an admission obviously deserved, Austin regarded her sympathetically. “We simply haven’t worked out a strategy yet. But think about it. What is your pussy telling you to do?”

“Fuck him,” she blurted instantly. Just saying it out loud made her even wetter. “Fuck him all day every day. Follow him to class so I can blow him while he takes notes. Follow him to the food court and make his cum my breakfast, lunch and dinner. Follow him to the bathroom and—”

Austin held up a hand before she had to finish that particularly graphic thought. “Exactly. Now be honest with me. A woman like you, beautiful, sexy, persuasive... You could fuck him if you really tried. Couldn’t you.”

“Yes. Probably.” At least she was ninety percent sure. No way she was about to tell her therapist about the other night, when she’d taken advantage of his open door policy to sneak into his room in the middle of the night and touch herself while she watched him sleep. She’d managed not to come, but barely. At least not until she was back in the hallway, and she’d muffled it with a big mouthful of her shampoo-commercial hair that he said he liked.

Austin probed a finger into her pussy. When was the last time they’d had a therapy session and she’d stayed clothed? She hoped seeing her naked and squirming and begging and frigging and coming provided him some tiny, tiny fraction of the pleasure that Shauna derived from following his instructions to do it.

“Of course you could. Say it like you believe it!”

“I could fuck him!”

“Why!”

“Because I’m so fucking *hawwwwt!*” Shauna squealed, spasming as she gushed a fountain of cum around her therapist’s knuckles.

He gave her a moment to calm down. Not that she did, much. Sometimes it felt like her therapy only fed her pussy’s egomaniacal rage. She never used to get *this* horny. Hadn’t that been what she’d said when he asked her to rate it? Like a three out of five horny. Now it was a thousand, always. But it was all focused on Spencer. And Austin. Both of whom had told her they absolutely wouldn’t fuck her. Sort of an improvement, still.

Austin petted her hair sweetly. Her cum was all over his fingers, but he didn’t care. He knew she liked having cum on her, even if it was just her own. Cum was hot. Being petted was hot. Getting fingered by her therapist was *crazy* hot. It was always a treat on the rare occasion when he let her put part of him inside her.

“That’s right, Shauna. You are. We’ve established your pussy wants to fuck him. Which you just said you knew you could – and I agree. So as long as you don’t – as long as you’re just amusing yourself in your free time with a stray fantasy or two–”

“Try a hundred.”

“A hundred, even. But so long as you decide how to act on your feelings, and you don’t do what your pussy is telling you to, then... who’s in control of Shauna?”

She considered. Maybe he was onto something. He usually was. The man knew more about controlling nymphomania – or at least, controlling this particular nymphomaniac – than anyone.

“I am.” Shauna giggled. “Or maybe Spencer.”

“Maybe Spencer,” he repeated with a laugh. “Well, if he’s half the fellow you make him out to be, perhaps that wouldn’t be so bad.”

“I did something good this week, but I also did something bad.”

Austin smiled. “Oh, my dear sweet nymphomaniacal girl, why am I not surprised. Though I was, actually – surprised I mean – that you’re here today. I never mind a walk-in appointment with one of my most intriguing patients, but aren’t you on break?”

Shauna crossed her legs. In this tiny skirt, it flashed her thong, but that was part of the fun of these therapy sessions. She could pretend to be as much of a slut as she wanted without judgment. *I am not a slut*, she thought reflexively, but followed with her private new addendum, *I am a nymphomaniac*. Compared to all her efforts to mask it around Higgins 3, it was a tremendous relief to have somewhere to unwind.

“I am, but I didn’t want to waste money on a flight home for a week, so I’m crashing at a friend’s apartment, Ana. Actually,” she said, crossing her legs the other way, “that’s the good thing.”

Austin knew what she was doing – he knew her slutty antics better than anybody – but he let her, as always. “Oh?”

“Yeah. Tl;dr, her boyfriend was hitting on me pretty blatantly while she was at work, and I told him no. And not just ‘giggle you’re so bad!’ no. I told him he was an asshole and said if he even looked at my chest again, I’d tell Ana.”

Austin looked genuinely impressed. “Now that *is* quite positive. I’m proud of you.”

That shouldn’t make her horny, but, well, her inability to help it was why she was here. “You should be proud of Spencer. And, um, do you mind if I...?”

A perfunctory hand wave bestowed permission to borrow one of his vibrators from the Good Girl Drawer. “Your RA? Why so? What’s that oh-so-remarkable young man done this time?”

Shauna picked one of her favorites, a menacingly large black phallus that from past experience she knew pulsed like a freshly struck lightning rod at max setting, and plopped back down on his couch, thighs spread wide. Her thong had a slit in the crotch. (Most of them did, so she could put things in and out surreptitiously during class and such if she was having a high sluttiness day.) She permitted it to slide inside her as far as the limitations of her poor, mentally diseased pussy would allow, and switched it on.

“He’s why I said no. Like I said, this guy was being really blatant about it. Ana probably told him about my reputation – a warning, you know, but most guys don’t take it that way. But when I thought about fucking him, it was like I immediately compared him to Spencer, and I was just... no interest. None. Like he was a cucumber or something. Fuckable but pretty unappealing compared to the real deal.”

Shauna sat up, adjusting the vibie so she could ride it while they talked. She’d gotten pretty good at managing the distraction, so long as she didn’t let her imagination run away with her. Austin thought nothing of it – nothing he hadn’t seen dozens of times. Weird, to think that the first time he’d availed her of the Good Girl Drawer, she’d been pretty creeped out. Austin being Austin, though, he’d quickly made her feel comfortable, and accepted, and then made her come so hard she hadn’t felt the urge to fuck another random guy for days.

(Well, day. Still, pretty good.)

“Interesting. So would you say that at this point, your sexual energy is fixated exclusively on Spencer?”

Shauna sighed, grinding her pussy on the sofa cushion. “Oh yeah. Oh *god* yes. Yes. Yes yes yes yes yes *yesssssss...!*” Austin waited patiently while she came. It didn’t slow her down, though, Now that she’d gotten to thinking about Spencer, there was no stopping. When she could, she resumed speaking. “That’s, um, actually the bad thing, though.”

“Bad? To go from being a toy for any man with the guts to ask, to being a model member of a community with a crush, however strong, that you’ve kept under tight control? That sounds very good to me, Shauna.”

“No. I...” She winced. “You know how I said sometimes I, um, do stuff? To him?”

“I remember.”

She wished he didn’t. She wished she’d never told him, or better yet never done any of it. It was just so hard to help herself. Stealing Spencer’s underwear from the laundry room. The pictures she’d snapped over the wall of the shower stall. Shauna had needed to teach herself to make out the sound of him dunking his head under the water; there was a distinctiveness to it, if you listened hard. Stopping by Casey’s room to help her drink or smoke herself into oblivion so Shauna could listen through the wall as he dictated blowjob preferences to his girlfriends. (Fucking Vickie. She could listen to that grade A slut talk herself through a fuck for a year.)

She could be a goddess if she ever posted her pics and trophies to the Hottie Haven, but it was too much of a risk. The poor sweet boy still thought she was chill casual Shauna, platonic hot chick. Not the psycho pervert who snuck into his room to fuck herself with his hairbrush while he was doing RA rounds. If somebody betrayed the server again, it would be the end of everything. Shauna had expressed her concerns about privacy to both Terri, who managed the Haven, as well as Tori, who enforced its rules with her sexy iron fists. If he ever learned how much of a crazy fucking whore—

No. Use Austin's words.

If he learned how atypically her disorder caused her to behave (much better), he'd never talk to her again, much less let her fuck him.

Speaking of, though, she continued her story, her shame already evident from her tone. "So... I went to Higgins the other day. Other night, I mean."

"Higgins? Aren't the dorms locked up for fall break?"

She nodded. "Yeah. But, um, I'd sort of stopped by a couple times earlier in the week, and—"

"Why?" Austin interjected.

"I don't know, really. I guess just because I missed it. Missed him. I don't know. I just like it there. It's *home*, you know? Plus I was pretty drunk, one of the times, and you know I get nostalgic for old comes when I'm drunk." She shrugged, then slammed herself down hard on her vibie. "But... yeah, when I was there, I saw there were lights on. On our floor. Spencer's room. I know because I know where my room is and his is two doors down."

"And because you told me you sit in your car sometimes and watch his window in case he gets careless undressing again," Austin interjected. He always kept her honest.

"Um, yeah. That too. Sorry. I shouldn't dissemble. Do I have to...?" She tapped the base of her vibrator and glanced sheepishly at the Good Girl Drawer. Sometimes if she was bad he rescinded privileges. It was just as hot as bestowing them.

"Not just yet, but remember, don't hide your symptoms from me. I can't help you if you aren't completely honest."

Shauna squeezed her tits until it hurt, hurt fucking goood. "Thank you, sir. But yeah, it made me wonder if the building was open for some reason or something? The parking lot door was locked, though, so I went around to the other side. Only when I got there, there was a light on way over on the other end of the hall. A room I thought was empty. It had lights on, too. So I went back to the lot. A bunch of people left their cars over break, but his was definitely there, too. I didn't know who else was up there, but I was pretty sure it was Spencer and someone else."

"Interesting." Austin leaned in, apparently engrossed by her retelling of her misbehavior.

Shauna tried to keep her voice steady. Just thinking about Spencer was making it hard not to go into nympho-come mode. One time she'd blacked out for almost twenty minutes, snapping out of it to find Austin was having a zoom meeting at his desk. She had to assume the camera angle didn't include her naked splayed out body in the background, but it was hot thinking she'd been this sexy little decoration in his office for the guy on the other end to marvel at.

"Yeah. And I was like, that's weird, you know? Sooooo, yeah. I couldn't stop thinking about it, and I have jack shit to do all week, so, um, I went back a couple times and just sort of hid?" *Because your pussy controls you.* "And one time his car was gone, so I thought maybe he was out with whoever, you know? There's this nook by the south entrance that's out of the lights, and so I just sort of hunkered down and waited. I guess I wanted to know who it was. Like a friend, or... someone else."

"What did you intend to do, Shauna?"

She shrugged, then moved herself to fuck that big black plastic dick on top of the arm rest instead. More resistance, easier to fuck herself on. "I don't really know why I did it. I don't think I would have done anything, just watched him go. But then he came downstairs, and he was with the hall manager."

"The hall manager? His supervisor, you mean?"

"Yeah. I remembered her from orientation. She's really pretty, one of those faces, bodies. Like me, I guess. Big, hot titties." She giggled, but it became a moan. Objectifying that woman the way she objectified herself was hot. It was such a shame Spencer didn't seem to go for easy sluts usually, though all his fooling around with Casey before break might mean he was turning over a new leaf. She could only hope.

"And what time was this, about?"

"I was there for..." She thought. "Hours. Like, from when it got dark out, and I think they came back at like ten something."

Austin came up behind her and helpfully massaged her titties. It promptly ushered in one of those slow orgasms only he seemed to know how to elicit from her. They went on for whole minutes sometimes. Only like a third the magnitude of her usual climaxes, but for twenty times as long. That he knew how to manipulate her pleasure centers like that made her so fucking horny it was almost hard not to beg for dick sometimes.

"So you hid in the shadows for hours just to get a glimpse of him?" he asked from behind her.

"Y-yes." *Fuck* she'd needed this. She was so glad she'd come to talk to him. Like always. "They came in, and they had little bags with them. L-leftovers, like they'd been out t-to eat." Still going. God, still going.

"Unusual. Did they say anything interesting?"

“No.” She hesitated. Came. Kept coming. “Not at first. But... then I followed them upstairs.”

“You broke in?”

Shauna frowned, even as her body succumbed to little paroxysms from pleasure spikes. “I do live there. Not l-like I was some burglar or something. But, um, yeah. I caught the door before it latched. I waited a s-s-sec, so they wouldn’t hear me in the stairwell, but then I went uh-hup. My card still worked on the Higgins 3 door.”

He squeezed harder on her titties. Less pleasurable, but more domineering. Definitely a good trade. Plus it helped clear her head a little. This was the sort of touch she’d get off to later, not now. “Then what?”

“I heard them. They were in one of the empty rooms. Some ugly girls – no offense – moved out way back in August. People say it was some kind of inferiority complex. Anyway, they were in there. And, um...”

“And...?”

She had to wait until he finished pinching the shit out of her nipples to answer. “They... they were fucking.”

“He was fucking his manager?”

Her hips swiveled, grinding that baby every which way. “Not just... fucked. They fucked – oh *god*, did he fuck her – but he... he... oh *fuck*... He *dominated* her.”

“Dominated?” Austin stroked his chin with one hand, her ass with the other, lifting her skirt to make a belt around her hips so he could probe her asshole, like she liked. Because she liked everything he did to her. *Because your pussy controls you*. “Are you employing hyperbole, or did he–”

“She called him her master. Like over and over, like it was just what she called him. She begged him, *begged* him to use her. To stuff her full. To use her like, ungh, like a fucking *toy*, god...”

“Six eight one eight, you little minx,” Austin mumbled pensively. It meant nothing to her, and so she focused instead on more pressing matters. Like his second finger pressing into her ass. It hurt, but it was so slutty of her. So good. “And I can only assume, you being you, that you listened.”

“Anyone would listen!” she protested, humping his fingers, humping his dildo, humping his couch. Hump, hump, hump. “Not just a fucking, *ungh*, slut like me.”

“We’ve been over this, Shauna. Having urges doesn’t make you a slut. Masturbating to those urges doesn’t make you a slut. Only acting on those urges makes you a slut. Do we need to pause and give you a moment to do your exercises?”

“NO!” she howled. She couldn’t stop. Not now. Not when she was so close to another one! She was fucking always so close, always, her perfect counselor who knew every ripple in her cunt. “No, I’m not a slut, I’m not, I’m not, don’t stop, don’t stop!”

“They didn’t catch you listening, I take it?” Austin said. Apparently he was feeling generous today. To think her tuition covered this absolute godsend of a therapist. Though she did sometimes think it would be hotter if she was paying him to do this to her. All those years she’d thought it was so hot making boys do what she wanted. Such a waste, now that she’d discovered how much sexier it was when they made her do things for them. When they brought her inner slut out so strong she couldn’t help but want to pleasure.

“No. They fucked so *loud*, she came so mother fucking *hard*, like *I* would if I slutted myself to him, that they didn’t hear me. But, um... then...”

Austin slowed. That only made Shauna wriggle her ass into him harder, so he withdrew altogether. She whined, pleaded, but he held firm. “Then what, Shauna. I can’t help you if you don’t tell me everything.”

“They started talking. It was hard to hear – and I was breathing really hard, my heart pounding, so like... Anyway, I heard her say that soon he’d be doing that to ‘all of them.’ I think... I think she meant *us*.”

“She said that?”

Shauna nodded. *Tell him everything. Then he’ll use your ass.* “I wanted to keep listening, but I worried they’d hit the showers. I couldn’t see shit through the peephole, but it looked like they were moving around. But she definitely seemed, I don’t know, like she was cool with it. Like she thought it’d be hot for him to be a slut like her. Like me. Maybe she’s a nympho, too?”

“Maybe,” he said dismissively. “But what did Spencer say? He must have said something.”

“He did. Oh god please. *Please*, sir.” He gave her a punitive slap on the ass. It was even hotter because she knew he wasn’t fucking around. If she kept behaving like a bad little slut bitch, he’d make her put his vibie back in his Good Girl Drawer. She heeded the warning.

“Sorry. It was too quiet, though, so I can’t be sure, but it sounded like he said he would. I think. Only he didn’t sound excited? It was weird, even at the time. I don’t know. If his slut fucking boss was giving him a hall pass to ignore the rule about fuck his residents – more of us, I mean–” (Goddamn Andi, goddamn fucking Casey!) “then I know I would. There are some seriously hot girls on that floor.”

“I’ll say.” Austin patted her head with his sticky fingers affectionately, then at last put them back inside her. Fucking disgusting. So fucking hot. Shauna was a creature of holes and fluids and yes yes yes. She resumed her riding immediately. “So, he’s finally gotten himself formal permission, license to operate. No more red tape, even in perception. Total consent.”

Shauna wasn’t quite sure what he was after, but it sounded about right. All the girls on the floor wanted Spencer so bad they’d piss on their grandmothers’ graves to get

a piece. Only made sense his boss felt it, too. She supposed if she got what she wanted, she was willing to be cool about him fucking all the others too. Plus, that hall manager bitch was a fucking *sub*. A sub's sub. Even in her fantasies, Shauna barely begged and debased herself like that lady had. Bitch probably got off on being cheated on. It had been the hottest sex she'd ever witnessed, including her own.

Was... was that the kind of girl Spencer was into?

"Do you think he'll really do it? Do you think I'll finally get to...?"

Austin chuckled softly. "That's up to you, Shauna. Not him. Remember, you control your pussy. You can, at least."

"I want to. I want to be his first. When he comes back anyway. Do you think he likes women like that? Submissives?"

"Are you asking me if a young heterosexual man would want a hot little nympho like you to pledge herself as his fuck slave?" He laughed. "Shauna, for all your experience with cocks, you have a lot to learn about men."

"Well Higgins won't open again until Sunday..." She sighed as he stretched her ass with a third digit. "Teach me?"

"I'm going to fucking kill her," Casey announced darkly.

Jordyn took a big hit and passed the bong back. After a cough, she added, as angrily or more, "Not if I get to her first."

Shauna's turn, though she kept her toke light. "You can have dibs. I can't believe that bitch took our shirts." She didn't trust herself if she got too high. Didn't trust her sneaky bully of a pussy, at least. He was right down the hall, alone and vulnerable and just waiting to be consoled. She couldn't tip her hand yet. If only there were some way to tell everybody what she'd heard over break, that if they just cooled their stupid jets they could all finally have a taste. There was no way to do that without outing herself, though, which meant she'd be last in line if she wasn't cast out altogether.

Jordyn was still fuming. "I can't believe everyone let her. Can't believe I let her."

Casey accepted her bong back. It suited her somehow, a little glass panda with a bamboo-styled pipe. She scratched at that hideous bandage on her head as she took her god-knows-how-manyeth hit. Casey took drugs like Shauna took cock. She was a fucking rock star. She'd probably die like one, too, if she kept it up.

Casey took a long hit, her voice squeaking as she slowly released the vapors. "It's my fault, you guys. I sneetched us all up, got us worried about who all got the stars upon thars hating on him for my own shit."

"Hey, no, you were hurting. I'm just glad to see you guys patched things up." Shauna in fact did not care if they had patch things up. She didn't like Casey – the lying

cheating bitch was too much like Shauna's pussy. Horny, greedy, relentless. In times like these, though, she needed allies. If she was going to stop Tori from ruining things on Higgins 3 right when they were about to finally become perfect, she needed help. If these two druggy idiots were all Shauna had, then she'd use them.

Jordyn seemed to harbor some of the same misgivings about their fledgling alliance, though. "No, she's right. It is her fault. But you can't craft a profound future if you keep trying to build on the ruins of your sins. You—"

Casey snickered. "I fuckin' told you this shit was good, yo."

"You gotta clear it out, make smooth the uneven place. Which for you means getting us back to the good times."

Did Jordyn think people really spoke that way? Maybe she thought she sounded deep instead of tryhard. At least Casey was an authentic hippie and merely spoke the language of her tribe. Regardless. Shauna voiced agreement, as allies did. "Fucking Lex and her stupid little tantrum. Like he hasn't seen her tits a dozen times. A hundred, probably, flat skank always flitting around topless like she's the flat-front fairy of Higgins Hall. You know, I even went down to try to talk to her, tell her she needed to talk to him and work things out with him, and the little bitch told me to get out. Like *I* was the one in the wrong."

Casey frowned empathetically. Empathetically with Lex, that is. That was the trouble with stoners, always trying to see things from someone else's perspective when Shauna needed her to see things from *hers* and only hers. "She's hurting. She splurged on those magnificent melons for him, felt stupid once she did, and then he comes along and says the dumbest damn thing. I love the guy – I fucking *love* the guy – but he gots to learn to speech before he... wait. Think. Think before... yeah. Whatever, y'all get me."

"Disagree," said Jordyn. "This is her not being willing to take an apology. The offending incident aside, he's said and done exactly the right thing since. Seriously you guys, he's always got such good instincts about the way he treats people. He does all these heart-to-heart talks in the lounge, and you know I'm always down there. I think he thinks I got music in all the time or something, but I just like to listen to him talk. I could listen to that gorgeous idiot talk to these kiddies all damn day." She sighed. "But of course when the clock strikes midnight and he turns back into a pumpkin, he does it in front of New Tits McGee over there."

Shauna seized the pro-Spencer sentiment and tried to push things from discussion to action. "So what do we do? I think we all agree that we want him to stay, but how do we make it happen? I heard he put in for a transfer, but they said they needed time to recruit somebody else for our floor."

Casey gasped, openly horrified by the prospect of losing her shower buddy. "What? Says who?"

Shauna couldn't tell them, of course. That had been a gift from Austin, who was apparently close personal friends with the director of housing. They played squash or something together, he'd said. Evidently the guy was venting about this staff member looking to bail on his all-female floor, and Austin recognized which RA he was referring to from his sessions with Shauna. Austin had been reticent to pass it on, he'd said, but considering how crucial Spencer was to her treatment, how important he was to her as a person, he'd felt it was worth sharing.

She'd never had a man in her life she trusted like Austin.

They'd spent the rest of the session combing through Hottie Haven on their phones – he'd had her login (ShaSha) and password (notaslut69) since early on so he could keep tabs on her, make sure she didn't start getting slutty – and had jointly decided that organizing against Tori would be for the best.

"I forget. Somebody posted it, but of course Tori had to go and delete the post before anybody could feel sorry for the guy. Twice now he's had to sit there waiting to be kicked off this floor, and she doesn't give a shit just because he's got a dick."

"Oof, and what a dick," Casey echoed, unconsciously squeezing one of her tits for a moment.

Jordyn scowled. "Shit. Well then we need to get serious on the resistance. I'm not giving him up just so they can stick some asshole like the RA up on 4 in here. You know she wrote somebody up for singing in the shower? Not even in the middle of the night or something. Fucking *singing*."

"I heard she wrote someone up for giving her a dirty look," added Shauna. Everybody hated that chick. Personally, though, she hated the RAs on the basement and ground floors way more. They actually got to fuck him. God, that night when they'd all sat around listening to him feed his cum, drop by drop, to that crazy hot one. Shauna had ducked back into her room just in time. Some of the girls had been sneaking around in their panties, but Shauna didn't do sneaky. She'd been gagging herself to the point of weeping on a dildo while she played with herself, imagining she was that lucky bitch.

"OK. So, how do we hearts and minds this thing? 'Cause I think we all know people are pretty pissed. Whether or not they should be, they are."

"My lyin' ass coming clean is a step, for sure. Ima tell everybody the truth, that I played him, so he'd play me. Fuck, I still feel bad about it. I can't believe I..." The rest of her self-recrimination was muttered into her bong. Shauna was glad. Casey's self-loathing for being a greedy stupid slut made it way harder not to empathize with her.

Jordyn nodded. "That's good. When you do make the rounds, though, make sure you keep that bandage on though. Don't want anybody getting so pissed off that they clobber your ass."

Shauna rose, leaned against Jordyn's wall against a smattering of printed off artsy stuff. She'd been researching resistance movements, counter-insurgency tactics, that kind of stuff. "We need a symbol. Something to unite behind." The other two looked at her uncomprehendingly. "A way to show support for him publicly. Something like the shirts, you know?"

Casey frowned at her tits, clearly missing the way they'd spilled out of her Hottie half-shirt. "Well, that ship sailed. What else you got, my very hot homie?"

Shauna had come with the tactic in mind, but hoped either artistic Jordyn or popular Casey would have a sense for what could catch on. "We could make new shirts, right? Same logo and everything."

Jordyn shook her head. "Custom design, small quantity... you're looking at five hundo, conservative, up front. Plus those promote us Hotties, not our guy."

There was a knock at the door. The bong disappeared in a flash even as Jordyn dove for the window, jerking it open and fanning the curtains. "Um, you guys? It's Terri. Can I...?"

Casey rolled down the length of Jordyn's bed until she could reach the door, her head hanging upside down off the end of it as she threw it open and waved their neighbor in. "Fast feet, chica."

Terri scurried in, shutting and locking the door behind her. "Um, hey. Sorry, I was walking by and I sorta smelled... And it smelled *good*, and so I was sorta... yeah. Anyway, then I heard you talking and..."

Shauna's muscles tensed. If this chick was going to betray them to Tori, she'd—"I think I have just the thing."

Casey looked upwards, probably seeing more up Terri's skirt than of her face, giggled. "Yeah? Why you wanna help?"

Terri snorted. "Are you kidding me? You guys saw the vid. I've been living on that shit for weeks now. Me and TT – Toni, it's a rebrand – anyway, we've been freaking out that he's gonna quit or get fired or something. I mean, his freaking boss moving in just to monitor the guy's every word and move! Fuck. That's not OK. And where the hell is the—"

Jordyn slid open the closet door and gestured, producing a lighter out of seemingly nowhere. Terri promptly partook. "What vid? Not sure I saw any vid."

The girls laughed. Of course they'd all seen it, and of course they'd all seen it a thousand times. Shauna had played it on loop every night until she fell asleep to it. God, listening to those sluts tag-team Spencer with that sexy ASMR slobber shit, not twenty feet from where she now stood. Shauna had listened to it so much she dreamed to it, dreamed it was her lips competing for space on his shaft, dreamed it was her moaning and slurping and purring and *mmmming* until he got so hard he couldn't help but whip

it out before it ripped through his pants, dreaming she was there across from his boss, competing to see who could beg the most convincingly for the gift of his cum.

That last part especially. She'd been dreaming about it so much that she'd nearly called him "master" when she bumped into him at the food court the other day.

Because your pussy controls you.

The girls plotted, and schemed, and smoked. (Shauna continued to partake, but only in moderation so as to make sure they stayed focused and didn't try anything stupid.) Terri showed them her streaming site's new merch. T-shirts, halter tops, pins, these earrings that had been a bit too ambitious and turned out horribly.

The moment Terri produced it, though, without hesitation, the upperclassmen agreed that it could only be the chokers.

"I don't know," said a hesitant Terri. "I don't know how we convince everybody to put on a choker. They're kind of, I dunno, sexual."

"Naw, T, you're only saying that 'cause you got the ho-iest stream name on the dubya dubya web on 'em." Casey elbowed her playfully, nearly falling out of bed in the process. The three of them dove to make sure she didn't hit her head again and worsen her concussion.

(Shauna held privately that Casey's cognitive function hadn't been 100% in the first place.)

"But don't you see? That's it," she proclaimed.

The other three, intrigued by her confidence, turned to Shauna to hear more.

"What's the one thing every girl on this floor has in common?"

"Perfect tits?" guessed Terri.

"Da hotness," said Casey right over her.

Jordyn took that extra moment to consider, and got the right answer. "We all want Spencer."

Shauna nodded. "Bingo. Think about it. He's lonely, right? His girlfriends both dumped him, the Hotties have turned on him. He's got to be feeling the need for a little TLC. He's *vulnerable*. He needs us."

Jordyn shook her head, that thick mop of hers waving. "So what, though? I don't follow."

Terri, however, had got it immediately. "No she's right – that's it! It's not a symbol *about* him, it's a symbol *to* him. Wear a choker, you get to... No, wait. I mean, he's not a dick vending machine."

Casey was high enough now that she openly caressed her slit through her little shorts. It really annoyed Shauna how alike they were sometimes. "Mm, Ima head down to the coinstar, start pumpin' nickels into H3, homies."

Shauna saw Terri's point, though. "So we flip the order. You don't proclaim for him by putting on the choker, then get some cock as a reward. No. You proclaim your

support for the guy by satisfying his cock. Suck him off, fuck him, motorboat the guy, who cares. *Then* we give them the choker. Along comes another Hottie and she's all 'hey what's with that super hot choker you're wearing? That's new.' And just all sly like, we go 'oh, I blahdy-blahed Spencer, and he gave me this.' It becomes the world's hottest participation trophy. They're gonna want a choker just so everybody knows how they got it. The faster they get it, the more prestige, you know?"

Casey seized the one they'd been examining from the pile of HOTTEZ merch and, with clumsy fingers, fastened it around her neck. True to form, it was a little too tight, sinking into her slender neck. "And errybody already know how I earned mine."

Jordyn put one on next, the only other one present. "I earned mine when that bitch censored my art. Watching her toss them in her shitty box, cart them off... fucking *felt* like I was choking."

Not quite the plan, but Jordyn was committed. Shauna wasn't going to insist she traipse down to 310 for a facial to prove it. More Spencer cum for her.

They made the arrangements. Terri or Toni would hand over what chokers they had. No charge, which Shauna thought was pretty classy for a scheme to fuck a guy for slutwear. When a girl demonstrated – or claimed – carnal knowledge, Casey and Jordyn would dole out their choker.

As for Shauna, she controlled herself admirably. She couldn't distribute or promote, she said, because of some trouble she'd gotten into with Ramona earlier in the year. If this thing went tits up if and when she found out her RA was fucking his residents, she couldn't be associated with it. She'd simply get the rumor mill started, and let the Hotties do what they did best. Namely, look for excuses to let Spencer flood their skimpy little panties.

All that, without giving in to her pussy on any single one of its endless suggestions. Shauna couldn't wait to brag to Austin what a good nympho she'd been.

A few days later, she treated herself to a quick sloppy blowjob as he headed for the showers. Totally casual, same as that email she'd sent him, like she hadn't been masturbating to the brink of unconsciousness thinking about it ever since that night she'd listened to him fuck his boss. If he found out Shauna was so horny that she'd leave Ramona in the dust with how eager she was to service his every sexual desire – then help him dream up some new ones and service those too – he'd freak out at her intensity. She'd never get her shot. "Don't stick your dick in crazy," as the saying went, and her nymphomania more than qualified her for that warning.

Not that she was crazy. She simply had a disorder that caused her to behave atypically, that was all.

Spencer pumped a more than generous load of his thick, creamy nectar down Shauna's throat, patiently standing by as she sucked and sucked and sucked. Not that the girl was so cum-crazed that she truly needed every last drop; it was only that she had

been dreaming of the taste of this dick for so long that she couldn't seem to make herself give it up. She'd always been fine with the taste of cum (a pretty baseline requirement for a nymphomania diagnosis) but Spencer's was honest-to-god delicious.

"Don't know why I thought that would be hotter," she mumbled, as if it hadn't been her favorite sexual experience of her life outside of therapy. Maybe even that. He'd looked so happy, gazing down at her as she blew him, all while keeping an iron grip on her pussy's leash. She didn't even suggest that he fuck her.

After he left, Shauna crawled back into her shower stall and plugged her suction dildo into the wall, seizing that wonderful shower nozzle and spritzing it right on her clit. To think these had been a recommendation from Spencer's ex, who worked right there in the same building with her therapist.

It was a small world when you were learning to control your crazy, crazy pussy. She couldn't wait to tell Austin what a slut she'd not been, and to thank him for all the guidance he'd provided.

"HAPPY HALLOWEEN!" Shauna crowed it as loud and as enthusiastically as any of them. She really did love this floor.

Spencer pretended to be shocked. Did he think this was a surprise party...? In any case, she was elated to see he'd found and returned their shirts. Her big, hot titties looked incredible in that thing. She'd gone for a size Small in the fall when they'd first handed them out, but the cotton was stretchy. She went for an XS this time. No way that thing would cover all of her nipples. Somebody else could have her old one.

She and Jordyn and Casey shared another moment celebrating the success of their coup, like they had last night after the Halloween Eve party. After Jordyn went to bed, Shauna had snuck next door into Casey's room. She'd been so drunk, or high, or both, she clearly hadn't remembered Shauna coming in and sucking her tongue, savoring the fleeting tang of Spencer's cum from that unbe-fucking-lievable three-girl blowjob. He was so fucking badass. He deserved a world-class nympho like her, and she deserved him. This was going to be the best year of her life.

And yeah, it was sort of gay, what she'd done with Casey, but that was fine. Austin had assured her as such many times, whenever her fantasies ranged so out of control that they required additional hands and mouths. Maybe additional hands and mouths of men ought to sound better in that capacity. They used to. She remembered being spitroasted that one time freshman year, feeling like she was such hot shit. Those guys meant nothing to her, though. Less than nothing. She didn't even remember their names. The other Hotties, though, this was her pack. A bunch of fucking shameless sluts, same as Shauna. They were the only hands and mouths she wanted to share him

with. Plus she was sure he'd perform even better for her if she let in some of the other Hotties to help spur their stallion on.

Anyway, then she'd sat on Casey's face, just to get a few of his lingering sperm cells in her pussy. Because her pussy controlled her, and for one stupid night in her life, she was going to sit back and let it work unrestrained. To be fair, she'd been gentle, what with the concussion and all. Besides, Casey was such a slut she probably wouldn't have complained even if she'd been conscious.

(Fuck, had she committed a sex crime? Why did *that* turn her on? Ah, well. If Casey ever complained, should she remember it at all, all Shauna had to do was suggest it would probably turn Spencer on to watch. That bitch was almost as nymphomaniacal about Spencer as Shauna was.)

Before too long, Spencer made his way over to where Casey was still (at Shauna's request) describing how last night's blowjoborama had felt. Smelled. Tasted. She cut herself off as he walked up. "Sup, Ra. How's your staff?"

"I'm sure the rest of the Higgins staff is enjoying time with their own residents. Heck, maybe some of them even have a life and are out partying."

"You know that's not what I—"

"I know." He poked Casey playfully. Shauna had to hand it to her, she looked pretty tasty in her costume. It was inspired even. A mummy, draped in bandages like she had been after her concussion. Except now the bandages covered not just her head but her entire body – except for the many, many parts that they didn't. Slutty, yes, but it had a story to it. Maybe the girl wasn't a complete loss.

Spencer seemed to recognize it, too, as his face softened. She'd far rather sit on that than Casey's, even with his lower lip all pouty like that. "I like your costume. Can't say how glad I am that the bandages are fake this time. How's your head?"

"Less full than last night, homie."

Spencer rolled his eyes, but good-naturedly. "And let's see, here we have... hmm. Oh! A canvas! You're a canvas!"

Clad in what Shauna had until that moment thought was just a sloppy toga, Jordyn beamed. "Figured I'd let y'all do the painting for a change. Though don't panic, I only brought markers. No messes in your court, my liege."

"Yeah?" He looked her over. "Hasn't anybody...?"

Jordyn reached into the baggy sheets shrouding her and pulled the promised pack of markers out of her bra. "I wanted you to be the first."

Spencer accepted them. "Oh wow. I haven't had an art class since, geez, like, freshman year of high school. Pressure is on."

"There's no right or wrong to it," she assured him. "I'm only glad you're still here to draw on me."

“Pff, after what I saw you working on earlier, I’ll say there’s at least a little pressure.” He addressed Casey and Shauna. “Seriously, you should go check it out. It was... I don’t know the words for it. Beautiful.”

Jordyn’s smile brightened. She really was pretty. She belonged here. “You can’t weasel out of it with flattery. C’mon, doodle on me. Go nuts!”

Spencer took a moment, thinking it over, and finally uncapped a marker. He began small, so small Jordyn had to insist he “embiggen” it. It was a simple enough design that even his accurately described meager talent was up to the task. It only took a few minutes, but when he was done, there on her chest was a candle, the flame burning in orange marker on her tit. Wavy blue lines swept across the whole of her torso, a broad pattern of lightning behind it. Considering he’d drawn it on a person’s clothes, with no prep, it... well, still looked pretty bad. But it was from the heart.

“For a woman who knows how to keep a fragile light alive in a storm,” he said, returning the markers.

After a moment, Jordyn grasped him by the back of the head and pulled his mouth to hers. Shauna gaped, envious. Lots of the girls did. That lucky fucking girl. Getting to have his hands roam up and down her body during that drawing. He’d been a gentleman about it as much as he could, but he’d definitely gotten a feel of Jordyn’s awesome, perky tits.

What about *her* tits? What about her big, proud, sexy, bouncy, suckable, fuckable, whatever-Spencer-wantsable, hot titties? This party hadn’t been going half an hour, and already half a dozen girls had gotten felt up, kissed, pinched, groped, or otherwise been allowed to command some portion of his attention on their bodies.

No, she cautioned herself. Exercises. I am not a slut. I look like a slut, I’ve acted like a slut, I have a slutty pussy, but I am not a slut.

But... kisses.

I am NOT a slut.

One of the gay girls was giving him a lap dance.

I look like a slut. I have a slutty pussy.

People were bullying Tori, pulling her drawstring and laughing at her as she babbled one whorish phrase or another. *Pull*. “I love being on my knees!”

But I am not a slut.

“Actually Ramona was holding on to them for us. Wasn’t that nice of her?” Spencer was answering someone about the shirts. Ramona. His boss, his slave, Ramona. Ramona, who begged for dick from her subordinate because it was Spencer’s dick and therefore she like Shauna like all women were subordinate to its majesty. Ramona had kept the shirts because they were hot and slutty and turned Spencer on and she wanted Spencer turned on all the time because every man had his breaking point and Shauna and the Hotties could wear them and look hot and slutty for him until he pulled out his

cock and fucked every last one of them including Shauna which was how it ought to be because the Hotties were all sluts just like her they were her home they were her family sluts all and together they would pleasure him forever and always because she couldn't stop herself because...

My pussy controls me.

Oh, fuck it.

Shauna turned around, swept her costume up over her ass to reveal her bare pussy. It was so wet it was dribbling down her fucking thighs – like it always did when she was Spencer, or Austin.

“Fuck me, master!” she pleaded, shaking her cunt enticingly.

The party went silent apart from that hokey music Katrina was playing. She could feel the eyes on her. Spencer's eyes too, though, so who cared if anyone else saw.

“Fuck me, master. I'm yours, master. Use me, master. I beg you to fuck me, master,” she gushed. Shauna was barely aware it wasn't just another fantasy. She simply couldn't contain it.

The dam had broken. Two and a half months of keeping herself under control, and suddenly, in the middle of this dorky dorm party, she was outing herself as the weak, easy, slutty, fuckable nymphomaniac that she truly was. Oh, she'd go back to her room later and lecture her pussy for this, but in this moment, presenting herself as a fuck toy for her RA, she finally understood.

Shauna *was* her pussy. Shauna's pussy was Shauna. She'd always been in control of herself.

It was simply that herself was a dirty fucking slut.

Spencer stared for a long moment – as did everyone else, each and every one of them aghast – but finally snapped his fingers with a grin. “Aha! Slave Leia! I get it. Dang, Shauna, you had me for a second there. Embarrassed I needed the hint.” He patted her softly on the butt, then moved on to the next cluster of girls.

Oh right. The costume.

Some of the nerdy girls had started doing a weekly group viewing of whatever stupid Star Wars show they'd put on Disney Plus. Shauna had joined in, not that she'd ever been much of a fan. It just gave her a chance to sit behind Spencer and imagine what his hair would feel like if she came up behind him and buried his head in her big hot titties. Because she was a slut. Controlled by, and for, her pussy.

Still, Spencer's rejection stung. Or if not a true rejection, then his dismissal, since he had so much pussy being thrown at him that even hers was mere white noise. Finally the man was giving in! Ready at last to harvest his Hotties, yet she'd been so focused trying to tame her basic nature that she'd kept herself completely off his radar!

Fuck!

Was it the costume? The costume was a chintzy thing she'd picked up at Target that afternoon. She'd cut off the stupid netting that supposedly preserved modesty but mostly just looked ugly, then spent the rest of the evening fucking herself with a smooth-handled plastic lightsaber she'd found in the toy department. Where she belonged. Another fucking toy, a girl he thought was cosplaying a slave when she was sincerely offering herself as one.

What was she doing wrong?

Shauna laughed at his reaction. The other girls laughed as the tension of her outburst became one more forgettable slutty anecdote in a party overflowing with them. Then she waited for a quiet moment to slip out. One soon presented itself as Nikki and Emma and Danielle and Jacqui and pretty soon half the floor demanded a dance with their RA, which swiftly became girls shamelessly grinding on him, shaking their bits, everyone ready to fuck as soon as somebody said Go. As the revels heightened, Shauna proceeded down the hall, stopping in her room to send a quick text, scrolling through contacts. Damn it. She always looked for him under Austin, and then under his last name, forgetting she'd entered him way back when they'd first met under his professional title, placing him in the D's. Where Shauna wanted to be, she thought with a giggle.

She clicked on Dr. Austin Tacker, and typed quickly. *Had a major breakthrough tonight. Am slut. Thank you so much. Can't wait to tell you about everything.* She attached a picture of herself in her sci-fi slave girl uniform blowing a kiss and hit Send.

With that, she made her way down to 303. No point in knocking. Shauna let herself in.

Ramona looked to be in the middle of packing. Interesting, but beside the point. "Um, Shauna, right? What can I...? You know, it's considered polite to knock before you—"

"I know you're fucking him," Shauna said.

Ramona froze, choking on her rebuke. "Um, you know I'm fucking who, exactly?" She wasn't about to play games, though. "I know you're fucking him, and I know you're his sub. His willing slave. I know all about it. Don't try to play a playah. Admit it."

The woman slowly folded her arms across her chest. "I suppose there's nowhere you could be hiding a phone or recording device in that skimpy thing, so... sure. I'm fucking him. What do you want?"

"How long has it been going on?"

"How long...? Is this some kind of jealousy thing? Honey, if Spencer showed some interest in you, you can't take offense that he's still seeing other women. Spencer's not really a one-woman man, I'm afraid. Trying to blackmail me isn't going to change that."

Shauna blinked. "What? I'm not blackmailing you. What kind of person do you think I am?"

Ramona likewise looked confused. “Then what exactly can I do for you, Shauna?”

Shauna finally understood her relationship with her slutty pussy, why she’d never been able to control it. The same way you couldn’t put a leash on a dog and then put the lead in its mouth. They might do fine trying to walk themselves sometimes, but often as not it was going to leave a trail of mangled squirrels down the sidewalk. She couldn’t control herself. She’d tried and she’d tried, but she’d failed.

This woman, however, had shown her the way. She didn’t need to control herself. She just needed to give control to someone else.

Chin lowered, Shauna knelt at the woman’s feet. “Mentor me.”

The woman looked down at her, big hot titties overflowing the cheap plastic cups of her slave uniform, chest heaving at the thought of putting those titties into their master’s mouth.

Ramona lifted Shauna’s chin to meet her eyes, and smiled.

END, PART TWO

Part Three: The Warrior's Tale

“How about that, you guys, eh? That look straight to you?”

Aunt Julia spoke excellent English for a woman who'd not come to it until she was in her twenties, doing it on her own after her sister passed and she became responsible for raising her very English-fluent niece and nephew. She'd been content living in the barrio. Everything was close, everything was Spanish, it was affordable and there was always something going on.

Suddenly, though, her niece and nephew weren't just some cute little weirdos to visit on the weekends or babysit when her sister had errands to run, or, closer to the end, medical appointments to attend. So when those appointments became a past tense and caring for her newly adopted children pressingly present, she picked up a second job, moved to an apartment in a complex where she was one of the only Latinas she saw, and figured out how to raise kids.

She wasn't a perfect mother, but then, she'd never intended to be one in the first place. Ten years in, she felt like she was doing a pretty good job slapping condiments on the turd sandwich her family had been served.

“Little high on the left, Tía,” said Amy. “Don't you think, Benny?”

The boy hesitated, almost imperceptibly, then nodded. “Um. Yeah, little high on the left.”

Aunt Julia made a few micro-adjustments until her niece and her niece's friend thumbs-upped the new addition to her décor. “*¿Qué van a hacer ustedes hoy?*”

Ben looked at his girlfriend. She fielded the Spanish stuff. “We're gonna just hang out here. There's a new season of *Riverdale* on Netflix.”

“Bah, you two are young,” grumbled her aunt in her thick accent. “You should be out doing things, having fun, getting into trouble. Not sitting around here watching other kids do it on the TV.”

“It's like a hundred degrees outside, Tía! We'd melt, then you'd come home and find our puddles on the sidewalk, and then you'd yell at us about how I'm never careful and always making messes for my poor put-upon tía. So which is it?”

She didn't bother pointing out that her brother Jonah went out getting into trouble all the time, and that the DCS meeting Aunt Julia had been dragged to over it hadn't gone over well. Jonah staying home to watch Netflix would be a relief.

Aunt Julia laughed. “You are so like your mother. She would turn everything I said into a fight, too.” She said it affectionately, though. She always spoke of Julia's mother affectionately. It helped. Julia had been too young to remember very much of her. What she remembered, though, she treasured. There was a sense of safety and love attached to all those old memories that the real world seldom seemed to convey. It was

bittersweet, but Amy suspected that her mother's knowledge that their years together would be cut short had helped her stuff more love into what few they'd had.

"Lucky for you, Tía, it's too hot for fighting, too. What about you? Working?"

"No work today – just catching up on all the *mierda* I wasn't doing when I was working, which means there's extra work. *¿Necesitas algo del supermercado?*"

"Um... I *think*–"

"Never mind. You think. I gotta go. Text me, yeah? You got a few hours, but if you forget, you gonna starve – worse than usual, skinny chica."

Aunt Julia was at the door before she remembered her purse, whirled about and snatched it from the front table, and back. She stopped with the door open, one foot out. "*Este chico es lindo.*"

Amy gave her aunt a *look*. Ben had taken German in high school. (He was a *college boy*, something Amy had not yet tired of lording over her friends.) She was pretty sure the closest encounter he'd had with a native speaker was his family's housekeeper, but still. "Tía...!"

"*¿Me arrepentiré de haberlos dejado solos aquí?*"

"*¿Puedes irte por favor?*" Amy groaned.

Aunt Julia blew a kiss. "Text me, OK?"

The door closed behind her. "Sorry about that."

She expected to be asked for a translation, and was already prepared with suitable lies. It would be way too embarrassing to explain her aunt's anxieties about leaving the young couple unchaperoned.

Instead, she got, "I don't like it when you call me 'Benny' in front of people. I haven't gone by Benny since I was twelve." He sounded angry, for some reason.

"You didn't mind it when I was moaning it last night," she said, traipsing her fingers up his chest.

He brushed the fingers aside roughly. "When we're alone, it's different. Just don't, OK? I don't think that's so much to ask."

"All right, sorry, geez. *Ben*," she said. "Let me make some popcorn. So we have something to spill later when you try another one of those cheesy moves like at the movies last week."

That seemed to mollify him. He pinched her on the butt when she stood up, which she liked. He put his arm around her when she sat back down and hit play, which she also liked. He kissed her when Archie kissed Veronica, which she *really* liked.

"You know, I thought they'd be bigger," he said when making out advanced to the level of getting Amy out of her shirt.

She did not like that.

"Um, I'm sorry...?" she said, immediately pulling it back down.

“Oh come on, don’t be like that. I like them.” Somehow, her shirt didn’t fly back off. “I said I liked them! I wasn’t trying to insult you. Just saying I always thought they looked bigger. Because you’re so pretty.”

Amy frowned. “What, a girl can only be pretty with big boobs?”

“Did I say that? Don’t put words in my mouth. Jesus, and I thought your aunt was a bitch.”

Her frown intensified by orders of magnitude. “What the hell did you just say?”

“I said, your *aunt*. Is a *bitch*,” he repeated, slowly. Somehow Ben didn’t seem to recognize until after he’d said it that he’d gone too far, grimacing at his overreach. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it, Ames.”

“Amy.”

“What?”

“You said you don’t like being called Benny. I don’t like being called Ames.” She folded her arms imperiously, turning a shoulder to him.

“Oh my fucking god. Did I do something wrong? You know, you might be the first girl to invite me over for a Netflix and chill who actually didn’t mean it as a metaphor. Fuck, what a waste of time.”

He stood up, Amy presumed in order to leave. He didn’t leave. “Yeah, well, sorry to have wasted your valuable time on my tiny tits.”

“Yeah, well, maybe you should be sorry. What I get for throwing a bone to some sheltered high school girl.”

“Maybe because you know I’m way hotter than any of the college chicks who probably won’t give you the time of day, *Benny*,” she snarled.

Ben hit her. Open-palmed, the coward’s hit, the way men who wanted to and knew how to hit a girl hit them. Amy looked up, stunned. There was a flash of regret in his eyes, though she surmised – correctly – it was fear of getting in trouble, not fear that he’d hurt her.

“I told you to call me Ben,” he said, like that excused it. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to lose my temper, but... You bring me over here, you wear that hot little outfit, and then it’s like you tried to make me mad on purpose. I didn’t mean to.”

Amy, meanwhile, was clutching her cheek and watching him in abject terror. In an objective sense, she’d known she’d been locked in a space with someone twice her size, biceps the size of her waist. It had simply never occurred to her that was cause for concern. Not until now. With him standing over her, muscles tense, thunderclouds darkening his face, she was a fox trapped in a den with a bear.

“You hit me,” she said, processing.

“I *slapped* you,” he corrected, though he’d been thinking of it exactly the way she said until she said it. “Are you OK? It wasn’t that hard. You’re OK.”

“You... you *hit* me!”

“You insulted me,” he countered, pathetically. “Look, I said I’m sorry. I am. Here, let me...” Ben leaned down. When she didn’t remove her hand from her face, he pulled it away – pried it away, one might say – and kissed her cheek. “There. All better.”

It was not all better. It still stung, and the loss of pressure on it made it sting. Why wasn’t he leaving? He’d just done the one thing guys were never ever supposed to do to a girl – well, one of the two things – but he didn’t seem scared. The door was ten feet away. The apartment wasn’t that big. Somehow he didn’t budge.

“Forgive me?” he pressed when she didn’t say anything.

Amy wasn’t sure what to say. She wanted him to leave, but what if saying that made him stay? It could start an argument. A fight. Pointing out what he’d done had only made him feel like he had a right to touch her, to put his lips on her. What if telling him to leave made him do something worse?

But... what if *not* telling him to leave accomplished the same thing?

Her eyes darted anxiously to the new wall hanging. No. No no no. This would *not* do. She wasn’t the sort of person who let someone intimidate her. Not in her own house. Amy took to her feet and guided him, full force, toward the exit.

That evening, Ben helped Aunt Julia carry in the groceries – lugged the whole load up in one trip, the same macho way Jonah always tried to do it – and departed then without even a final kiss.

“*Nunca me enviaste un texto,*” complained Aunt Julia as she flopped into her chair. The woman was scarcely bigger than Amy (though nobody would ever call her flat, Amy thought bitterly) yet still the springs whined under her weight. It was a venerable chair.

Amy apologized. To Aunt Julia, she looked like she was looking at something on her phone. Really, she had the camera app open, triple-checking to make sure there was no bruise forming on her cheek.

Or her neck. Ben had thought it would be hot to be aggressive like that. Maybe it had been, for him.

No bruises, though. Not where anyone could see them, anyway.

“So? You two have fun...?”

There were a hundred things Amy wanted to say. Almost all of them began with a resounding *no*. All of which she knew would end with questions and drama and anger and making Ben pissed off at her again. Not that she was ever going to see him again. Of course, she’d have to see him at school. Plus, he was going to Lakeview, where Amy had also planned to go when she graduated the following summer. They had some mutual friends, too. Friends who’d set her up with him in the first place. Friends who had expressed their undying envy that she got invited to college parties at fraternities like they’d only seen in movies. Friends who thought she was so fucking lucky to have landed a guy like Ben.

Amy laughed, somehow. She was pretty sure that was the sound she'd made, at least. Why wouldn't her hands stop shaking? "Why do you think I didn't text?"

"Don't you go having *too* much fun, *sobrina*."

"You were the one who wanted me getting into trouble."

Aunt Julia eyed the grocery bags on the counter grumpily. She hadn't meant it as a signal, but Amy hopped up anyway to put them away. If there was a sure way to get on Aunt Julia's good side, it was to put the groceries away.

"I think it's still crooked," she said, eyeing that decorative sign Amy had made – made on her first date with Ben, in fact. She'd thought it was so classy, so romantic, attending a crafting class with him. She'd bragged about it to everybody who would listen. All the other couples were way older than them. Most of them were married. She'd seen the price tag, too, a ludicrous amount to put a little paint and a doodad or two on a piece of wood. And he'd been such a gentleman.

Had she called him Benny, there, in front of those people? Had he said anything? If only he'd said something, she would have known not to do it again.

Fucking asshole. Fucking fucking asshole.

Amy gave one corner a ghost of a nudge, watching for her aunt's reaction. "Eh. Good enough," she said.

Amy studied it for a moment. Pink background, letters sponged on in this cool textured paint they'd had. A sunflower in the corner, a ladybug perched on the *R*. A border stenciled in so well even the instructor had said it was impressive for a first-timer. Amy's guidance counselor had tried to steer her toward the arts, once, but Aunt Julia had said under no circumstances would she permit it. Artists were poor, and they were all going to be replaced by AI in the next five years anyway, she said. Maybe she'd be able to take some classes as electives, or sneak in a minor.

She couldn't afford to go somewhere else, though. That scholarship was huge, and she'd only landed it because she was a townie. Maybe Ben would transfer. He always complained about how he hated living here.

Anyway, Ben brought flowers to their next date, to Aunt Julia's delight. "*Este me gusta*," she said, thumbs-upping her niece behind his back as she let him in.

"C'mon, let's get going Ames. You're cute enough as it is – don't wanna make us late to the party, right?"

Maybe it was a one-time thing, she told herself. Just don't call him Ben.

"Yeah, well, go fuck yourself, you flat frigid fugly bitch."

It ended far better than she'd hoped it would.

Amy wasn't stupid. She was actually pretty smart, as it so happened. When she graduated, it would be with honors. She hadn't realized her increasingly nightmarish relationship with Ben had been such a common thing, almost cliché, until she'd found some places online full of other women living it themselves.

Once she learned the vocabulary for it, read up on all the tactics and techniques guys like Ben used – consciously or no – it was easy to find people who'd been with abusers and manipulators and controllers. Easy to find advice. Encouragement. Empathy. She even appreciated the sad solace of not feeling alone while trying to rationalize what to make of Ben's threat to kill himself if she ever left him. Boy, was *that* trick on everybody's list.

Then again, any comfort in knowing she wasn't alone in spirit did nothing to make her less alone in practice. Her family liked Ben, even Jonah. So did her friends. On paper, if you didn't know what went on behind the scenes, he seemed great. Local college boy, also on academic scholarship, good-looking, not the worst conversationalist. He hailed from a respected family; his mom owned the local Target, the one up on the north side of town. He had "going places" written all over him in a dozen languages. (Spanish not included.)

They simply didn't hear the insults or the threats. They didn't see the menacing gleam in his eyes if another boy tried to talk to her, or feel the power in those muscles if she didn't cut it off fast enough. (Not that it always mattered if she did.)

It was one thing to believe in the principle that she didn't deserve this. It was, emphatically, not her fault. It was quite another to accept the stark reality that she didn't know how to get away. She'd tried to merely start a conversation about breaking up last Christmas. ("You know, do you really see us still being together long-term? You'll graduate two years before me, you know, and I'm sure you'll land some fancy new job way far away from here...") It had been made plain that if he left, she would go with. They were, Ben informed her, in love.)

Maybe if she bit the bullet and followed through, actually left him – if he let her go, which she had a hard time imagining – he'd likewise follow through and kill himself. But the chamber of his dad's gun (something he'd done a little show and tell with, super casual, a few days after the incident when she refused to give him the passcode to her phone) held nineteen bullets. That left eighteen for Amy before he got on with the main event. Maybe he'd split them evenly between Aunt Julia and Jonah and her, six apiece.

Aunt Julia was a big fan of all those murder shows. They used to watch them together, laugh and comment on the tropes that played out so often. "*Por supuesto que es el marido!*" they'd cry, one or the other or both.

It stopped being funny to Amy after that.

Amy told herself and told herself she should open up to her aunt. Aunt Julia was old school, and if she didn't drive out and smash in the windows of Ben's sports car with

the baseball bat she still kept by her nightstand from the barrio, she knew some no-bullshit hombres who'd start there and then get serious if she asked them to. Which was in part why Amy held back. Everyone would know – except they'd only think they knew, without knowing jack shit. There would be the ones who thought she was exaggerating about all Ben had done; the ones who thought she was outright lying, making shit up about him to avenge some petty slight; the ones who'd want to believe it all but were too adjacent to those other types. What was easier to believe, after all? That Amy hadn't gotten what she felt was her due for an anniversary gift and lashed out, or that Ben was a violent, controlling, manipulative sadist?

Worst of all, though, there would be the ones who would believe her completely. People who would understand how weak, and terrified, and helpless she'd been. How pathetic. Discover that she was afraid of even going to the hospital and showing them the bruises. Letting them involve the police. That was one thing the forums had in spades, testimonies from women who'd gone to the police. Stories where they actually helped instead of making everything worse were few and far between. So instead, Amy hid in her room and put a razor to her ankles or the tops of her feet.

Ben believed she never took her socks off because she had a huge hangup about her feet. It was something she could keep from him, a part of herself only *she* could hurt. That made no sense, Amy knew, but neither did constructing an elaborate web of protections for her abuser and she'd acclimated to that in a big fucking hurry.

Her fantasy was that Ben would cease to exist somehow, fall in a hole in the woods or be smashed by a meteor or drown in the middle of Bear Lake. Drown in the deep water, cold and murky. Ol' Ursula, the bear that lives at the bottom of the lake according to local legend, could just eat his body bones and all. He could just disappear, and people would wonder, and then forget. And so would she. And she'd be Amy again, not Ben's girlfriend.

Instead, her tits shrunk even smaller thanks to her frequent escapes to the Y and her infrequent escapes to the kitchen. (Food was a happy thing, and Amy was not happy.) So Ben finally just cheated on her with some bitch from some sorority at Lakeview. A college girl, not some immature high school senior like Amy. She "caught" him, which was to say Skyler sought her out and told her, rubbed it in her face like Amy would be anything but relieved to the bottom of her soul. Skyler had no idea what she was in for, because Amy had been just that goddamn good at making sure no one knew she'd spent 10 months 2 weeks and Memorial Day weekend shackled to a monster.

Skyler was exactly what she'd needed. She'd fantasized about it, often, and knew precisely how to proceed once daydreams manifested. Without batting an eyelash, for the first time in her relationship, Amy got clingy. Possessive. Texted Ben all the time, inane shit like *wyd?* or *miss you* or a picture of her lunch – especially if she had reason to think he was out with Skyler. Amy started drama on every social media platform the

chick had an account for, passive aggressive laugh emojis on every sexy pic she'd ever posted. Drove by the Sigma Chi Epsilon house and took a shit on her porch in the middle of the night.

Amy had been in no condition to drive that night, but she'd begged her little brother. Jonah had taken his big sister on his moped, persuaded that a midnight trip to the ΣXE sorority house was worth the bother. He hadn't known what she meant to do there, but after Amy told him about the cheating, he marched right up those steps and left a pile of his own. Once in a while he wasn't such an asshole.

Skyler, in her ignorance, fought back, but she couldn't come close to matching Amy's intensity. Ben had enjoyed having a girlfriend he could control. Suddenly, she was completely out of anyone's control – including her own, as she demonstrated at a frat party at Kappa Nu, where Ben was a pledge. She'd convinced Ben she was PMSing too hard to attend, but sure enough, when she arrived anyway, there was Skyler grinding on him. Amy tackled her to the ground and was beating the shit out of her as convincingly as possible while trying her best not to really hurt the girl. (Except by giving her to Ben, that is.) The fiasco earned her a perma-ban from the KN house, and from there it had been a short walk to Ben deciding he didn't want a future with this unseemly embarrassment of a girl or her uninteresting shriveled chesticles.

Skyler's boobs were enormous. Good for him.

So Ben told her to fuck herself, called her a flat, frigid, fugly bitch, and Amy fell down and wept with relief. She also wept with self-loathing for what she'd foisted off onto Skyler. She didn't even like Skyler – a *junior* in college with an undeclared major? fucking seriously? – but nobody deserved that. There was no way to warn her, though. After how insane and obsessive Amy had been over the cheating during those final weeks, nobody would believe it was all an act meant to repulse Ben, the relationship equivalent of peeing on a jellyfish sting.

Or if Amy did warn her, and the warning tanked things between Skyler and Ben, he might find out. He wouldn't like that.

One time last fall he'd been making out with her in his car after a date. When he tried to take things further, Amy had said, somewhat bitterly, that since he'd refused to use lube the night before, she didn't think she was ready to have sex again. Knowing Ben, she'd quickly added that she would go down on him instead if he wanted. Without warning he'd punched her full force in the stomach and screamed at her that he shouldn't need it if only her cunt wasn't so frigid all the time. Then he had sex with her anyway. Raped her, she supposed, but thinking of it in those terms only made her want to cut more.

Amy wouldn't endanger that breakup for anything, no matter what. If Ben found out how far she'd gone to be rid of him, he'd come for her, and it would be a race to see which one of them killed Amy first.

Maybe Skyler would have better luck. Maybe it really was Amy's fault he got so angry and possessive somehow, and with Skyler he'd be happier. Maybe.

Ben left her. He left, and he was gone, and he was out of her life, and he wasn't there any more, and Amy told herself that over and over and over again in a hundred ways that were all lies, because all the iterations failed to acknowledge that he was inside her head and was never going to leave. No matter how many times she repeated it, the cutting and the starving and the exercise mania and the pills she'd scored from this sketchy guy in her second period that she couldn't afford but she couldn't sleep couldn't concentrate couldn't stop crying all the time until giving some gross dude a handjob for drugs was the only way but even those didn't stop the terror... That all stayed, to do Ben's job for him now that he was off torturing Skyler. Which was Amy's fault.

Wasn't it supposed to be better now?

It made no sense at all. Maybe life wasn't supposed to make sense. That made no sense either.

"Amy? *¿Puedo pasar?*"

"One second, I'm changing," Amy said hastily. It wasn't technically a lie. She hastily hid her knife under her bed, then donned her emergency socks from under her pillow. It stung like hell, but they were the perfect color to hide the seepage from fresh blood.

Trying to study for her finals this afternoon so she didn't blow her scholarship in the home stretch was probably the first thing she'd done in weeks that wasn't purely self-destructive, and it had been stressing her the fuck out. If she lost that money, bye bye Lakeview. Part of her – a big part – wanted to lose it. Ben went to Lakeview. She'd tried telling herself that it was a huge school, that there were tens of thousands of students at Lakeview, that her odds of randomly running into Ben were lower than bumping into him at a dozen other places they used to frequent. More convincingly, though, she told herself that Ben had taken enough from her, and she would *not* give up her scholarship, too.

Still, sometimes she needed to just blow off some steam.

Amy invited her aunt in, sitting criss crossed to try to hide her feet, just in case. "What's up?"

"Not decent, huh?"

"Yeah, why?" Amy effortlessly summoned the attitude of the affronted teenager.

"You're wearing the same clothes you been wearing the last two days, *sobrina*, and I know your lazy butt hasn't been doing no laundry."

"You're monitoring what I wear now?"

“Amy, I don’t need to monitor what you wearing when I can smell it from all the way over here. You’re starting to make your brother seem like a neat freak.”

Amy could feel the wetness against her thigh, a trickle of blood beginning to soak through her crimson sock. “Did you actually need something, Tía, or did you just swing by to run me down?”

Her aunt’s expression softened. “*Lo siento*. I wanted to see if you wanted to have dinner with me tonight. Maybe some drinks, relax, have a good night. I know you’ve been *deprimida* lately since Benny.”

Aunt Julia had always been permitted to call him Benny. Amy had corrected her once by reflex, but Ben had laughed it off and said it was fine. Apparently Amy was the only one who got hit for offenses of nomenclature.

“Drinks? I’m eighteen, Tía. Barely.”

“I didn’t say we were going to get hammered, did I? Just a few, to help you relax and remember my Amy. It’s a stupid law anyway. Dude can fight a war, but not down a few *cerveza*.”

“I’m studying,” Amy said. “It’s finals week next week.”

“C’mon, you got your scholarship already. Why you need to study so much?”

Amy wasn’t ready to tell her she was going to fail three classes if she didn’t ace the finals. The math shouldn’t permit it, but school policy held that even if you flunked a quarter, if you earned an A the other quarter and on the finals, you got credit for the semester. It didn’t come up often, her guidance counselor said during a lengthy lecture, but it was still possible to pass and graduate. He said it with barely disguised apathy, as if Amy had finally revealed herself to be the disappointment he’d always thought deep down she really was.

Ben had liked having a smart girlfriend. It helped his parents get on board with his decision to date a high school girl two grades behind him. (She remembered how they’d laughed about it one time, how silly they’d been in hindsight not to see Amy was more than mature enough for their son. She remembered wishing they’d found her a little less mature. She’d been 17 then, but was recuperating from her first abortion before their eyes so maybe they were right and she *was* mature for her age.)

Stressed as she’d been while they were together, Amy’s studying had been a way to get a night off once in a while. Though he was merely a B student himself, she tried to nurture his impression that he was smarter than her, and therefore she had to study more than he did. Now that he was out of the picture, though, she’d lost all academic motivation and had fallen apart overnight.

Amy snapped at her aunt, “I just have to, OK? Maybe find an actual friend your own age for once?” She had to graduate. She had to ace these tests. She had to learn five months of material in two weeks. It was that, or let Ben win, again.

The rejection stung, as it had been meant to. It worked. *“Buena suerte con tu estudio, sobrina.”*

Aunt Julia left to get shit-faced by herself. Her hooligan nephew was out partying; her bitch niece had no use for her; her dead sister had abandoned her here in this iron maiden of obligation. For once, she was taking the night off.

Ironically, Amy didn't have any friends of her own any more. Classic abuser that he was, Ben had made sure he was her entire social circle. Anyone she might have reclaimed on the far side had been repulsed by her manic behavior during the breakup. Word had gotten out about the dump at ΣXE somehow, too. Probably had security cameras. Still, Lukas, her pervy dealer with the hair trigger cock, he thought of her as a friend. She texted to ask what he was up to, and he invited her to a house party later that night.

Three hours later, drunk to the gills and high as shit on whatever those pills were (different color than usual but felt as good or better), Amy had had time to reflect on her aunt's advice. She really did need to unwind a little, to look for a scrap of happiness in this shitty world. Fuck studying. If she was fucking up high school this badly, she wouldn't make it in college anyway.

“DO YOU WANT TO FUCK ME?” she yelled at Lukas over the music. A handful of nearby party-goers, strangers all, made out her offer and cheered them on.

Lukas spoke right into her ear. “Serious? Let's just dance!”

“I WANT TO FUCK!” Amy whined.

“You're pretty wasted,” he replied. Lukas put his hands on her hips, pulled her closer, but when she made to kiss him, he dodged it. Gentlemanly, for a guy trading his grandma's medicine cabinet for a handjob.

Amy was done dancing. “WHO WANTS TO FUCK ME?!” she screeched.

The guy who got to her first made it good and clear that Lukas better keep out of the way, then allowed Amy to drag him down some hallway to some room. Not a bedroom, but there was a loveseat. It would do.

“You're so fucking hot,” the guy said as she took her shirt off. That felt nice. “By the way I'm—”

“Take your pants off,” she commanded as she started on the slutty little shorts she'd worn. Ben had loved the way her ass looked in these things. He'd gone berserk when he caught her wearing them to visit Kappa Nu unannounced, paranoid she was trying to flirt with some of his brothers. She'd told him she'd thrown them away, then hid them in the cardboard box labeled “FROM MOM” where she used to store pictures and hand-me-downs. It was where she started storing all the things Ben disapproved of but she wasn't ready to throw away. She'd moved the actual keepsakes to Jonah's closet, only to find months later he hadn't known what they were and had thrown them out.

Whoever this boy was, he was good-looking and obedient, two traits Amy admired in that moment. He'd gone ahead and shed his underwear, too, and his cock was already nice and hard for her. Bigger than Ben's for sure. She wished she could take a picture of it. In fact...

Amy dropped her knees.

"Uh, you want me to..." He gestured to join her.

"Never had your dick shucked before?" She giggled at her slurred speech. God, she was drooling. When was the last time she'd sucked a cock other than Ben's? For a guy who was grateful and didn't take it as a matter of divine right. She couldn't remember right then that she never had. Who cared. She pounced on his cock, forcing it down her throat on the first go. Ben loved that. It made him feel powerful. Let him mix his twin passions of fucking Amy and hurting Amy. Tears flooded down her cheeks in seconds as the boy gasped and groaned at her gusto.

She'd never sucked a cock like this before. Desperate. Slutty. Like some porno – Ben had *loved* to make her watch porn with him, make her do what the professional whores did. It was sloppy. She gagged. She moaned like the taste of his sweaty, funky shaft brought her genuine pleasure.

Which it did. This guy was going nuts for it. He was shaking so hard he could barely stand. Maybe just the alcohol, but Amy decided to award herself some credit. She was so hot Ben had been ready to kill for her. This guy was so fucking lucky to have blundered into a hot slut like her.

I hope Aunt Julia's not mad at me any more. The stray thought cost Amy her balance, and she fell backward on her ass.

"Whoa, hey, are you OK?" The boy rushed to help her up.

Amy took his arm in both hands. While he'd been exerting gentle pressure to help a 95 pound girl up, she jerked with the force she'd need to drop a boy twice that size to his knees. He wasn't ready, and he fell onto her. She needed this. She deserved this. Never mind that she didn't know where this room was, where this house was, didn't know this guy's name, that she'd definitely gotten a vibe like he meant to lock them in together and do whatever he wanted to her.

Wasn't that rape?

Amy kissed him. She didn't like kissing, but she'd gotten good at it. If she rebuffed Ben's kisses it invariably started a fight, which she invariably lost. She'd gotten very, very good at pretending to like kissing. The boy finally needed to breathe, eyes wide, shocked by the sexual tornado sucking him into its vortex.

"I, ah, don't have a condom..." He was confused by his own admission. He'd intended to take the drunken girl and fuck the hell out of her in this secluded room, maybe come on her face, and leave her there to dry off. But this girl was a slut's slut.

Now he was worried he needed a condom for his own sake – which Amy found very funny.

She giggled. “Joke’s on you, Benny. You can’t rape the willing.” That was *really* funny to her in that moment.

His eyes flew wide open. “My name’s not... Whoa wait, did you say–!”

Nothing like the feeling of a tight, wet, warm, snug, smooth, silky pussy to shut a guy up. Apparently. She’d only ever initiated with Ben when he’d made it clear he wanted her to. As Amy’s head rolled back in, at last, a taste of true pleasure, this lesson was burned into her brain.

Then she blacked out. She didn’t know if he finished in her or not, but he definitely took her panties as a trophy, so probably. Once she woke up, Amy went to the clinic the next day and got the morning after pill just to be sure. The lady at the counter was so nice. She never judged, never said more than she needed to and always politely.

Aunt Julia was passed out on the sofa when Amy got home. She slept past unnoticed, slapped herself in the face for being such a stupid weak stupid stupid slut, and told herself that Ben might have won that round, but she would *not* throw her future away and let him win the fight.

With the aid of enough caffeine to give a gorilla a heart attack, and perhaps further assistance of some tearful pleading to her teachers, Amy snagged two out of those three needed A’s. Learning a semester’s worth of calculus in a weekend turned out to be more than she was up for. 86%, a solid and worthless B. Amy laughed to see it, peering down the neckline of her shirt at her worthless A’s.

Mr. Glasco, however, proved persuadable by this new lesson of hers. Not the most conventional way to get an A, but at least Ben hadn’t been able to keep her from Lakeview after all.

At least she didn’t keep on with the drinking after that. Alcohol was full of crap nutrients. A single shot could have upwards of a hundred calories, which the anorexic in her was not having. (Anorexia was something the doctor at the clinic diagnosed on one of her myriad morning-after check-ins. She promised to scale it back, at least enough to make sure her hair stopped falling out. Not much of it had, though. Amy was still fucking hot – not that the doctor gave the anorexia due credit for *that* side effect.)

The slut thing? Well, it was a hobby at first. She still lived at home and took the city bus, but most students lived on or near campus. Dorm rooms were easy to come by. As she started classes at Lakeview – assiduously avoiding Greek row, obviously – she started making friends again. The only sort of friend she had any room for that is. The pills made it hard to always remember who was who, but if a strange number texted her

🍆, Amy answered the eggplant with a prompt 🍊. The only one complaining was Aunt Julia, who of course didn't know why she kept such late hours or whose texts she was always jumping to answer, but knew it was atypical.

"A boy," she'd say.

"Must be some boy," Aunt Julia would mutter as Amy hustled into her room to freshen up. The sex was better when she blew their minds. For them, at least. Amy didn't care how it felt for her. Sometimes she came. Sometimes. But knowing she was giving herself to someone not Ben was the ultimate aphrodisiac. *Look at this pussy I'm giving away, Benny boy, a pussy you only ever took. I never gave.* He'd be so devastated, she told herself while she rocked yet another world.

Diminishing returns were a problem. Oh well. Not like a college campus was shy of guys who'd want to fuck a babe like her with minimal questions asked.

As it so happened, the solution to that problem coincided with the solution to her other. It wasn't academics this time. She was doing fine in school. Almost straight A's, actually. Amy even had a couple professors she really liked. Unlike that slag Skyler, she set her major going into semester break as a freshman – psychology. Maybe it would help her make sense out of all those broken pieces drifting around in the limbo of her brain.

Still, school was also expensive. Amy had no savings, and she knew damn well Aunt Julia didn't have the money to help out. If she even still wanted to, considering how awful Amy had been to her the whole past year. The expenses never seemed to end. A computer. Activity fees. Lab fees. Athletics fees, as apparently athletics weren't an activity. A bus pass. The e-books – holy *god*, the e-books. And of course at the end of it all was the tuition fee with its insurmountable legion of O's. Her scholarship covered a lot, but not everything, and she still needed to eat and whatnot.

She needed a job.

"¿Qué es eso?" asked Aunt Julia, stumbling out of her bedroom to switch on the coffee pot.

Amy was lying on the sofa, scarred feet waving in the air (in socks, obviously), laptop propped up in front of her. "Job hunting, Tía."

"Yeah? I thought you were a professional student. You always complaining you got no time left over from all your classes and studies and everything."

Her aunt wasn't wrong except by omission of all the partying and fucking she was doing, and all the nights where she went into her room and downed some pills and passed out for half a day. "I know. I'm looking for something where I can work from home."

Aunt Julia rounded the corner, peeling a banana. "Oh? You find something good, you let me know. Fucking buses in this city, *son una mierda.*"

"Bleh. They all need a degree, or like ten years experience or some shit."

“You could start one of those Lonely Fans, you know? You a serious cutie.” Aunt Julia laughed before Amy could retort. “But seriously, put on a blanket or something before your pervert brother wakes up and sees your little booty in those boxers, chica. You gonna make him *blanquear sus bombachos*, and that’s more laundry for me.”

“Gross!” Amy giggled.

The smell of coffee began to fill the apartment. Aunt Julia took a bite, talking casually around the mushy mouthful. “But seriously, you oughta get into waitressing. You don’t even gotta do the Hooters. Looking like that, you could be raking in the tips, *serio*.”

So she found a little Lakeview sports bar, Mother Bear’s, and walked in for an application. They hired her on the spot, and the manager didn’t do much of a job of hiding that it was for exactly the reason her aunt suggested. It was convenient, easy walking distance from campus, and most of the staff were students so the place was used to being flexible about classes. The money was pretty decent. Her spreadsheet said she’d need to get more hours to keep up, though, so Amy sucked it up, stopped eating out, and cut back on the drugs.

In only a few short weeks, Amy started feeling better. She was eating more thanks to the chefs at Mother Bear’s, and her system was crawling out of the shallow grave she’d been keeping it in. Even the random hookups scaled back just because of time constraints, and not feeling particularly sexy reeking of wing sauce.

“Hi, welcome to... fuck.” Amy’s blood froze. As she walked up to the table, the guy sitting there had his back to her, and she hadn’t been paying close attention. Only when she arrived at the tableside did he turn, and there he was.

“Hey, Ames.”

Run. Run. Run. You’ll have a head start. Run. He’s here to kill you. He’s finishing the job. Run. Why the fuck won’t you run. Why won’t your muscles move? He’s RIGHT. THERE. FUCKING RUN. RUN. RUN OR DIE. RUN OR DIE.

“Um, hello...?” Skyler snapped her fingers as Amy seemed to zone out. “Oh my god, Benny, she’s like losing her mind right now. Relax, I’m not mad any more. Water under the bridge. Gosh, how long has it been?”

Ben – *Benny? Oh fuck. He’s BEN not Benny BEN. He was going to beat the shit out of her* – smiled at her. “A long time.”

She couldn’t talk. Inwardly, she knew it was a panic attack. She’d read about these in class, and had experienced them plenty of times when she’d still been with Ben. Or Benny. *Please don’t kill me. I’ll call you whatever you want.*

“Um, hello...? Ooookay, can we just order then, or...?” Skyler wrinkled her nose. “She’s gonna spit in our food, Benny. We should go.”

"HE DOESN'T LIKE IT WHEN YOU CALL HIM BENNY!" Amy shrieked. She hadn't really meant to say it out loud, she thought, or maybe she had. Skyler had deserved a warning. Not giving her one had cost Amy a lot of sleep and a lot of tears.

The whole restaurant was watching now. Thank god. He couldn't kill her with everyone watching. Couldn't kill Skyler either.

"Whoa," said Skyler, gaping.

"Amy, hey. Are you OK?" asked Ben, frowning.

Her heart thundered. She couldn't speak. If she tried, she'd scream. She was sure of it.

Only Ben had seen her act like this before. The time Jonah scratched Ben's car with his bike handle. When they were having a nice night out and she forgot herself and told a story about her previous boyfriend. The time Ben couldn't get it up and the harder she tried the limper he got, until he forced his flaccid dick into her mouth and told her if she tried to breathe before she stopped teasing him he'd choke her in a much less pleasant manner. Which she couldn't. Which he did.

He spoke in a calm voice. The voice people were used to hearing him speak in. "You look good, Amy. Really. Put a little meat on your bones like I always said you should."

Her jaw chattered. She meant to speak, to agree – *Agree before he chokes you, before he squeezes until you die on the shitty floor of this shitty bar, why didn't I fucking mop when it was slow earlier, it's disgusting, I'm going to die on this disgusting floor* – but she couldn't.

Ben went on. She knew him. He couldn't have everyone know she was afraid of him. "Have you been working here long? I don't think I've seen you. I mean, of course I would have seen you." Skyler glared at him, then much more intensely at her. He ignored her.

Run Skyler, fucking RUN

"We come in here pretty regularly, so I guess I'm just surprised to see you. I guess it's been a couple weeks?"

"We were in here Saturday, baby."

She saw that twitch, that twitch that meant someone would pay for this later. *WHY WAS NOBODY RUNNING OR AT LEAST SCREAMING WAS THE WHOLE WORLD INSANE.* She started to wonder if her heart could actually stop on its own.

"Yeah, I guess we were, but with a bunch of the guys. I meant just the two of us. But yeah, nice to see you again. I guess we'll be seeing more of you, then. But yeah, hey, just a couple Fat Tires for now, OK?"

Somehow, Amy found the will to force a smile. "Coming right up."

She didn't run. She walked. Walked *fast*. Right into the manager's office, where she quit and promptly ran out the back door of the restaurant, sprinting down the alley

and around a corner and down some sidewalks and through a park until she was in an unfamiliar neighborhood, panting and sobbing in someone's front yard.

Her shirt was gone? Right, she'd quit, thrown it at her former boss along with her apron in case he tried to make her come back to return it. Or something like that. She hadn't really been reasoning at that point.

So... Right. Ben ate, sometimes. So restaurant work was out of the question.

She started her first shift waitressing at Jumping Jack's three days later. No top to return if she had to panic-quit again, just a little elastic band they called a halter top that even on Amy's modest bust was too immodest by far. She learned to giggle at bad jokes and awkward compliments while she sat on laps and poured shots down customers' throats. The money was significantly better than she'd made during her weeks at Mother Bear's, with fewer responsibilities and in fewer hours. She could easily get more whenever she wanted. The manager, Jack, was perfectly happy to pay \$2.13 an hour for one of his hottest employees to float around smiling and flirting and keeping the drink orders coming.

Six weeks later she moved to the stage. Those girls made *way* more money than her, and while Amy might not have the boobs of a stripper, the mountain of garbage floating atop the ocean of her soul held more than enough of the right stuff to excel. Objectification and sexualization were familiar friends. She did some research and ordered a g-string from Amazon that featured these stretchy interior pockets for maximum cash space, almost as an inside joke with herself for how much she intended to earn. She made sure Aunt Julia didn't intercept the package in their mailbox. That was the only real threat to her at this job.

There, dancing almost-but-not-quite-completely naked on a grimy stage in a grimy shithole like Jumping Jack's, she felt safe. Like his parents, Ben was afflicted with a crippling case of smug superiority. She'd mistaken it for "class," as people often did, but she remembered those significant looks his parents had shared when they'd found out he was dating a high school girl. A Puerto Rican. A poor. Amy spoke without an accent, though, and she was white, and she was going to college (with that fancy shmancy academic scholarship), and she was *very* pretty. She'd checked enough boxes to earn their approval despite the marks against her, and provided Ben the benignly neglectful approval that was the hallmark of their parenting.

But they'd raised him well enough that he'd never *ever* set foot in a grubby, seedy, nasty little strip club like Jumping Jack's. College kids seldom did. Amy had known Jumping Jack's by reputation as a running gag from high school. It was somewhere girls joked that they'd work at if college, trade school, the military, and peddling meth all failed.

Even through the fog of drugs numbing her mind to what she was doing – she was back on those again, bigtime, thanks Lukas – she would never forget that first night dancing.

The stage lights came up. Some thumping soundtrack to some generic song with a dance-worthy tempo and heavy bass started. Some guy old enough to be her father in the front row saw Amy's soft round ass doused with glitter and couldn't stop himself from letting out a very audible "Damn, baby!"

He could actually be her father, she supposed. She had no idea who he was, not a name or a face or anything.

Amy's pussy started to sizzle by pure reflex, and her ass began to shake by design. She'd paid some of the dancers for a little tutoring – in pills, their preferred currency – and picked up some basic moves. Learned others from the porn-adjacent corners of youtube. Bit by bit, Amy's skimpy, sparkling, skanky clothes – "clothes" – melted off of her body. She felt nothing. The older strippers there at Jack's had taken years to become as disaffected as Amy was on her opening night. It was only a body after all. A fragile, weak, sexy body, a means of making money no more precious to her than a wrench was to a plumber.

The tune – "tune" – was familiar from waitressing. As it drew close to the end, a naked, glistening Amy crawled toward the spellbound churl, tiny tits not so much dangling beneath her as simply pointing at the stage with its chipped, fading wax job in token recognition of the law of gravity. She stopped in front of him, on her knees, thighs spread wide, hips gyrating, her pelvis thrusting toward his face, toward the wad of money clenched in his fist.

"Hi, Daddy," she purred. She was the youngest girl working there, and she looked it. Fucking pigtailed, for fuck's sake. That could be her whole vibe, she decided as he licked his lips, transfixed by the shimmying of her ass cheeks in his face. The helpless little schoolgirl who needed a firm hand to control her.

It was, after all, a role she knew well. It felt almost like that was the real Amy, and this weird nerd who wanted to go to classes and have a future was the roleplay.

Amy guided his hand and the \$20 bill he'd offered into her g-string, into what she would soon begin to call her hot pocket. It came out damp and empty. Amy moaned. A few more of those would pay off her calculus book – no sucking off the professor, this time. Unless she felt like it, which, she supposed, she might. What was the fucking difference. This was simply another currency, a good to be exchanged. And it was *very* good.

Amy climbed down into his lap and humped his middle-aged dick through his jeans. "Do you think you could raise my allowance, Daddy?"

The man's cock twitched. She literally felt it twitch at her through three layers of fabric (although one of them was the translucently thin fabric of her g-string). "You

gotta finish your chores first, baby girl,” he said with a leer, hands clenched to keep from pawing this little tease. Or choking her. Whatever. A man wants what he wants.

Amy wasn't afraid. For one, there was Seiji, the little Japanese bouncer who looked scarcely bigger than Amy but had muscles like steel cables. He didn't speak much English, but he had an unhealthy dose of little man syndrome and was happy for any occasion to try out his black belt (black belts? the girls weren't sure) on some handsy dickwad.

For two, Amy just didn't care what they did to her. It was just a job. A means to an end. And god, did she spend a lot of time fantasizing about ends.

Amy grinded on his lap, smiling the worshipful smile she'd learned for Ben, deferential and needy and adoring. That scored her another bill. It was too dark off-stage to see the denomination, but she told herself this was a learning opportunity, so if she was getting singles to take a guy's finger in her mouth and fellate the whiskey-soaked thing, she'd at least learn not to try this again.

The DJ restarted the same shitty track since she wasn't done yet. Hump by hump, suck by suck, she parted the guy with his money. She was surprised when he lifted a fifty between her eyes. (Amy had seen enough Asian porn with Ben to recognize an opportunity to go full *ahogao* with it floating at the end of her nose.)

“If you can pull it out of my hand with those skeeter bites, it's yours, baby girl.”

God, it hurt. God it fucking hurt. Her tits were not built for gripping a cock, much less something 2-dimensional. So he grunted, and she whined, and finally the fellow let her have it. It fell out of her cleavage – “cleavage” – the moment he let go, but Amy just shoved it into her hot pocket and kissed him on the cheek.

“Thanks, Daddy,” she cooed. “I love you.”

With that, she relinquished the limelight. Usually girls just sort of hung out on the stage, idly shook her bits until they got bored or tired or sober. It was her first time, though, and she was *damn* hot, so Jack had made it a little event. The DJ switched on the mic. “Damn – looks like we got a new star at Jumpin Jack's, eh? Give a big round to Maritza!”

Muh-REET-suhhhhh, he said it.

Her mother's name. Jack had asked her for a stage name and it was the first one she thought of. Why the fuck not – not like she wasn't shaming the shit out of her a dozen other ways. And it was sort of weirdly nice, a little, to hear it said.

Two months later, Jack gave her the go-ahead to work the back room one night a week. His business wasn't exactly a Chick-Fil-A, thronged with needy customers, so there were only so many cocks to be satisfied. The girls were contentious over it, so that was as much as he could give her. He almost took it back when she asked if it could be a different night instead. It was Aunt Julia's birthday. They were supposed to go out to dinner and she had this whole weird axe-throwing thing she was into that actually

sounded pretty fun. Oh, well. Her aunt was getting too suspicious and intrusive about where Julia's sudden influx of cash was coming from anyway.

"Oh come on, now, sweetheart. What's a pretty little thing like you crying for? I'm not so ugly, am I?" The man laughed. He really wasn't. He was actually sort of good-looking, at least compared to the usual clientele of Jumping Jack's. Which made her wonder what was so rotten in his heart that he'd paid Jack \$200 for first rights on a private dance from the hot new backroom girl. Amy would get her 75% share once she was done, which also made her wonder what travesties had befallen dancers – "dancers" – past that he'd seen the need to hold onto the money for them.

Amy sniffled. "I'm sorry. It's not you. It's... It's my aunt's birthday, but I'm here, and she doesn't even know, and..." She collapsed onto the strange man's shoulder, sobbing.

"Oh. Oh shit. Um."

But Amy's pelvis was working by instinct, grinding her little cunt on his crotch like she was supposed to. She cried through the whole song. Every time she came close to getting her shit together, her vision began to clear and she saw herself in one of the mirrors in the little booth. Two-way, the other girls said, so Jack could watch if he wanted – though they assured her he hardly did that any more. They thought this was reassuring. Amy didn't care what he was looking at. What *she* was looking at was a nineteen-year-old orphan who was burning through her genetic gift with her shitty, scummy lifestyle to distract her from her masochistic ex and the worthlessness which she only understood as wrong in an intellectual never emotional sense, humping a stranger for money she was splitting with a guy who was little more than a pimp for broken souls, while the only people left in the world who would give a shit if and when she died got older together without her.

"Do you want to fuck me?" she asked, wiping her dribbling tears and snot on her arm.

"I, um, I think I might need to hit the ATM first...? But–"

She shook her head. "Not for money. Just for fun."

The man cocked his head back. "Seriously?" It was his turn to ponder what festered inside of this pitiful, frail thing.

Amy nodded. "Yeah."

She was broadcasting *damaged goods* in visible, audible and palpable spectra. "Um, no thanks. I, um... You take care, Ms. Maritza." As he left the booth, he turned back to her and fished his last \$10 out of his wallet. "I know it's not much of a tip, but, you know, maybe you can get your aunt, I don't know, a card or something."

Amy didn't cry for the next one, and he fucked her without batting an eye. She made \$485 that night, after Jack took his cut. It wouldn't happen often, he told her – correctly – but he turned a blind eye to her indiscretions so long as she never charged

for sex. So Amy wasn't a prostitute, technically, just a bottom-feeding low-life sex worker piece of shit slut.

Money was no longer a problem, at least. She saved up enough to pay down her school with enough left over to get her tits done the day after her last final exam that May. 2.9 GPA for her freshman year. Disappointing, but not bad considering how many nights Amy lie in bed pep talking herself out of killing herself.

The same old rationales eroded with repetition. She couldn't do that to Aunt Julia; that was usually her most effective argument. Her shithead brother would probably be glad she was gone, if he even noticed. He'd gotten his first arrest recently, but it was a non-violent offense, spray-painting tags on some cargo trains like he was Banksy the gang banger and not just some moody, pissed off loser. He was still 17 by a few months, lucky for him, so he got off with community service.

At least it kept Aunt Julia's energy focused on him and out of her business.

Thud thud thud. "Amy. Open the door."

Or so she'd thought.

"I'm in the middle of something," she said. That something was some serious misery, wallowing in it harder than usual. Her new tits were still new enough that the bandages hadn't come off. B cups only, cute and ultra-perky and perfectly round, nothing flashy but hot and slutty as fuck and undeniably an excellent business investment. Amy was splitting her attention between this, her latest assault on her body, and the picture frame she held in both hands.

Amy had kept on her nightstand since the day they'd moved here. It was a single photo, her mother holding a three-year-old Amy over her head at a carnival somewhere. The toddler she hardly internalized as herself was squealing in shock and delight, frog-eyed and stupid and precious, the way happy toddlers looked. Her mother's face was turned away from the camera, but the wind had her hair. It looked so perfect that Amy would have thought it were photoshopped if not for the even littler kid photo-bombing it at the side of the frame with his finger hovering an inch out of his nose. Reality was always there ready to assert itself with its grotesqueries.

THUD. THUD. THUD. "AMY."

"I said, I'm busy."

BANG. "Abre la maldita puerta antes de que la abra de una patada!"

Amy doubted her aunt was strong enough to make good on her threat, but it turned out she didn't need to be. It was unlocked. God, she'd gotten sloppy. Locking it before she cut had become second nature, but today she'd contented herself with gently scratching at the surgical incision sites through her bandages.

There was Aunt Julia, myriad expressions warring for supremacy on her face. Anger, at whatever had driven her to pound on the door in the first place.

Embarrassment to find her niece topless. Shock to find that her toplessness had more to reveal than it had a couple days ago. Mortification on top of the shock.

“What the *fuck?!*” her aunt groaned in dismay. Dismay won out, evidently.

Amy wanted to throw her sheets over her chest, but she didn’t dare make any sudden moves or violent gestures. Her brain wasn’t working fast enough to separate photo from frame, and the prospect of breaking it was far more alarming than having her aunt see her stupid new tits.

So instead, she acted like it fazed her not at all. “Uh, excuse you,” she said snottily. She’d be twenty soon, if she lived that long, in which case she figured she ought to pump out all the teenage sass she had left in her before then.

“What did you do? What the fuck did you do?! What did you fucking do to yourself, *sobrina?*”

“What, these?” Like she had body parts surgically modified all the time. “They’re called tits, Tía.”

“What... You... They’re...” Her aunt shook her head, clearing cobwebs from her capacity to show anger at her usually quiet, reclusive ward. “Don’t you fucking *dare* ‘what, these’ me, Amy! Why would you do that to yourself? *How...* No, never fucking mind the how. Tell me why. Tell me why before I slap those fucking things the fuck off your chest!”

“It’s called an investment...?” said Amy as if her aunt were being deliberately obtuse. They were, she supposed, though that had little to do with why she’d gone through with it. It would shut up the girls at Jumping Jack’s, yeah, shut up the echoes of Ben and a dozen other men that always started up after the girls said something.

Why? It was a ball of yarn full of tangles, knots and barbed wire, and Amy didn’t know how to unravel it. To mutilate herself out of spite. To become a woman, finally. To become something other than the Amy who’d been Ben’s. To rip the asterisk off of hot girl*. To look outwardly like the slut she felt like inwardly. The slut she *was*. To hurt. To shut up the greedy fuckers who came in and got to have a babe like her make them come in their pants but still felt like they were entitled to tease her about her cup size. To take money away from the pointless waste of effort that was college, “bettering herself.” To make her life that little bit extra worse so she’d maybe have the guts or the shame to do something about it.

Most pressingly, to start this argument, so her aunt would understand she should hate Amy like she hated herself. She couldn’t articulate it, not even in feelings much less words, but there was a way in which hate and indifference had become easy to process and love only meant guilt and shame and reasons to live, which had somehow become a negative.

From the livid look on Aunt Julia’s face, it was working. “Investment? In what? Stripping?”

“Yeah, actually.” Amy shrugged, tits bouncing, achingly. “Where do you think all my new clothes, the new car came from? Tips for slinging mozzarella sticks and shitty beer?”

“When did this start? Never mind, because I tell you when it ends, and that’s right the fuck now.”

Amy stood, very carefully setting the picture face down on her bed. Her mother shouldn’t have to see this. Junkie instincts for when she was too stoned to process rationally immediately kicked in, reminding her she’d put Precious Thing on Soft Thing, so Be Careful next time she Soft Things.

“Or what?”

“Or what? There’s no ‘or,’ *niñita*. There’s you quitting that shit, to-fucking-day, and then you and me going to the hospital and getting that shit sucked back out of your *tetas* so you look like my Amy again! *That’s* what!”

“It’s my body. I can do whatever I want with it.”

“The fuck you can! *Eres mi sangre, y no te lo permitiré!*”

Amy sneered. “Good luck with that. I’m nineteen, not six. And you’re not my mother.”

The blow landed, a haymaker to the heart. “No. I’m not your mother. But I’m the closest fucking thing you got to it, and if you wanna live under my roof, then *no deshonrarás el alma de mi hermana!*”

“Fine. If that’s what you want, then I’m gone.” She knew damn well it wasn’t what Aunt Julia wanted, but accusing her of wanting it would hurt her more. It drove the wedge deeper, split the gap wider. Aunt Julia would be so much happier without Amy around anyway, and the more she could make her hate her the more relieved she’d be that her fucked up fuck-up of a niece was gone. It was kindness, in a way.

Three hours later, Amy finished stuffing her possessions into her car. Her aunt watched the whole time and helped not at all. Aunt Julia stopped her at the door on her first trip, jamming the wall hanging she’d made on her first date with Ben into an open box. “You gonna need this.”

Amy studied it for a moment. Had that really been there all this time? Going on two years now. “Yeah, I guess I will.” She flipped it upside down.

Jonah woke up sometime in the middle of it, scowled at the fuss and stormed out, slamming the door behind him and right in Amy’s face as she was lugging an armload of laundry. She yelled goodbye after him, but he only flipped her off and drove away on that noisy moped. She got it. At least his mom hadn’t had a choice about abandoning him.

Amy lived in her car for a couple days before one of the other girls at Jumping Jack’s saw the mountain of junk in her back seat and trunk and offered Amy a space on her flea-infested futon for a modest rent. Amy accepted. She started working three days

before her doctor said she should, if only to have something to do other than sit around cutting and listening to angry sad music and flirting with an OD on pain meds all day.

The summer passed that way. She'd almost forgotten she was enrolled at Lakeview until she got the bill for it, and an email from some university bureaucrat asking if she had any update on her contact information after receiving multiple bills returned to sender.

My bitch aunt kicked me out of her apartment, she replied candidly. Are sophomores allowed to live in the dorms?

She received an email – *Re: Fwd: Re: Update your address* – from someone named Bob, whose email signature identified him as Lakeview University's Director of the Office of Housing and Residence Life. Fucking mouthful.

Your sophomore status does not impede enrollment in campus housing. However, the enrollment period ended in July. Don't worry, though. I'm looking through what few openings we have left, and I think I've found something for you in Higgins Hall. It's a thematic coed community, so it does come with an added community fee, but if that's an impediment you let me know and I'll see if we can't get that waived. I'll hold it until I receive confirmation that you're interested. I'm sorry to hear about your aunt, but we'll make sure you have a place to stay. For more information on rates, check out our site (linked at the bottom).

Let me know how we can help.

– Bob

Winning at the fee and glad she only had the two tits to expand, Amy accepted. He waived the fee, at least. Higgins Hall, huh. A year at Lakeview, and it was one of the few dorms where she'd never fucked somebody. Girls dorm. Well, she'd be a hit with the guys on the floor for sure, she thought with a laugh.

Higgins Hall. At least for the first time in months, she'd have a home. ("Home.")

Her first day scored Amy a new friend.

"Whoa, bad ass!" said a girl from behind her.

Amy had thought the door was closed. Not that it needed to be shut tight; the thing creaked so loud it'd wake the dead. She'd hauled around half of her stuff up those wretched four flights of stairs and was taking a break to unload boxes. The Higgins parking lot was flooded with students and their families moving in. Amy had a family, but she hadn't spoken to them since leaving. She'd actually had been staring at that wall hanging, wishing it out of existence to no avail, when the voice startled her.

There was a person. A hot one. She looked as hot and sweaty as Amy. She was looking at where Amy's knife – her newest, a wicked looking thing she'd found online, a

curved black handle made out of animal horn and a carbon steel blade that was razor sharp and then some – sat on her bed. It had been on the top of her first box.

“Oh, shit. I’m, um, that’s just for cutting packing tape. I’m not keeping it in here,” Amy said quickly. She hadn’t read up on the rules, but she doubted a blade that looked more at home in a Jumanji movie than her dorm room was permitted.

The girl snorted. “Pff, I don’t care. I mean, you’re not going to kill anybody, right?”

Amy decided immediately that she liked this girl’s energy. “Not today,” she said, walking over and extending a hand. “Amy.”

The other girl shook it firmly. “Quinn. I’m across the hall in 302 with the valedictorian.”

“Valedictorian of what?”

“I have no idea, but she included it in her introduction so it must be a core part of her identity. I haven’t seen any signs of a secret service detail yet, so maybe she’s full of it.”

“If your room’s the same size as mine, I hope those guys sleep in the closet or you’re boned.”

Quinn laughed. “Depending on the agent, I could make space, ya know wha O’m sayin’?”

Amy laughed, too. Holy shit, when was the last time she laughed? Other than part of some bullshit flirtation for tips? Strangely, guys tipped better for happy laughing girls than weepy messes. Though those guys still tipped.

“Speaking of, did you see our RA downstairs?” the girl went on.

Amy shook her head. “What’s an RA?” Later on she could be embarrassed that she’d spent a whole year as a college student and talked to so few people that she’d never picked up such a basic acronym.

“I don’t know exactly, but I think it’s like the floor boss or something like that. Here, let me…” Quinn made for the window. Amy had shoved her bed up against it. She liked waking up with the sun on her face. Weird, she supposed, but far from the most fucked up thing about her. The knife bounced with the girl’s movements, but she didn’t seem to care. Amy hastily snatched it and shoved it in a drawer before somebody less chill saw it. That thing was no mere decoration.

Quinn pointed, and Amy followed her finger. They were four stories up, so she couldn’t see him well, but now that he’d been pointed out she thought she remembered seeing him. He was the guy who’d said something about how the third floor was really the fifth floor when she was on her way up with her first load. He had been cute, she supposed, though the top of his head from a hundred feet off didn’t do much for him.

“I had my hands full. So we have a guy RA?”

“Yep. I guess the coed floor is run by the enemy.”

Amy grinned. “Don’t tell anybody, but I’m actually a mole. I’ve been in bed with the renegade forces for some time now. They don’t have any clue I’m hostile.”

“Well you look fucking dangerous to me, Amy...”

“Molina.”

Like that, the girl had her phone out. “Why am I not finding... M-o-l-i-n-a...?”

Amy understood her. “I’m not on social media.” She’d deleted her accounts after Ben. She never wanted him to be able to find her or see her or know anything about her, ever. Ever.

“Oh. Look at you, too cool for shit. We are going to run this joint, you and me. But do you mind if...?”

Unprompted, Quinn put an arm around Amy’s shoulders and took a pic for her feed, captioning it “boss bitches.” She told herself it was uptight to worry that Ben followed this particular random freshman, and gave her blessing to post it. They looked pretty hot together. And happy, even if Amy had barely had time to flash a smile before Quinn snapped the pic. By the time her new friend helped her move the rest of her stuff up, half the floor had liked it; Quinn had been friending people as she met them, which made it feel all the nicer that she’d singled Amy out to hang with.

How long had it been since somebody was just... nice to her? Maybe the dorms wouldn’t be so bad after all.

“I need to borrow your knife,” Quinn demanded the following afternoon. The door groaned and un-groaned as she let herself in.

“Make yourself at home, why don’t you,” grumbled Amy only semi-seriously, setting down her phone. She hadn’t been doing anything important, just shopping online for some essentials she’d forgotten to buy. The idea of making a trip to Target, where the prospect of bumping into Ben or his mother or someone who might recognize her and tell Ben or his mother, who might tell Ben, filled Amy with terror. It was old terror, though, deeply etched. Compared to that, Quinn’s dark request and matching expression were a nervous curiosity at worst. In the meantime, she could wait a couple days for Amazon to deliver toothpaste and some shower shoes.

“I’m gonna cut her. I am gonna fucking cut that bitch.” Quinn was pacing. She looked like she’d already been pacing, carried across the hall into Amy’s room by sheer momentum.

“Use your words, Quinn. Cut which bitch. Remember, there’s like twice the bitches we were promised.”

This goddamn floor. All girls? Amy had been looking forward to not having to go up or down stairs for a quickie. There was the RA, she supposed, but she very much

didn't trust him. For one, Aunt Julia had raised her right with a healthy distrust of authority figures. Plus, Amy thought this guy had that same darkness behind bright eyes that Ben had. She was probably projecting, but so what? She didn't owe anybody a fair shake. She sure as shit hadn't gotten one. This Spencer dude had been trying so fucking hard to be nice to everybody that it made her nervous. Nobody was that nice without an ulterior motive.

She hadn't had a panic attack since that night a few months ago when one of the other dancers yelled "hey Jen" but with the music and the trauma she misheard. At least the customers hadn't seen it. She didn't need more causes for anxiety.

"Leigh," growled Quinn.

"Which one's Leigh...?"

"The blonde Barbie doll."

"Which narrows it to like 8 girls on this floor."

"You know which one I mean. The one who's like six feet tall with the quintuple D's, with the little toady freckled bitch with the octuple D's following her around, fucking *smirking* at me. Fuck, I'm gonna need *two* knives."

"You've made the rounds here way faster than me," said Amy, who had no intention of making the rounds. She and Quinn had been up half the night talking and – she could still hardly believe it – giggling. Quinn was more than enough drama for her. Hooking up with the RA on the first day? No *way* that guy's cum hit the ceiling. No fucking way. Amy – Maritza Amy – had seen a lot of guys coming really hard, but her best was maybe a couple feet. Quinn had to be exaggerating, though she swore she wasn't.

And what kind of pent-up pussy shot off like that just from a finger up the ass?

Amy moved on to the core issue. "What did they do? Besides smirk. Unless smirking is a knifeable offense?"

"I told her. I fucking *told* her I was into him. I didn't get all detailed about what we did, but I took her aside, real chill, and told her we'd had some fun, back off, quit shaking your big fat fucking ass at him."

"You're not saying he already hooked up with *another* girl on the floor? Jesus." And people said *Amy* was a slut. Not people around here, but the other strippers.

"What? No! Not for lack of that fucking ho trying, though! I was just taking a shit and I could hear her in the shower, giggling about how she's gonna snatch him up – and he was in there in the next goddamn stall! She's practically *begging* for it! As we fucking speak."

"Did she know he was there? Wait, how did *you* know he was in there?"

"Unless you think one of these bougie bitches is using Old Spice body wash," said Quinn with a roll of her eyes. "Smells like a sexy grandpa. God, I want to taste him. Last night was... God. *God*." Her eyes squeezed shut. "How is it that *I'm* the one who put a

finger in *him*, but somehow it's me that's losing my shit over him? I can't stop thinking about him, I swear."

Amy planted her hands on Quinn's shoulders, halting her pacing. "Hey. You want him, you take him. She's Barbie? You're a fucking Bratz doll. You're a million degrees hot. So just go down there and—"

"Fuck yeah! Fuck yeah! Who needs a goddamn knife when you got deez guns, yeah?!" Quinn flexed. She wasn't weak, Amy noted. The girl worked out.

Amy had been going to tell her to simply go down there and tell Leigh to back off, but she was out the door. "Take no prisoners," she called behind her with a laugh.

With her room way down at the end of the hall, Amy didn't hear the fight until it was over. Truthfully, she didn't miss it. The only reason she even saw the stupid video of it was because Quinn begged her to download a copy. It was... interesting? Sort of? Miles down the list of anything she'd ever fantasized about in terms of cock utility, but it was new, Amy supposed. Neato.

She overheard girls in the halls – and in the bathroom, in the stairwells, at the food court, fucking everywhere it seemed – raving about the guy, heroically defending Princess Leigha with his lightsaber dick. It didn't spark anything for her, though. Why the fuck was he still there? He'd done that thing with Quinn, yes, but he was also a dude on a girls floor. He'd shown the whole floor his cock. He was only there because Bobby the Housing Dictator or one of his goons fucked up.

So why hadn't the head dorm lady fired him? It didn't sit right with her. To Amy's mind, the phenomenon of a man getting special treatment from women for no reason was a short walk to dark places.

Quinn was quickly banished, and she supposed she could see why, even if it sucked. She'd helped Amy move in, so Amy repaid the favor by helping her move out. Then Amy channeled her energy into helping Quinn find an apartment. If only she and Aunt Julia were talking, she probably could have let this girl crash there for a bit while she figured shit out. The bus ride to campus was annoying, but free housing was free housing. Instead, Amy found one of those pull-tab ads hanging on a message board in the union advertising what was clearly way too good of an offer. It turned out to be a little place off-campus with six roommates. Quinn's bedroom was a closet just big enough to fit a futon. The rent wasn't cheap, either, walking distance from the stadium.

The first night of classes, the two found themselves lying together in the claustrophobic space after installing shelving units on the closet walls. There was no AC in there, obviously, so Amy grubhubbed ice cream sundaes. She'd sweat the calories off in there anyways. They talked, and in that shitty place for the shitty events that had brought them there, Amy let Quinn vent about how magnanimous Leigh had been in informing her she wouldn't press charges (but really because she didn't want that video being entered into evidence).

That segued into more venting, and more urgent, about how Quinn was broke, and jobless, and afraid. She'd gotten hired by the campus IT office after applying over the summer and had been excited to get a job doing tech support for the Higgins computer lab. Quinn's first job, actually – or it would have been. That very morning her training was supposed to have started, but the job which was obviously no longer available to her. Amy didn't say much, just let her talk, and basked in the opportunity to think about anyone else's problems but hers.

Quinn eventually got self-conscious about how pitiful she sounded and dropped it, then treating Amy to re-tellings about the dreams she was still having about Spencer. Nobody liked hearing people blather on about their dreams, usually, but these came with graphic and salacious details. Excellent stories. Amy wasn't gay or anything, but if Quinn made a move...? She never did though.

It was getting late. They weren't tired though, at least not of their conversation, so Amy reciprocated by opening up about herself. About why she'd stayed in the car while Quinn went into Target to pick out this futon. About Ben. About why she really had that knife.

Quinn listened, and didn't judge, and offered to break into Kappa Nu and find wherever Ben showered and beat his ass next. "No superhero RA to save that fucker's ass," she said, laughing, but tinged with commiseration.

One of Quinn's new roommates – Lurch, they dubbed him, both Addams Family fans – came and shut the door to keep their talking from interrupting her sleep on the living room couch. They shifted to a whisper, but giggled that it was a little too sexy for two nominally straight girls.

Amy yawned, and Quinn feigned that she was grossed out by her breath. It was hot fudge. Amy couldn't remember the last time she'd had chocolate.

"Sorry. Fuck, I'm tired," Amy said, yawning again. The girls were getting hoarse from talking so much, hours and hours into a night that was becoming morning.

"Are you OK to drive?"

Amy considered. Then she reconsidered. "Would you mind horribly if I crashed here?"

Quinn flashed that charming, sexy, one-sided grin of hers. How Spencer had ever let her go, Amy couldn't guess. What a fucking idiot. "Well I don't want to be the first person ever to kick you out of bed."

Amy grinned back. "It's a futon, not a bed, so you'd leave the distinction open."

"Right. Oh and shit – and of course you can stay, Lurch can't rape us both." Her eyes shot wide in mortification. "Oh fuck, I didn't mean to joke about that. I'm–"

Amy put a finger to the girl's lips. "You're fine. You were saying... something?" She smiled.

“Right. Let me know how much I owe you for the futon. I, um, don’t know if I can scare it up super soon, but I’ll get you back ASAP. I promise.”

“Take as long as you need.”

Quinn sighed with relief. Amy knew that feeling. Financial stress sucked. “Thanks, Amy. You’re seriously the shit. Now to just figure out how I’m gonna manage rent and food. Ugh. Fucking Leigh.”

“You’re going to be OK. Everything is going to be OK.”

Quinn smiled at that, and then she blinked, and Amy blinked, and they were asleep in seconds.

Before Amy left the next morning, she venmoed two month’s rent to Lurch. (Not his real name, but the bald giant really did look it, and a guy charging what he was charging for a closet deserved at least one unflattering nickname.) She’d tell Quinn in a couple days, once it felt like it was long enough that it would be weird to try to get a refund should she refuse Amy’s generosity. Amy drummed on her steering wheel, parroting one of those crappy tuneless techno songs from work and grinning ear to ear. Maybe she wouldn’t let Quinn pay her back at all.

God, that thought felt divine. All that booty-bumping and titty-jiggling actually doing some good for someone good for once. She was still smiling when she got to work that evening. It was so unlike her that Jack demanded to know what she was on now.

Huh. Come to think of it, she hadn’t used since move-in day. Fucking wild.

“I’m high on *life*, Jacky boy!” she chirped, shimmying on into the locker room to glue on her tassels. He didn’t believe her, but she didn’t care. Just because she knew it wouldn’t last was no reason not to feel good about it.

It didn’t last long. In the twenty-four hours or so she and Quinn had cohabitated on Higgins 3, Amy had quickly developed a swift distaste for her fellow residents. “Residents,” not “tenants.” At the second floor meeting, after Amy made the mistake of asking if tenants had to take their trash down to the dumpsters or what – way to not mention the goddamn trash room, Spencer, ya dick – and he corrected her in front of the whole floor. Then, lest anybody think (correctly) that he was being a douche about it, he apologized and promised to show it to her after the meeting. Like she was going to let this creepo get her alone in a room full of garbage. Garbage, like the way the sonofabitch treated Quinn after she rocked his stupid world.

Left with the options of opening her door and mingling with the other girls or staying in her room and getting too blissed out on oxy to dwell on her loneliness, Amy chose the latter. There was something weird about this whole thing. No, not *every* girl was a smoking hottie or anything like some of them made out, but there were plenty of

them for sure, and even the so-so girls were pretty. That, plus this boy RA situation, made her uncomfortable. It felt too much like they were trapped in a glass case, being monitored, window dressing for their pretty manager and his meaty cock.

Only then, without meaning to, Amy made herself popular.

“Are you allowed to do that?” someone asked from behind.

Amy scoped out the intruder in the bathroom mirror. That girl from a few doors down, with the nerdy glasses and incredible tits and the braid as thick as Amy’s arm. “Whuh? Bruth muh tuhth...?” she asked around a mouthful of spit.

“No, I mean... walk around... like *that*.” Embarrassed, the girl looked down at her feet. Or where she must assume her feet were with those mad perky titties in the way.

Amy’s gaze reverted to herself, and only then did she realize she’d not only walked down to the bathroom without any socks on, but in her bra and panties, too. At least it wasn’t pepperoni hot pocket – the one with the red polka dots that made her look like a skanky 12-year-old, always a crowd-pleaser – which she’d worn to work last night. She was usually pretty good about changing when she got home, but sometimes she was too high, or too depressed, or just too tired. Thankfully, she was wearing a pretty normal pair of panties. If they were a little skimpy, well, it wasn’t her fault she had such an amazing caboose. Better yet, it kept eyes from scrutinizing her feet. She’d have to be more careful.

Amy spit. “It’s a girl’s floor. Who cares.”

“But it’s not *just*...” the girl protested, though she let it trail off. If Lakeview didn’t want guys seeing Amy in her underwear, then they better transfer their boy. And find a way to make her quit her job. “Sorry, I don’t mean to stare. I’m Andi, by the way.”

As Amy rinsed out her mouth, she pondered if there was a way to brush this prude aside without responding. All these fucking bitches unfriended Quinn before she’d finished re-packing her stuff. Sure, Quinn had flown off the handle, but it was Leigh who brought her claws to bear and turned a shoving match into a fight. Nobody was revoking friendship with Leigh though. Now this prig chick wanted to be chummy.

Bah. Quinn had started it *and* finished it, and even if she personally liked Quinn and felt more comfortable with someone who was also a little crazy, Amy could concede that it wasn’t the most sympathetic position. Amy was quietly envious that her new friend was able to channel her issues outwardly rather than inwardly, but it *had* been pretty fucked up.

“Amy,” she replied. Andi smiled, headed for the showers, and that was that.

Only then, the next day, someone knocked at her door.

“Uh, yeah?”

Leigh had been smiling on the other side of the peephole, anticipating that Amy would be looking, but the squeal of the hinges shook it off her obnoxiously pretty face.

Two tits the size of volleyballs hovered right there at Amy's face level. The nerve. "You should really put in a work order for that."

"I did, on move-in day." Full stop.

"Oh." The smile re-asserted itself. "So you're Amy, right? Is it cool if I come in?"

Amy had been popular-ish once, before Ben. She still remembered enough of it to have a knee-jerk instinct to smile and invite her friend's enemy in, the spider welcoming a juicy fly. Did she know Amy and Quinn were friends? She couldn't see how. Despite Quinn trying to sell her on the wonders of tiktok, Amy had remained off the grid. Well, she had joined the floor discord servers, but only to get at that video everybody had been talking about, and that only as a favor to Quinn. That chick was even hornier than Amy, it seemed.

"Sure. Leigh, right?" Oh man. Aunt Julia had always loved *Survivor*. Jonah, too, weirdly, one of few things those two really clicked over. Amy saw enough just by being there. Look at her now, forming an alliance, preparing the blindside. Her tía would be proud.

Leigh made a little pose as she swept in, folding her hands under chin and smiling a pageant smile. "You've heard of me? Just kidding, obviously. Pretty sure everybody saw that freaking video of that psycho jumping me."

"Video...?" The attempt at feigned innocence was too much, and she couldn't help but laugh. "Yeah, sorry. If it makes you feel any better, I haven't found a buyer for it yet. Entertaining offers."

She'd meant to be kind of a cunt – not much for *Survivor* tactics – but Leigh only laughed. "Too bad some idiot's head was in the way, or you could have paid off your tuition peddling these puppies to Pornhub." She drummed on those absurd jugs of hers.

"Probably. Um, so yeah, what'd you want...?"

"I'm just making introductions. I hear you're making waves down here." Amy must have looked mystified, because Leigh seemed compelled to explain. "Reclaiming the north bathroom? Creating female space? And looking hella fine doing it, from what I hear. Strutting around in your undies, who cares who's looking."

"What?" Amy looked at her like she was crazy. Which she might be. "I just forgot where I was. I'm, um, kind of a low-clothing girl. Comfy in my skin or whatever you want to call it."

"Right? There's just something empowering about letting it hang. We were all thinking it, but *you* did it – and without thinking it, which is even *more* badass!"

"I'm a badass for brushing my teeth in my underwear?"

"You're a *game-changer* for brushing your teeth in your bra and underwear. Not just because you made it swell to swagger around comfy-like. Having to get fake dressed, *then* go do your routine, then back to your room to get actually dressed? F that."

Amy guesstimated that it had taken probably thirty seconds to snag a pair of shorts and a tank top and put it on before heading to the bathroom on the preceding mornings, but she let Leigh go on.

“But also, like... I don’t want to sound like *that* bitch or anything. But we’re *hot*, you know? Like, there’s just something *sexy* in the air around here. It’s like we’re in this special hot girl club, complete with our own hot boy servant. If you can’t skank around in your skivvies in hot girl club, what is even the point? Am I making any sense?”

Amy laughed in spite of herself. There was something about this chick, how self-aware she seemed of what a self-parody she was. The statuesque blonde with big tits and long legs and the gleaming white teeth and eyes that sparkled so bright they probably glowed in the dark. And she knew it, and what did she do with it? She teased up her hair like an 80’s porn star and taught herself to heel-toe.

Amy wanted to hate her – for Quinn, if nothing else – but suddenly, being alone in a room with her, where Leigh ought to be at her most threatening, she was somehow more relatable.

“Not a lot, but you’re right about me being pretty great in my underwear,” Amy quipped.

Leigh giggled hysterically. “Come on, let’s go get lunch. And no, not in your underwear, superslut. Get dressed, let’s gooo!”

Amy let her have it. She’d been planning to eat soon anyway, so it was either starve until she could feel sure this chick had left the food court or just be rude. Amy picked out an outfit and started changing. If Leigh thought it was weird that Amy undressed right in front of her, she could give a shit. Nudity didn’t bother her, probably to an unhealthy degree. After all, what was one more self-destructive tendency?

She locked her groany door behind her. Leigh made for the stairwell, but Amy hesitated. “What about Angel? It’s been a week and a half and I don’t think I’ve seen you two apart. Aside from... yeah.” Faux pas. Amy winced apologetically. It was true, though. They sat together at floor meetings, did their morning routine together, she’d seen them eating together, going to the gym together... Amy was glad as hell not to have a roommate if there was even a chance of snagging one like that.

Leigh just kept going down the stairs, so Amy followed. “Eh. She’s in class. Between you and me, thank god a little? She’s cool, but she can be a little clingy.”

“A little? It’s like she’s a koala and you’re a eucalyptus tree.”

Leigh barked out a laugh. It echoed up and down the stairwell. “OK, you and me, we’re gonna be friends. Whatever your plans are tonight, text ‘em and fuck ‘em, because you are partying with yours truly. We are officially super awesome college friends for life, girl.” She was being funny about it, but the hope underlying the declaration was real.

Amy still remembered her first day of kindergarten. How scared she was as her mom walked her down to the classroom. Then right before she had to go into the room, her mom reached into her purse and pulled out this huge, incredible block of crayons in her hand.

The 128-count. Fucking legendary.

Her mom had knelt down, looked little Amy in the eye, and told her, “Now just go in there with these. And when it’s time to color, you offer everyone a crayon. Tell them your friends can use your crayons any time.”

Amy had done exactly what her mother said, and she’d made ten friends in a day.

It was a peculiar commonality between the first week of kindergarten and the first week of college – that you could just walk up to someone you didn’t know and claim them as your friend. That had not been Amy’s experience her own freshman year. She’d spent most of it telling guys to fuck off, and telling girls to also fuck off.

Well, screw it. Maybe she could pretend it was kindergarten again, but instead of making friends with crayons, she’d make friends with her underwear. The drawer might not have 128 pairs, but it was reeling them in anyway.

That night, drunk and cackling and barely able to walk in her heels, Amy stumbled out of a house party, the music still pumping loud enough to vibrate her bones all the way down at the sidewalk. She had no reason to remember, but by sheer coincidence it happened to be across the street from the house where she’d run out of air following her flight from Mother Bear’s almost a year earlier.

They packed into the back of their Uber with Leigh and Angel, Charlie wedged in between them. Amy was the littlest, so she was assigned Leigh’s lap. Georgia and Kendall were in the front seat, the former atop the latter. It was blatantly illegal and if there was an accident Amy and Georgia were probably going to be ejected, mangled and/or decapitated, but they looked way too hot for their male driver to complain.

“You guys, this is gonna be the best four years of our lives!” declared Kendall to the cheers of her co-partiers.

“I only have three,” sulked Amy. “It’s not fair. You guys should have been here a year ago.”

“But a year ago they didn’t have the coed floor,” Kendall pointed out. “We probably wouldn’t have even met.”

“Booooo!” jeered Leigh.

“Yeah, boo!” parroted Angel. She laughed (to curry favor), and Leigh laughed along (to favor her).

“I love you guys,” slurred Charlie. “I love our whole floor. Whoever messed up and put us all together deserves, like, a medal. And a kiss,” she giggle-snorted. Charlie had offered to be their DD, but her wholesome vibe was sort of annoying so Amy had

poured some tequila into her until she turned back into a human, then offered to pay for the ride. She'd figure out how to get her car back tomorrow.

"You just wanna kiss our RA," teased Georgia.

"She wants to do more than kiss him," added Kendall.

Charlie's cheeks flushed even more than they had been from the tequila.

"Maaaaaaybe...!"

"Get in line, sluts," preened Leigh. "I got him right where I want him."

"But you're saying there's a line we can stand in to fuck him?" queried Kendall.

"Grooooooss!" Georgia complained. "That said, I'd take any of your sloppy seconds, any day."

"From Spencer," clarified her roommate.

Amy found the whole line of discussion... disturbing. Like, yes, the guy was hot, but so what? There had been at least a couple guys at the party just as attractive. The whole Spencer fetish creeped her the hell out. The girls were still talking about him by the time their driver, wide-eyed and sweaty at the out-pouring of sexy teenage lust, dropped them off in front of Higgins. Amy helped keep Charlie steady as they made their way in. Up ahead, they could see a couple of the other RAs – Amy didn't recognize them, but some of the others did – meeting up just inside the entrance.

Amy knew one of them, sort of. Savannah Grey had been in her biology lab last year. They hadn't really interacted, but the chick was conspicuously hot in a way even Amy balefully envied. Of course, most people didn't know about that fucked up scar on her tummy. She'd seen it once when the girl's shirt got skewed a little out of whack and it had stuck in her head. Even 10's had their 1 spots, as she herself knew all too well.

They waited for the RAs to head off on rounds – "snitchscapades," Leigh dubbed it to the giggles of all – and scurried up to Higgins 3 before they had to explain why they stank of alcohol and could barely walk straight. Charlie was particularly wrecked; they had to hand-deliver her to her roommate, a little ginger chick who was evidently spending her Friday night playing video games. (Destiny, the door tag read, making her the first "Destiny" Amy had met outside of Jumping Jack's.)

"Whoa. Is she OK?"

Charlie laughed and booped her roommate on the nose. "I'm fiiiine," she tittered. "We had sooo much fun, and I can't wait to *BLUHHHHHHHHH*." She vomited, and though she had the courtesy to whirl away from her roommate, it meant she sprayed it all over Amy and Leigh.

"How about that for karma," Amy self-recriminated a few minutes later, raising her voice so Leigh could hear her over the divider between their shower stalls.

"You were the one funneling booze down her throat. For you, sure, karma, but for me this is just shitty luck. Ruined my fucking dress."

Amy finished rinsing the vomit off her top and started wringing it out. Leigh was probably doing the same to her dress, though she might have just set it aside and gone to work on her hair first.

The two quietly washed up for a bit. It was quiet and steamy and weirdly intimate for a public bathroom. After a time, Amy finally asked what she'd been wondering about since she first pondered not hating Leigh.

"Are you doing OK?"

Leigh grunted. "It's no-win. Can't leave the vomit in my hair, but I'm not going to be able to sleep with my dome smelling like crazy of shampoo. I'll be in here rinsing for a freaking hour. Goddamn lightweight."

Amy smiled, then hopped up on the little seat in the changing area and looked over the stall. She was a little too drunk to remember other girls had boundaries about nakedness, but not so drunk she was worried about her balance. Not very worried, anyway. "No. I mean... since the fight."

Leigh adjusted her posture, put her back to Amy. Maybe she was just rinsing, but Amy suspected more hiding. "It's no big. Spencer handled it."

"No I'm serious. I wasn't in here, but I saw the vid same as everybody. That looked... terrifying."

Leigh was quiet for a moment. "It wasn't great, I'll tell you that."

A little drunk, and a little out of her element being in a good mood, Amy wanted to go over there and hug her, but that was a bit much boundary-ignoring even for her. "I, um, know a little about that. Getting beat up and stuff."

Leigh laughed, but Amy took it for what it was. The laugh was to protect herself, not shame Amy. "I can just picture you out there, going all krav maga in the MMA circuit. Do they have a weight division for girls skinnier than my leg?"

"Yeah, well, he wasn't in my weight class," Amy said softly. "But I just mean I know how it can get in your head. Fuck you up."

"I didn't say it got in my head," Leigh said curtly.

"No, I know. I'm just saying, for me. And, um, if we're gonna be super awesome college friends and all—"

"For life," said Leigh, her stupid hot stupid sexy butt bouncing with a little laugh. Amy frowned at it, then went on.

"Then I just wanted to say, if it ever did get in your head, and you wanted to talk to somebody who got it..." She paused, smiling, and Leigh slowly turned around, eyes big and soft and vulnerable in a way that didn't suit her at all. "And you can handle my stupid door screeching your face off... you can talk to me."

Leigh's eyes settled on hers, radiating gratitude. She didn't let it linger, though – it wasn't her way. "You're as bad as Charlie, I swear, freaking sexy Mr. Rogers up in

here. Don't you fucking barf on me, Amy. I swear I'm not losing *two* fights in this shower."

Amy: just so you know I hung out with Leigh tonight. (you remember her, I suspect? tall, smug, can't take a right hook)

*Quinn: you don't have to apologize for who you hang out with
do what you want idc*

*Amy: bullshit you don't care
and I'm not Applegate*

**apologizing*

*I just wanted to tell you she's not broken or anything
that's all*

*Quinn: maybe next time
but good I guess
text me tomorrow A*

Amy: Will do "Q"

OMG WE'RE Q&A WE'RE SO FUCKING COOL

*Quinn: ... wow
get some sleep*

Amy: IYQYQR

She made a hasty edit to her contact while Quinn grappled with Amy's previous message.

Q: dafuq..?

Amy: Say it out loud...

*Q: omg you are such a fucking dork
ILYYQR
srsly.*

Amy huddled in the back seat of her car and felt relieved no one could see her. (To the extent that she could feel anything beyond sheer terror, that is.) Her heart was trying to hammer out of her chest. After a minute, she dared to peer up again.

It was a gorgeous day. A million little sparkles danced across the surface of Bear Lake, though still not quite enough to obscure the reflection of the clouds overhead. The parking lot was right near the beach, and everywhere Amy looked was another Hottie looking hot doing this or that. Playing volleyball in the sand, floating in the shallow

water on an inflatable, sitting at a picnic table talking and laughing. It looked like a great day. Amy had been sitting with Jordyn, Shauna and Emma, the other sophomores. She'd driven here with her friends, but Emma had invited her over.

The four of them had gone for a walk on one of the hiking paths. The city didn't maintain them very well. More than once the trail was so obscure it was basically nonexistent; they'd blundered into the Northside High School parking lot completely by accident, but as a townie, it oriented Amy enough that she steered them back toward Spencer and the girls. Kind of wild. Her old apartment with her mom had been in the Northside school district. When she'd been with Ben, she'd thought sometimes about how if her mom hadn't died, she never would have met him. A very different life that would have been.

So it goes, as one of her favorite authors wrote.

When they'd gotten back near the beach, though, she'd seen him. Kaiden Eaton. Kappa Nu's sergeant-at-arms, and a friend of Ben's.

Amy didn't know what a sergeant-at-arms even did at a fraternity. Ben had tried to explain it once, but it was full of all that douche-y jargon – “keeper of ritual,” “recorder of legacy.” It reminded her of back when Jonah used to be into D&D, or whatever it had been. (“It's not D&D, Amy, god, D&D is a totally different game!” Fuck, she missed that little asshole. She hoped he was doing all right.)

Regardless, that creep knew Ben. If he saw Amy, he'd tell him right away. Text him, probably. What if he and Skyler had broken up? What if Ben missed her? What if he came here? What if he found out where she lived?! Spencer hadn't been able to restrain Quinn and Quinn got winded carrying in her groceries. Ben would maul the guy if he got in his way, especially if he saw how besotted the Hotties were with Spencer and felt like he had to make it a Man Contest.

Fuck, for all she knew, Spencer and Kaiden were buddies, and Ben was a friend of a friend. Fuck. Fuck!

She peered again. He was still there, chilling on a swing like it lent him a cute wholesome approachable vibe. No doubt the bipedal turd couldn't wait for one of the girls to notice him and say hi so he could introduce himself and use that disgusting “Eaton – as in eatin'...” line he thought was so fucking clever.

As she watched, he stood up and availed himself of an open beach chair next to Spencer. Of course he did. Leering perv attracting leering perv, big shock. The two of them started chatting. They were much too far for her to overhear; Amy's windows were up, and the doors shut and locked, and an old hoodie under the passenger's seat donned and hooded over her ears for maximum incognito. It was a thousand degrees in the car, but she'd take a chance at death via heat stroke rather than brave the alternative.

Suddenly someone pounded on the glass behind her. In an instant she went from heart-clenching dread to full-blown panic attack. She screamed, but then her throat

caught and she couldn't make any sound at all. As if every single thing wasn't already bad enough, the sudden shock made her lose control of her bladder.

Why was it so dark? Was she already dead? She hoped so. It hadn't hurt so bad, nice and gentle like she'd planned.

They started banging. Amy tried to beg them to leave, beg them to go away, beg them not to kill her, or just kill her and get it over with finally, and bit by bit Amy's vision returned. Not Ben. Not Kaiden. Not Spencer. Just Tori. She looked upset. What had Amy done? She must be in huge trouble. Tori would get Spencer would get Kaiden would get Ben would kill her. Oh god. It wasn't rational but neither was Ben. Oh fuck.

Amy switched the lock and launched herself out of the car on the far side from Tori. She took a circuitous route to avoid Kaiden, but soon cover availed itself via some tall reeds. She darted behind them and made straight for the lake, diving in and swimming confidently.

Amy had been on the swim team in high school. Not very good or anything, but it had been good exercise, and some of her friends did it. Ben had stopped it of course – no girlfriend of his was going to strut around for the whole world to see in one of those not-at-all skimpy one-piece swimsuits and hideous swim caps the team wore. Still, she could swim, even in the increasingly heavy wet hoodie.

When it got to be too cumbersome, she thrashed around until it came off and let it sink. It didn't matter. Swim. Kaiden was there. Hold your breath. Stay under. He can't identify you if you don't surface. Swim. Swim. Swim.

Ben can take you off the swim team but he can't stop you from knowing how to swim.

Swim.

Grueling breathless minutes later the panic attack subsided, leaving Amy dizzy and alone somewhere way out in the middle of this branch of the lake. It was so far to shore she could hardly see the rest of the group. Where she was, the water was so murky she couldn't see her tits, much less down to the lakebed. Bear Lake was surprisingly vast, fed by a number of tributaries from every direction in the city and then spreading out into the countryside for miles, where it was fed by more. People had gone missing out here, survivalists who'd thought to brave the wild only to find out the wild was a lot braver than they were.

Was Ol' Ursula down there, paddling along in the depths?

A trio of bubbles popped up only a few feet away. For a moment, Amy, still coming down from the peak of her panic, forgot Ursula was a legend. She closed her eyes, braced herself to be dragged under and torn apart and forgotten.

Aunt Julia. More than anything else in that moment, Amy wished she could apologize to her tía. If she only had one wish, it wouldn't be for a boat. It would be that.

When, after a moment, she didn't die, Amy opened her eyes. No bear. Just a turtle, a cute little painted turtle hardly bigger than her hand. It was simply floating there, a turtley little smile on its face. Paddling water as delicately as she could, Amy slowly found herself smiling back.

A little ladybug that, like Amy, seemed to be having a moment of malcontent with its life on shore, landed on the turtle's shell. The creature's little jaws tried to intercept, but when it failed, it simply submerged itself and disappeared in an instant. The ladybug floated on the surface of the water for a moment, then likewise flew away. Amy squinted after it, but lost it in seconds. After one last glance down for old Ursula, Amy followed suit and made for the shore.

"You scared the fuck out of me!" Tori snapped as she handed Amy a towel. "Mind telling me what the shit's going on with you? Are you on something?"

Amy was – she usually was, to the extent she only noticed it when she wasn't – but that was beside the point. "Sorry. I was..." What? Terrified our RA is in cahoots with the Kappa Nu sergeant-at-arms to hunt me down so my ex-boyfriend can murder me? It sounded insane. It *was* insane. Not a valid psychological term, she knew, but it applied. "It was just a prank. You should have seen your face." She tried a laugh, though her confidence about what laughter sounded like was yet to return since her impromptu aquatic escape attempt.

Tori placed herself in Amy's path. "Bullshit. I saw the look on *your* face. What happened? Are you... No, scratch that. You are definitely not all right. Talk to me."

They were still a long ways away from the group. Amy didn't see Kaiden any more. Didn't see Spencer either until, surprise surprise, Sammi, Casey, Andi and Lex – in descending tit-size order, and reverse how-often-they'd-shown-them-to-him order – threw their heads back in giggle fits, and there he was in the middle of them.

Amy didn't understand these girls. She got horny, too. *Really* horny, of late. Kind of annoyingly so – she kept soaking through her hot pockets so bad she had to take multiple to Jumping Jack's and change mid-shift when they got so wet she was sliming the pole. Probably a side effect of having her first month in ages where she wasn't miserable a hundred percent of the time. Still, they acted like Spencer was the only guy around. Amy could confirm that there were many, many, *many* other guys.

She double, then triple-checked, but no Kaiden. He hadn't seen her, had he? No way he could have recognized her out there in the water. She was OK. It had all been in her head. What a shitty fucking place to be.

"I, um... I'm sorry. I didn't mean to freak you out. In my defense, you scared me first."

"I went to get my shorts out of Ellie's car to keep the sand off my ass, and I saw some weirdo in a goddamn hoodie hiding in the backseat of your car, Amy. I thought

you were some skinny little rapist or something waiting to ambush... you! What the hell were you doing?"

"Look, I apologized. It's none of your business, OK? Now do you mind...?" Tori let Amy push past her. She joined the girls splashing around in the shallows – ready to dive underwater at the first sign of Kaiden's return – and was still there when the group decided it was time to return to campus.

Tori was waiting for her in the passenger's seat. Kendall, Leigh and Angel had ridden over with her; Amy peered around and found them squeezed into Terri's little shitbox car. Oof. That chick was always trying to drag the other Hotties into one of her "collabs," a thinly veiled metaphor for the softcore porn she called a tiktok feed.

"Hi there. I hope you don't mind, but I sent your friends away."

"How? Why?" Amy demanded, sliding into the driver's seat, hoping her wet ass didn't damage the leather. She'd burned a *lot* of calories shaking her ass at randos for this car.

"How is I told them you noticed me bleeding through my shorts and you offered to take me and be discreet. Had to wedgie the hell out of myself to sell it, too, so thanks for that."

"If you drip *sangre menstrual* on my fucking seat I swear to god I'll kill you, Tori."

"You and what army. Or should I say what navy, with that stunt you pulled earlier."

"You have no idea how many dudes I have to hump every month to make this fucking car payment," Amy grumbled as she started the engine. She regretted it immediately. None of the Hotties knew about her job. She'd only told Quinn last week, and Quinn was her best friend. Even then she hadn't told her about how many of the Jumping Jack's regulars were only regulars so they'd be on hand in case the skinny little slut with the fake perky titties was feeling lonely after her shift. Seiji kept a close eye on her, making sure she never went anywhere with someone she didn't want to, and she tipped him handsomely for it.

"Uh, we'll come back to *that* weird-ass thing you just said in a second, but to your second question, why, because you were hiding in your car and when I startled you, you ran like a kid with a squirt gun from a Florida cop."

"Pretty sure that's Floridist."

"Spanglish or no, you are too white to be calling my black ass anything-ist." Tori smiled, though, with plain reluctance. "Sorry. Don't get to do the whole 'my black ass' thing too often."

Amy smiled in kind, but it faded fast. Tori had been trying to do her a solid, scaring a creep out of Amy's car, and she'd instead been subjected to a front-row showing at *El Carnaval de la Loca*. She deserved at least some explanation. "Look, there

was a guy there, I guess he's friends with Spencer or something. I don't know. But this guy's in my ex-boyfriend's fraternity, and he – my ex, I mean – is... I don't think there are words for what he is.”

“Abuser...?” floated Tori, but compassionately.

“OK, so maybe there are words for what he is. But he turned my life into a waking nightmare and I saw Kaiden – the guy – and I freaked out and–”

Tori put a hand on her shoulder. It was firm. It felt surprisingly reassuring. “Now I get it. I'm sorry that you had to go through that. That was some pretty intense shit there.”

Amy didn't really remember it clearly, the order of events and all. She'd been reading about trauma in one of her textbooks, and that was fairly common for a panic attack. Still, she definitely remembered being in the middle of a giant lake – had there really been a turtle? – so she could only imagine how it must have looked to Tori.

“Did you even know it was me before I swam back?”

Tori nodded. “Yeah, after a sec. I recognized your car – this is a nice ride by the way – and when I saw your little red bottoms, I knew it was you, even if it didn't make any sense. And that's not a lesbian thing or anything, just I saw you wearing it earlier and I got I think the same one except mine has to fit all of this up in it.”

“Your black ass?”

“That's our phrase.” Tori grinned. “You get your own thing.”

Amy would have been happy to pivot to lighter discussion, or just turn on the radio and not talk at all. Amy didn't really know Tori, but she was beginning to. There was an intensity to her, and intense people stressed her the fuck out. Instead, Tori pursued the other thing Amy had shared.

“Now what's this I hear about you humping dudes for a car?”

With a sigh, Amy gritted her teeth and made her confession. She didn't want to, but she didn't want Tori thinking she was a hooker or a call girl or something. (No, those would be so much more embarrassing than stripper-slut.) Not answering a question like that was how such rumors got started, though, so Amy told her about the stripping. Once she got going, and once Tori responded not with condemnation but with curiosity – polite, if not fascinated – Amy talked and talked.

Tori got a big kick out of the “hot pockets.” Amy told her about how last winter she used to wear them to campus so she could hustle to this Mexican place she liked off campus and have somewhere to keep her burrito hot on her rush to her next class. Tori laughed herself silly imagining tiny little Amy walking around sporting what anyone looking too closely had to assume was the biggest dick at Lakeview.

“Even Spencer isn't packing burrito-sized meat!” she howled.

The name brought Amy back out of it a bit. “You know, I don't get what you all see in that guy, honestly.”

“Seriously? Well, no, I guess... I dunno. He’s easy on the eyes and all. One of us,” she said, tapping the big H on her Higgins Hotties shirt. “But I just like the guy. He’s got good values, respectful of women, diverse cultures. I know it’s whatever, but it works for me. If I’m gonna fantasize about a guy I’m not ever gonna actually get with, I want the fantasy to have a nice date before the big show. Olive Garden, Pepsi, plotting the overthrow of the fascist regime, then back to my place so I can chain him up in my sex dungeon.”

“Whoa.”

“That was a joke, Amy.” Tori snickered. “Mostly. But you know, before we get too far off of it, I... I know it’s not my place, and you can tell me to shut up. But some of what you’re saying, about your job? I know you said you went there because it felt safe, but the way you’re talking about it, back rooms and random dudes... It doesn’t sound all that safe.”

“There’s a bouncer. It’s cool. I saw Seiji roundhouse a watermelon off the bar so hard it freaking exploded.”

“I’m just saying—”

“Hey. Drop it? It’s fine.”

Accepting her invitation to tell her shut up didn’t look like it sat very well with the floor governor, but she took it. She’d meant well, Amy knew. “Hey. Um, so I know it’s a little early, but while we’re out... wanna go to Olive Garden?”

Like that, Tori was all smiles again. “You’re still dripping wet and I’ve got sand in crevices I forgot I had. Blech. I need to sign up at whatever gym you’re going to.”

“It’s called starvation and self-loathing. The dues are brutal and the trainers are incompetent sadists. But seriously, I got a bunch of clothes in the trunk. Work stuff mostly, but I can use it as a towel and slip into a halter top, a sarong, use a hot pocket and get by. Come on. My treat. We’ll tip extra for leaving a sandy bench.”

“You don’t need to treat me.”

Amy flipped open the compartment in the center console, fishing around until she lifted the piece of black cardboard she’d cut from a shoebox lid that she used as a false bottom. There was a huge wad of cash in there, a wad she spent and refreshed regularly but never depleted in case Ben found a way to track her via her assets and she needed to run.

“Holy *shit*. Those... Those aren’t even singles. Jesus.”

“My white ass,” Amy quipped. “Literally. Had a guy last week who slipped me almost two hundred bucks to do body shots off the backs of my thighs. Not my proudest moment, but not even close to my most shameful.”

“I...”

“You’re an unemployed floor governor who risked her life to confront what she thought was a predator hiding in my back seat, and I’m a fucked up stripper who sees a chance to feel good about herself for an hour by doing something nice. Let me?”

Tori extended a hand, and Amy shook it. “Sold.”

Later that night, Amy was getting some reading done for next week when someone knocked at her door. While she’d had a nice dinner (Diet Pepsi and all) the combination of seeing Kaiden with their RA, the panic attack, that long moment of hoping to die in a lake, the memory resurfacing of the horrible way she’d treated Aunt Julia during their last conversation... It had been too much. She donned her emergency socks, which had been tucked between her mattress and bed springs since she’d gotten there.

It was Terri, of all people. “Um, hi...?”

“Your door is *really* loud,” she said, like Amy might have somehow failed to notice. “Can I come in?”

“I’m studying,” she lied.

“I won’t take long.”

Once more, the emergency socks earned their keep as she let the girl into her room. She was still wearing her Hotties shirt from the beach. Amy had changed into hers when she got home. They were kind of annoyingly comfy, and there was no pretending she – they – didn’t look fine as hell in them.

“What’s up?” she asked once her feet were carefully concealed by her sitting position. “And if this is about your streaming thing, no offense, but I’m really not–”

“No, it’s not that. Though the offer remains open if you ever want to just try it out and see. You’d be surprised how fast you get used to sitting around talking about nothing in a cute outfit while dudes fight for your...” She stopped herself. “Well, um, since I was about to say I talked to Tori earlier, I guess, yeah. You wouldn’t be surprised, huh.”

Amy found herself scowling. “She told you?! What the fuck! I can’t believe I–”

“Whoa, whoa, hey,” Terri said, holding up her hands. “She asked me to come talk to you, and she said I should tell you that all she told me you told her... I think that makes sense? But yeah, that you, um, were a... yeah. A stripper.”

“You don’t have to say it like that. I just do what you do on a stage instead of on camera.”

It was Terri’s turn to scowl. “That is so not what I do! I–” She caught her tone. “Sorry. I really didn’t mean it as a judgment. I suppose it is fair to say our professions are, you know, quasi-adjacent. Same neighborhood, at least. Looking hot, making guys happy. Putting a little beauty in the world. Fair.”

“That’s a hell of a euphemism for ‘shaking your tits for cash.’”

“Hey, I only came down here because Tori said, um... Sorry, this is so awkward. She said...”

“Something other than ‘Amy’s a stripper?’ Cool, what other gossip is she starting.”

“All right, so since I’m making a mess of this, let me just cut to the chase. You want to use your body to make tons of money? And you want to do it in a way that’s *actually* safe, not ‘I’m protected by a tiny Asian man who excels at the watermelon arts’ safe? I can help you do that.”

Amy shook her head. “What? I told you, I don’t want to stream. I’m doing just fine where I’m at. And don’t talk shit about Seiji and shit you don’t know about.”

Terri sighed and adopted a tone like she was the worldly one and Amy was some rube she had to educate. “I don’t know if you’re the sort who’s more persuaded by data or anecdotal evidence, but I can whip up a presentation to show you that no, you definitely aren’t ‘safe.’” She ticked off points on her fingers. “Sex work is horrendously under-regulated. They’re preyed upon by their managers, handlers, and sometimes folks like your friend Seiji. Sex workers are massively more likely to be assaulted on the job. They have significantly higher rates of mental health problems. They—”

“I get it. It’s not glamorous. But it also pays great, no paper trail for the tax man, and I’m good at it.”

Terri nodded. “I bet you are. Amy, you’re one of the prettiest women I’ve ever seen. You’re probably even prettier than my roommate, and you’ve seen her, she’s like a hot girl cosplaying an even hotter girl. Or... reverse that? Whatever, she’s hot, you get me. But you could do exactly what you do on stage, the tassles, the jigging, and... I’m told there’s some tool you call a ‘hot pocket?’”

“It’s a g-string with a big pocket inside. My pussy keeps it warm.”

Terri grinned. “That’s awesome. God, I wish you would let me put you on my... Focus. But I’m saying, you could just start an OnlyFans, or a competitor, whatever. You’d have complete control over what content you put out there. No tipping your bouncer, no giving your manager a cut like he’s the one busting his butt at the gym. Yeah, the site gets a cut, but they also create and maintain the digital tools for it, so it’s actually fair. You wouldn’t have to walk to your car hoping there’s not some psycho rapist hiding in the back seat, which if you think that sounds like Hallmark horror movie bullshit, one of the girls said she saw exactly that literally earlier today at the lake.”

Amy managed not to laugh. Apparently Tori hadn’t spilled everything after all. “Really?”

“Yeah, they told Tori, but she said they must have seen her coming because she thought she saw the creep run off into the woods in like a hoodie and fake glasses and mustache kind of thing. Fucking bonkers. And that was at a public park in broad daylight, not 2 AM in a dark parking lot at Hank’s Spank and Yank.”

She let it out this time. “You know, that wouldn’t be a bad name for a club.”
Maybe Jack had a brother.

“Anyway, if you want help setting it up, I’d be happy to. It’s not exactly what I do, but I’ve read up on my industry and I keep my options open. If not, forget I said anything and I hope you’re right. Maybe you found one of the good ones.”

“Thanks. I appreciate the offer.”

Terri gave her a nod and left, once more grumbling about the hinges. A few hours later, once Amy was good and scabbed over and could wear her normal socks, she headed down to 307. The door was open. Seemed like the doors on this floor always were. She’d grown up with Jonah, a kid who’d closed his bedroom door at age 10 and spent every day since rigorously testing whether it really could make you go blind.

Terri was sitting at her computer, likewise looking like she was doing homework. Why did it feel weird to think of this professional boobly broadcaster doing homework?

Terri would probably think the same thing about seeing the titty dancer doing hers.

There was no sign of Terri’s roommate. A shame; Amy was constantly forgetting which of the two ginger shortstacks on the floor was which. A reintroduction would have been helpful.

“Do you have a minute? I was thinking about what you said, and... maybe it’s worth checking out. I can come back later if—”

Terri was hugging her before Amy knew it was coming, bouncing and squealing in excitement. “We are going to make you a friggin’ millionaire, Amy. Or whatever your alias winds up being, I should say. I guess you probably have one at your club already, right?”

Maritza. Her mother’s name. Amy shook her head. “I, um, need a new one, I think.”

“Well sit right in, because you and I are going to figure all this shit out. You got your bank info ready? Because, by the way, you’re going to wanna call them in the morning and let them know that no, it’s no mistake. You’re just that freaking great.”

Amy smiled, and took a seat.

It finally happened.

Amy found out from a text from an unknown number that turned out to be her little cousin Alana, who’d heard from her dad, Amy’s Uncle Martín, who’d been told by Aunt Julia, that Jonah had gotten himself arrested when he’d been caught stealing. He even had a little blurb on the local paper’s recent arrests page, mugshot and all. He hadn’t been caught swiping candy bars from a convenience store or stuffing a couple

t-shirts down his pants at Walmart. No, the fucking idiot got caught on his school's security camera wheeling out a whole cart of laptops and tablets.

Alana said apparently he'd hid out after school, waited for the building to empty, then gone right out the front door with it. She had to hand it to him, he'd had a buyer ready. Sold them off right there in the parking lot, he said. The little genius never learned the guy's real identity, so now there was no returning the goods or finding the guy who'd made the real money off of it. Thousands of dollars of shit, and he'd gotten \$500 – right up until he was hauled out of first period the next morning and handed over to the cops, who found it in his wallet, less a few bucks for a pack of condoms and a slurpee.

Amy's cursory research suggested that he was probably looking at upwards of 2 years if – when – he was convicted. Eighteen. Eight-fucking-teen.

She was sobbing so hard, and as stoned as she'd been in months, that she didn't hear the knocking. When they kept at it, she dismissed it as irrelevant. She didn't miss the groan of that door, though. Still, she was weeping into her pillow so hard the posts were knocking into the wall as she shook the bed.

"Oh god. Oh my god. Amy? Amy, are you OK? What happened? Oh crap. Um, somebody—" There was nobody else in the room, of course. "Oh god. Um. It's OK. Shh, it's OK."

Someone was sitting next to her suddenly, rubbing her back and murmuring the same pointless shit. Amy didn't care. She didn't care that she was naked, either. She'd been masturbating when she'd gotten the text. She did that a lot these days, it seemed, just feeling good about things for a change. Plus it was cheap and easy content, and she didn't fake that shit for her vids. (Not often, anyway.)

Then she twisted, put her back to whoever it was, trying to curl up into a little ball, and after a moment, they saw her feet.

"Oh *shit*. Oh fucking *shit*. Amy. Oh my god. Amy. Oh no. Oh god. I'm getting Spencer. Stay right there, and I'll—"

Amy whirled upright. Katrina, Quinn's first and best roommate. "No! No. No, I'm fine. It's just my brother. He..." That was as much as she could manage, word-wise, but she made sure Amy understood that she didn't want the RA.

Quinn had insisted Spencer didn't seem to actually know Kaiden that she could tell; she was still friends with him on social media from her brief stay here. (She'd begun to acknowledge that her fixation on him was a bit silly. It had lingered for as many weeks now as their hookup on night one had lasted in minutes. Pretty devout for a handjob and butt-fingering, Amy thought.) In any case, it let her friend snoop, and there didn't seem to be any link. Amy surreptitiously asked Sammi who that guy was she'd seen him talking to at the beach, and she'd made it sound like the guy was bothering him, like they'd chased Kaiden off. Maybe that was how it had been.

Still, she didn't trust him. He was just too... Ben. That idiot smile he wore all the time for no reason, like he just *needed* these girls to trust him, that he was one of the good ones – nay, the *best*. Word had it he'd tricked his way into Andi's panties. It probably hadn't been hard. Some said he'd given Kyu-Ri a spanking. That chick's English was worse than her Uncle Martín's, though, so who knew what to make of her ditzy Korenglish giggle-babble when she'd been asked. Most people figured he'd fucked Casey – except Casey, who claimed she was only messing and she had a boyfriend whom she loved back home – and pretty much everybody seemed to hope they were next.

Pretty much. Amy kept hoping one of these chicks would make her life easy and turn her gay, but so far no such luck. She was stuck here single and sexed up, and the only guy in the building was a Ben.

And now her little brother was going to prison. It was going to chew him up and spit him out as another miserable broken piece of shit. Like her.

Katrina folded her hands in her lap. She plainly wanted to be reassuring, but wasn't coping well with the panorama of fluids, blood and sweat and tears and cum. To be fair, Amy wasn't coping well either. "OK. I won't get him. But, um, can I get Tori? I'm sorry, I just... you look dreadful and I'm freaking out and I'm sorry but I don't know how to handle this stuff, and... I'll get Tori."

"No. You're fine. It's fine. I don't need anybody. I'm fine." Katrina looked aghast. Amy took her at her word that she did not know how to handle this stuff. In fact, "I don't know how to handle this stuff, either." A disgusting laugh-snot-cry followed – adding snot to the fluid list – but it was better than just crying, she supposed.

"I'm sorry. I just heard you, and at first I thought maybe you were watching a sad movie, or like one of those Sarah McLachlan style commercials came on. Remember those, when we were kids? Those were so manipulative, my parents said it was hard to root for the ASPCA for a while. I guess I used to see them and throw tantrums and go 'Mommy, Mommy, we have to save the puppies, save the puppies, Mommy' and drive them sort of crazy. It was actually one of my Christmas presents when I was... 5, I think? They let me push some of the buttons when they made a donation. And I'm talking way too much and saying nothing and I'm sorry and I'll shut up."

It was all enough to get another laugh-snot-cry that was balanced more toward laughing. "It's OK. I'm just having a night."

Amy's eyes flitted between the sobbing girl, her bleeding feet, and the blood-stained knife now staining the bed. Fuck. Amy was usually really careful – kind of insanely careful, really. It had felt really important that Aunt Julia never find out about it, so she had a whole routine, her special towel, plastic wrap as a just-in-case tarp mechanism, her emergency socks. If Aunt Julia had found out, she'd have demanded to know why, and then demanded to get involved and help, and then found out about everything with Ben, and then get in his face about it, and...

She'd thought that scenario would end with a double funeral, and then Jonah being put in foster care or sent to live with family back in Puerto Rico. Not impossible, she granted, but with the benefit of hindsight it probably would have ended things sooner and without all that drama she'd put herself and Skyler through. Maybe even put Ben in jail where he belonged.

Where Jonah was headed now.

It was a long time before she was able to talk again. Katrina out-performed her self-assessment, comforting and soothing and subtly helping her get dressed. She started by running across the hall to her room for bandages because of course Madame Salutatorian had her own first aid kit, sensible-ass nerd-ass sexy-ass chick that she was.

She didn't know Katrina beyond the half-serious jeers people lobbed at her, which she absorbed and ignored admirably. Amy's sense was that they had next to nothing in common. She was there, though, and Amy could hardly tell up from down and she was so depressed she figured she might get on with it tonight and maybe she'd try fucking a girl before she did and Katrina was one who was always staring at Spencer like she'd fuck him if he even looked at her so you knew she was just so horny she'd say yes and—

“It's my little brother,” she said.

It was a give and take. Katrina wasn't wrong that emotional support wasn't her forte. (Not that Amy faulted her. It was better than Amy would have been able to do if she'd found Katrina having a meltdown in her room.) Amy would start venting, and Katrina would try to distract her from them.

“He's going to prison. My baby brother. In prison.”

“I think I stopped the worst of the bleeding.”

“If they charge him with grand larceny, Jonah could get a decade. More even, since the stupid *cabron* did it at a school.”

“Why don't I put that knife somewhere... else.”

“It's going to ruin his life.”

“Let's get you dressed. You'll feel better dressed.”

“I got fake tits to make myself feel like the whore piece of shit I am and my aunt who's been a second mother to me loved me too much to watch me flush my life down the toilet on drugs and stripping to stand for it so I said the meanest shit I could think of to make her throw me out so I could hit the flusher faster and now I can't even call her and tell her I'm sorry and go home and hug her because I'm no better than the guy who almost broke my ribs because I laughed for a second when he tried this stupid awkward sex position and he fell off the bed, but at least he never deliberately set out to hurt his family so much they'd never talk to him again.”

“Um, I really like that little sign thingy. Did you make that?”

Amy had fished that dumb wall hanging out of her box and had been holding onto it tight. It was the last thing of hers that her tía had touched when Amy stormed out. She let Katrina's non sequitur slide. Amy had been ranting and raving like a schizophrenic for hours, so she was due a subject change.

"Yeah. You can have it."

"I couldn't."

"Take it or I'm gonna throw the fucking thing in the trash."

Katrina nodded, set it in her lap committedly, and put herself back in listen mode. Amy was done venting though. She'd already said way too much. "No, I'm done. I'm sorry. You can go do your thing. I'll be fine. Thanks, Katrina."

Katrina didn't move. "Why didn't you want me to get Spencer?"

"What? I didn't... What?"

"When I first came in. I said I was going to get Spencer and you panicked."

"No I didn't."

"You did. I saw you did. Did he do something?"

Amy shook her head. "Do something? To Jonah?" She was so dizzy. How many of those stupid pills did she take? There weren't many left.

"To you. If he did something to you, you have to tell me. Do you hear me? You have to tell me."

Amy didn't know why she had to tell this girl anything, but she sounded very confident about it. "Something like what? What are you talking about?"

Katrina took a moment. Her eyes flickered like she was... computing, or something. Or maybe Amy was hallucinating. When she spoke, it was like she was presenting some kind of solution to a story problem. "You panicked when I suggested we invite Spencer. The self-harm on your feet, which explains why you do your morning routine in your underwear and socks so nobody will look and if they do there's nothing to see. The scarring that says it's been going on for a while. A tipped over bottle of oxycontin on your desk. Your panic attack a couple weeks ago on beach day that Tori told me not to tell you she told me about. And no, she didn't say what caused it so don't get mad at her. But she asked me to try to keep an eye and ear out for you since we're neighbors."

"Look at fuckin' Benoit Blanc over here," Amy said, forcing a laugh. *Deflection*, they called that in her psych classes. "How did you even see all that from the bed?"

"20/10 vision." Katrina did not laugh.

"Then what the fuck are your glasses for?"

"I get too much screen time and they have blue light protection."

"Oh."

Katrina got back to her point. "Anyway, add to all that your family situation, and... Amy, what I've seen in here tonight doesn't worry me. It fucking terrifies me.

You've obviously been through some things. If one of those things was being victimized by our RA, you need to tell me. I promise that I won't do anything about it without your say-so, but you *have* to tell me."

"He hasn't done shit. Yet," she added. "Don't worry, your precious golden boy isn't going anywhere."

Katrina studied her closely, like if Amy wiggled this finger or that, it might reveal she was lying. Amy made eye contact and delivered a scornful "see, nothing wrong" face.

"OK." She nodded slowly. "OK. You're high right now?"

Amy forced another laugh. It didn't put Katrina off any more than the last one. "Why, gonna snitch? 'Cause I was gonna share. Got me a fresh bottle of oxy for the evening, but looks like you're getting cut out."

"Come with me." Katrina stood up, held out a hand, the little wall hanging clutched in the other.

"Field trip time? Where we going? Oh, let's do the zoo!" Amy knew she was being a cunt, but it was better than being the weepy sad sack she'd been all evening. God. Jonah. Aunt Julia. Fuck.

No, keep shitting on the salutatorian. Safer.

Katrina dragged Amy along in her wake, but only across the hall to her own room. She sealed them in. "Oh, we gonna finally do this?" snickered Amy, flopping into the bed and half-heartedly striking a sexy pose. It felt too familiar. Strange place, someone she barely knew. Her pussy was already lubing up even though she was very sure she didn't want it. Whatever. Not wanting it was part of it sometimes.

"You're staying in here tonight."

"Oh am I? Fine, cuff me."

Katrina wasn't amused. "The label on your pill bottle said it had 30 pills and I counted 18 sitting out. You just told me it was a fresh bottle, and whether or not you were being literal I'm not going to risk treating it as a joke. 12 oxycontin pills means you're at risk of an overdose. Your pupils are so wide I'm surprised you can even see. You're a victim of trauma with self-harm. Now you're speaking semi-coherently, and you can still walk around, so for now, I won't force you to go to the hospital. I'm not leaving you alone in your room with that knife and those pills, though. If I have to cuff you to the bed, I will, but don't expect a kiss goodnight. Unfortunately, you're not my type."

"Somebody's a homophobe."

"I've lived on Higgins 3 long enough to admit I'd let a girl go down on me. But you're just a fucking basketcase."

Katrina allowed her smile to surface for a moment. Amy found herself laughing for real this time.

"Remote's on the... yep, you found it. Turn on whatever you want, there's Klondike bars in the freezer and kombucha in the fridge, help yourself."

The next morning, when Amy was sober, she accepted that the price of guzzling down two bottles of that kombucha shit to atone for the three Klondike bars was accepting Katrina's edict that she go to the health center and set up an appointment to see a therapist.

It had been over-zealous; they didn't really do walk-ins. By sheer dumb luck, they were able to get her in as early as that afternoon; Katrina cut class to walk her down there once again. Amy took a little offense at not being trusted to go on her own recognizance, but it felt weirdly good to have somebody set aside time to worry about her. Like Terri had. And Tori, the pushy fucking blabbermouth. And Quinn, who'd responded to Amy's 2 AM pitch-black selfie captioned *guess where I am...* with *did someone bury you alive or something...? wtf?* and then met her for lunch and hugged her and distracted her forming an almost unnervingly detailed plan to prison break Jonah. Amy would seduce the guards as a distraction, then Quinn would do most of the knifing.

How had moving to this stupid floor been the best decision she'd ever barely made?

So she saw a therapist. They didn't click. Amy simply couldn't feel safe alone in a room with the man. She'd been alone with men all the time at Jumping Jack's, but she knew exactly what those men wanted from her. When she knew all a guy wanted from her was sex, it wasn't scary. They weren't hiding anything, nothing behind those smiles but plain honest lust, nothing behind compliments and gentlemanly behavior but an earnest desire to rip her clothes off, slam her up against a wall, and fuck the shit out of her.

Katrina threw away her pills, deleted Lukas's contact from Amy's phone, and made her go back and request a woman counselor. She didn't like this one either, but part of it – Katrina said – was Amy's own refusal to let people help her, which was a bellwether of people who'd had their power taken away from them. A natural reaction when circumstances tried to make someone strong feel like someone weak.

There was a long weekend in there somewhere spent sweating and screaming and shaking and vomiting and shitting molten lava and finally accepting she needed to go to the hospital. Quinn checked in on her constantly, even violated her sanction against ever setting foot near Higgins Hall to drop off flowers for her at the center desk. Her fellow Hotties did the rest. It was pure hell.

She was functional again by Monday, and as weeks passed, she remembered her body, and how much she loved it. What it could do. Not just walking up to a pole and jiggling around, but it was strong. Fit. She had endurance and more power than a girl her size was meant to. A little spring in her step returned. She did a back-flip one day in the courtyard, for no reason, and stuck the landing. Amy hadn't done that since before Ben. It felt like she'd conjured fire out of thin air. She felt alive again.

Meanwhile, Katrina made her go back for another appointment, and it was... better. Not just rehashing her shitty life story, but actually getting advice. It would take more time to arrive at a thorough diagnosis, though Amy was told up front that because of her history of substance abuse, they couldn't prescribe her anything. The implication – basically calling her a drug addict – pissed Amy off and she cussed the lady out, stormed out. She'd only made it to the health center lobby when she received a text from the woman: "You're worth fighting for; don't give up on you. It took time to hurt you, and it will take time to help you. See you in two weeks, I hope."

Amy sat with that for a long while, heard nothing in her classes that afternoon. Just read it over and over. *See you in two weeks. Thanks*, she finally wrote back.

That night was another floor program. Amy usually went to them. It was something to do, and after reading about exposure therapy for class, she kept hoping that if she just spent time around him, in a safe place surrounded by the other Hotties, she'd make her peace with the guy's intrusion into her little paradise. Everybody was really excited about it. Massage night. Like they were going to dogpile on the guy and massage him until they all came on his face or something. Amy chuckled, reading all the posts in discord's #spencerthoughts about their little mini-fantasies for the night.

When she saw Katrina's door open across the hall, Amy hurried over and took her hand. The girl looked surprised, but pleased. "Hey, you."

"You want to be my partner for tonight, Miss Valedictorian?"

"I'd like nothing more. And like I keep saying, I was salutatorian, not valedictorian. Missed it by .02, stupid B+ in stupid AP calculus."

Amy tugged her in the direction of the lounge. "You're valedictorian in my book."

"Aww. Do you still have your knife, because that pickup line was so cheesy I think I might need to fend you off."

God, Amy was horny. Could she really...? Katrina was so...

Nah. Nah, that was crazy.

Maybe just once.

An hour of rubbing each other down in their underwear made her feel a lot less crazy about it. It was the horniest fucking display Amy had ever seen; if she could have charged admission for it they could have put Jack out of business.

(Not that she would. He'd been pretty cool when he found out she'd been handing out business cards at work for her site, and even pledged to it himself on her last day. He'd taken her into his office, and while she'd been afraid he was going to lash out at her, instead he just wanted her to watch him click the sub button. "Come back any time, Maritza." Not the worst guy, all things considered.)

Massage night got so fucked up by the end that Amy wondered if she'd found some more oxy and taken it without remembering, but no. It was just... nuts. She watched as one by one, her floormates descended on their RA and put their mouths and

tongues on his back, his shoulders. Some of them ditched their bras, or their panties, or even their whole-ass dignity while they watched. Casey had two fingers and a thumb at work the moment he granted permission for the whole salivatory affair; others joined in.

It was... hot.

For a moment, she thought she actually got it. A sisterhood of beautiful harem slaves, dressed per his command in next to nothing, drooling over their beloved sultan. If she weren't so goddamn horny, Amy would have run from the room screaming. Instead, she shook her head when it came her turn, only to be physically pushed by Casey. Faced with bowing out and demands for an explanation at how anyone could pass up the opportunity to lick some dude's back, or having a panic attack the longer she stood there psyching herself out, Amy hastily bent down and dragged her tongue over his shoulders. She gave Jacqui, underneath the beast receiving a tit massage, a little wave, and went back to shaking her head over the spectacle and trying not to touch herself. And failing, but less than most. She hadn't been fucked in days.

The party broke up. She and Katrina made their way back down to their rooms at the far end of the hall. "Do you want to, um, keep going?" she heard Lex ask Kyu-Ri.

Kyu-Ri grinned and let Lex draw her into their room. Jo, with the door shut in her face, turned back and knocked on her partner Addison's door. Nobody answered, but then Danielle came over and took hold of Jo's wrist, dragging the black-haired beauty into her room.

"Some people, huh," laughed Amy casually. "Getting all worked up over a little massage."

"And some licking," said Amy, laughing also, also casually.

Amy couldn't remember the next morning if Katrina had pulled her into her room or if Amy had instigated. What she did remember was everything else. Sober sex was *intense*. Not that it had started out as sex. They started by pretending they were still just massaging, like Lex and that horny exchange student had when they'd headed in to make out. Amy massaged first. When she got to the bottom of Katrina's back, she didn't ask, just tugged Katrina's boxers down and went lower.

She stopped shy of actually massaging her ass. Katrina was straight-laced, not some fucked up skank like her.

When Katrina's tongue joined her hands on Amy's own tight little derriere, she tensed in surprise.

"Is this OK?"

"No, it's good. You're good." Amy shuddered with pleasure as Katrina's teeth grazed her bare bottom.

Amy's body threatened to melt her bones into goo and ooze off the bed as the woman kneaded her ass. Bit by bit, she became more brazen. Less massaging, more groping. Those questing fingers drew closer and closer to her crevices.

“Do you remember Quinn? My roommate at move-in?”

Amy laughed to herself. “I think we all remember Quinn.” She didn’t know where this was going, so she didn’t bother elaborating that they were supposed to go out clubbing tomorrow night.

“So you remember how she said she and Spencer...? She told me she, um, put her finger...”

“Up his ass? Yeah, I heard.” She’d more than once watched the little piglet gross her out smelling the thing in memoriam, too.

“Yeah.” Katrina kneaded deeper.

OH.

Amy craned her neck to look back at her. “You can do any fucking thing you want to me,” she whispered.

It was a line she’d used with lots of guys, most of them pussies who took it to mean they could go “crazy” and fuck her doggy style, or some such vanilla bullshit. Really, though, the offer was to make everything feel safe. For Amy, blanket permission meant that nothing was a violation. It made all of the guys she’d let use her the superior of the man who’d never once asked.

Katrina’s finger slid right the fuck in, and it did it the moment Amy consented. It was electric. Her spine tried to curl the back of her head around into her fucking toes. Her neighbor’s free hand gripped a handful of Amy’s hair, and jerked her ear to soft, moist lips.

“Don’t you fucking dare come until I tell you to,” Katrina hissed.

Amy’s eyes widened. “Have you done this before...?”

Katrina giggled. “Nope, but it’s fun, right?”

Amy nodded. Carefully. It was a tight grip. “Don’t stop.”

The finger went deeper. “Don’t stop...?”

Mistress? Or please? Amy went with please. From what Katrina did to her next, it seemed to have been the right answer.

She met Quinn at her place the next evening. “My life blew up and I’m going to ruin your night,” she announced at the door.

“Right, you texted that this morning,” said her friend, pulling her in for a hug, then escorting Amy to her little closet.

“But first, I wanted to say I’m sorry.”

“Sorry? For what?”

“I should have believed you when you told me his cum hit the ceiling. Your ex-roomie is a fucking *freak*.”

She spent fall break in that closet. Amy had nowhere else to go. She could have afforded a hotel, but as Quinn, and Katrina, and Tori, and Charlie, and her therapist each individually pointed out, her mental health was in no state to endure a week and a half of isolation and boredom. Seeing everybody else going home to their families while she couldn't put her at major risk in the first place. It had only been weeks that she'd been clean and there had already been some days when she'd nearly relapsed. She would have without her friends.

She did try to reach out. It almost triggered another panic attack, but her brain settled for mere crushing anxiety instead. Amy texted Aunt Julia, *I heard about Jonah*. That was it. She had so much more she wanted to say. Her therapist had been a big help with thinking it over and prioritizing, assessing which of her misbehaviors weren't her fault and which might merit apologies and restitution. When the time came to press send, though, she'd been unable to open with the apology she wanted to open with.

You heard, did you? Glad to know his big sister won't forget him while he's in prison the way she did the last six months, huh?

That was as far as it went. No less than she deserved, but a lot less than she'd prayed for. She jogged from Quinn's place out to Bear Lake, the words echoing in her brain. Amy rented a paddleboat and took it out to the middle of the lake. Held her knife at the ready. Looked for Ursula, or her turtle friend. Neither of them showed up.

Still mulling it over, Amy called the number her therapist gave her and talked for half an hour with some woman somewhere. The reception was awful way out there in the middle of the lake, but the woman talked her down. Aunt Julia was angry because she'd learned to expect better from Amy, not because she'd given up on her. That was what the woman said, and she made Amy say it until she believed it. Just because it was true didn't make it easy to swallow, but it *was* true.

Before paddling back to the boathouse, Amy tossed the knife into the water and spit after the bubbles it tossed up as it drowned. Worst \$30 she ever spent.

Her friends returned from their time at home. Amy had been surprised by how much she'd missed them. She told them. She hugged them. And here she'd thought Charlie was going to be the clingy one.

Speaking of clinging, she and Katrina hadn't spoken of their fling after massage night. It was sort of a relief. It had been so exciting, but Amy wasn't sure she was really looking to go "gay for the stay," as Aunt Julia had jokingly warned Ben she might once upon a time. Much as she wished she could reject the whole male sex just to spite him, she liked cock. Or at least it's what she was used to. She thought she did, though. It was hard to think of one attached to a guy she wasn't afraid of or apathetic toward. Her therapist had told her that for a victim of so much sexual violence, that one might take some time, to be patient and find a good dildo in the meantime.

Amy decided she'd let Katrina fuck her again, if she wanted to. She liked Katrina. She knew how fucked up that sounded, but it was what it was. Apparently sex with people you actually cared about made it way, way better, cock or no cock. Who knows.

It was a relief to find out the housing department people were finally beginning to take the Spencer situation seriously. When she returned to Higgins from Quinn's, the head Higgins lady, Mrs. Tinsley – “Ramona,” she asked to be called, like she was one of the gang – had moved in right next to Katrina where the Two of the Three had vacated back in August. It was a relief to know someone was actually keeping an eye on him at last.

The whole week of midterms following his depredations at massage night, Spencer had been bouncing around instigating these creepy conversations with everybody. He'd invited himself to lunch with Amy and some of the girls right before break, started this weird dialogue about some kind of hypno-fuck app, point your phone at somebody and they'll beg you to sleep with them. Turn a person into a sex object, consequence free. Pretty misogynistic shit, basically “mind controlling” someone into sex. The metaphor wasn't exactly thinly veiled, either. *“Hey, girls, I know I've played the part of knight-in-shining-armor well enough you all want to fuck me, so no big deal if I just start doing it, right?”*

Amy played along the best she could to avoid pissing him off. The other girls were clearly ready to get fucked. They hadn't been with a Ben, though. They didn't know what they were signing up for.

After break it felt like ousting him was finally going to become a possibility. She knew most of the Hotties worshiped the guy, but absence had not made their hearts grow fonder. A little perspective had done a lot for them, it turned out. Tori had gone on the warpath on discord, making her case and trying to get people to align against him. The governor had grumbled about him privately at times, but Amy was relieved to see her very sensible friend coming back to her senses about the guy. Katrina had her concerns too, though she was less adamant about them. Katrina's massage partner/ass-playmate was quick to remind her how ready she'd been to believe that her precious Spencer had molested her. His reaction to hearing about Lex freaking out about her boob job... Jesus. (Happy with her own surgical results, Amy had been happy to provide a referral, but she was so relieved she hadn't gone all out like Lex had on her own.)

Amy wasn't political and organized like Tori, but she wasn't shy about sharing her worries. There was no getting around it – Spencer sought out vulnerable girls and seduced them one by one. Quinn, wide-eyed and innocent on her first day, whatever she claimed about having instigated it. Andi, the sheltered farmgirl, heart still bleeding from a break-up. Kyu-Ri, the stranger in a strange land. Jacqui, who could lose her scholarship if he wrote her up, pinned to the lounge floor, stripped and groped and

sucked on in front of an audience. Casey, the only girl on the floor who might have done more drugs than Amy, and with that inferno of a libido, missing her boyfriend and craving a man's touch. Terri and Toni, desperate for a gimmick to boost the profile of their stream.

Shit, when the pills had still been clouding her judgment, Amy had had some weak moments where she'd contemplated asking him to do a shoot with her for her site. She didn't think the panic attack from letting him touch her would be very sexy, though.

Her harangues had sold Katrina, and together, they pushed hard. Tori was relentless. She set her attraction to the guy, intense though it was, to the side, and made an earnest bid to ally the floor against him.

Day by day, it drew closer and closer to failure. Tori pleaded with Amy to share her story with the girls. Tell them how unsafe he made her feel. She couldn't. Too many people knew too much as it was, and Kappa Nu was only a four-minute walk from Higgins Hall. Tori claimed she understood, but Amy could see that it pissed her off. Hurt her, really, more than angered. So, as the "chokers" began to overwhelm their ranks, Amy sucked it up, and one night she crossed the hall and knocked on the door to 303.

Ramona answered. Amy had seen her around, and she usually dressed very crisp and professional. Seeing her hanging out in her jeans and a flannel felt weird, like seeing a teacher at the movies or something. "Amy?"

"Hi. Um, can we talk?"

"Of course. Is this something quick, or...?"

"Not quick."

Ramona nodded. "I thought not. Is here OK, or would you be more comfortable if we went down to my office?"

"Here is OK, I guess." She hoped.

Ramona invited her in, setting the room's two desk chairs across from each other and taking one, offering the other. The room was weirdly unfurnished. It looked like move-in day, except one of the beds was made, plain white sheets with a simple fuzzy blue blanket. A clear plastic box set with drawers, probably the same ones she'd bought from Target for Quinn to stick on her shelves to hold her clothes and stuff, held Ramona's food and sundries. That was it.

"So what's up?"

"I, um, wanted to talk to you about the situation with Spencer."

Ramona looked like she'd expected this. She licked her lips unconsciously. She must be nervous about the whole thing. "Go on."

"I don't feel safe with him in our community," Amy said plainly. "I'd like to see him replaced – fired, ideally – and have a woman put in charge."

Ramona nodded. Amy had a sense that this was a woman who had a great deal of practice at patient, empathetic nodding. Lord knows everybody had lost their minds about the ant infestation from when they'd been closed for break. The woman probably needed it. "I'll say up front that I can't in good conscience terminate someone's employment over a feeling. That said, I'd like to hear more about why you feel that way."

"Because I'm a woman, on a woman's floor, and he's a man, and he's slept with half a dozen of us? No offense, but you have to know about some of this at least, right?"

"I've heard rumors. Apart from the young woman who assaulted one of your floormates, nobody has come to me with any specific accusations of impropriety. At least, none in which a resident is the driving force behind the impropriety in the first place. I can't fire someone for *being* sexually harassed either."

The woman's accent was soothing, lovely even, but her message could go straight to hell. Amy had tensed at the allusion to Quinn, but she had to admit that yeah, the girls could be... aggressive. She'd been there while he knelt down and let them slobber all over him. When they staked out his room and touched themselves while he was having a date. These girls were undeniably *un poco loco* when it came to Spencer.

Ramona went on. "And while it's a sensitive situation, it's not entirely against department policy for an RA to engage in sexual relations with residents of his building, so if such incidents have occurred, those likewise aren't likely cause for dismissal."

"They're not? Because I heard him say the exact opposite, like fifty times."

More nodding. "Spencer was under a misapprehension. Obviously there would be a lot less drama if things were otherwise, but this is a residence hall, not an apartment complex. A certain amount of drama comes with the terrain."

"Did you know he's showering – routinely, like every freaking day – with Casey, the girl who ODeD last week?"

"I know who Casey is. I... heard that rumor also."

Amy folded her arms. "And you think it's fine that your employee is daily fucking the living shit out of–"

"Let's keep things polite here, OK? He's having consensual sex with a woman. If we ousted him for that, we'd be ousting half the floor. While we're acknowledging rumors."

She couldn't have heard about her and Katrina, could she? "It's wrong. It's gross, and it's... I don't feel fucking safe! How much more complex does it need to be!"

"And I respect that, but I'm still having trouble fully understanding why. We're all entitled to our opinions about sex, but I'm sure a sophomore on the dean's list doesn't need me to explain why we can't base employment policy around such opinions. Did Spencer do something inappropriate to *you*, Amy?"

"Well, no. Not technically. Wait no – he whipped his thing out in the lounge! Right in front of everybody!"

“Wasn’t that Casey who did that? I did consider whether she should be disciplined when I read his incident report, but she’s been through a lot lately and I didn’t want to be insensitive to that.”

That had been Casey, hadn’t it. Fuck. “Well, fine, I guess, but he’s said some weird stuff.”

More goddamn nodding. “Oh? What did he say to you to make you feel unsafe? Did he threaten you? Harass you?”

“I mean, not like that. He’s just... He held this floor meeting and passed these weird rules—”

“My understanding was that Tori was the guiding spirit behind those...?”

“—and he was asking around, like, for permission to have sex with more of us.”

“He asked you to have sex with him?”

“No! No, I mean, it was this ‘hypothetical,’ like ‘if I used some magic love-spell app on my phone, would you be cool with it’ or something. It’s been a few weeks, I don’t remember it exactly, but it was obvious what he meant.”

“I don’t understand. You’re upset that he’s having mature conversations or that he’s seeking consent?”

Was this woman being obtuse on fucking purpose, or what?! Amy growled in frustration. “I was raped, OK! There, are you happy?! Now can we do something about this or what?!”

The woman’s serene expression sure melted away after that. “Oh. Oh my god. By Spencer?” She looked horrified. Like she might vomit.

“No, not by Spencer, he wouldn’t—” Amy caught herself. What had she been about to say? “Some guy.”

The woman leaned forward. “At Lakeview? Recently? I’m sorry, I want to understand.” She sounded a hell of a lot more serious now.

“No. I mean, yes, sometimes, but like—”

“There were multiple incidents?!” The woman put a hand to her mouth in distress.

“It was my boyfriend! Ex-boyfriend. Do you know what it’s like to be trapped in a cage with a hungry fucking animal? Because I do. Whether the cage is a car, or a frat house, or your own fucking living room... You don’t know what it’s like knowing that at any moment, a man could snap his fingers and break you. Again. To feel like every time you hear someone knock on a door, it could be him, finally finding you again. To never know if a guy’s smiling because he’s a person, or because he’s playing you, trying to make you feel like he’s a nice guy but really he’s a wolf, huffing and puffing and blowing your whole mother fucking world down! To feel afraid *all the fucking time!*”

Amy realized she was on her feet, and that she’d been shouting. Ramona looked like she’d been punched in the face. Then she stood up, and right as Amy’s knees gave

out, she caught her, and helped her back into her chair, and held her, and swept her hair back, and let her cry and cry until she realized she'd told a total stranger her whole life story. Again.

Why did she keep doing that?

Except she knew the answer. Because these people kept... caring. Somehow.

It was late by the time they were done talking. She hadn't held anything back, and every time she'd come close to it, Ramona asked another question, expressed more empathy, brought her back to where she'd side-tracked. Was she going to be kicked out? She'd just told the head dorm person that she'd been doing drugs and filming porn right there in her room. Ramona promised that there were bigger concerns, though, that she was glad she was accepting help, and kept her talking.

"So can we fire him?" she asked at last. That was one point the woman hadn't circled back to.

Ramona looked... devastated. It was so much more real than that kind façade she'd worn at first. "Amy, I'm going to level with you. There are factors at play here that are larger than you know. The Higgins 3 staffing situation is... complicated. Extremely. I can't say more than that, but... What I'm trying to say is that whatever my personal feelings, I can't fire Spencer, whether I want to or not."

"But—"

"But what I can do, and what I'm going to do, is put in a transfer for you. You've been through so much, and you're still going through so much, and I'm in awe of how well you're managing in spite of it. Truly. But you don't feel safe, and you have too many things making you feel that way to keep you in a place that triggers you just by being here."

Amy shook her head. "No. No, my friends are here. I love it here. I mean, aside from that. From him. You can't. I won't go."

Ramona looked at her. Through her. Her head cocked side to one side, then the other, then back. Finally, she spoke. "You've been through a lot. Lost a lot. I won't be the one to take anything more from you. That said, my opinion, which you may ignore if you like, is that I think you should move. It doesn't have to be across campus. We have spaces on other floors here in Higgins. There's an open single on Higgins 4, in fact."

Amy had heard rumors that RA was even worse than hers, but she wasn't about to ask for another firing.

Ramona continued. "Think about it. Your feelings are valid, and real, and important. You don't have to decide tonight, or this week. In case you wake up sweating over it in the middle of the night a month from now and decide you need to be somewhere you feel protected and safe, I'm going to give you my number, and I want you to call me and keep calling until I wake up and take care of you. OK?"

It wasn't the answer Amy wanted, and she still didn't understand why he couldn't be fired. It wasn't the worst answer, though. "OK."

The walls closed in, and the battle was lost. Amy felt bad that she couldn't keep supporting Tori the way she wanted to, but there was no point rattling her saber once the woman said he was unfireable. She tried to tell Tori, but the woman wouldn't have it. If she couldn't force him out by legitimate means, she said darkly, she'd make him hate living here so much he'd leave on his own. Which of course rallied those choker sluts, like Katrina had said it would before she too somberly withdrew from the cause.

This, said Tori bitterly, was why people didn't vote.

A week or so later, Amy was surprised when she was picking up a package at the center desk and was greeted by Ramona, who darted out of her office with a purpose. There was that pencil skirt and silk blouse look. A proper boss bitch look. It wasn't for her, but Amy liked it as a style.

She asked Amy to come into her office. Amy was on her way from rather than to class, so she headed in. "Um, am I in trouble or something?"

"Trouble? Heavens no. Have a seat."

Amy sat.

"Since we spoke last week, I haven't been able to stop thinking about you."

"Um, thanks? You're pretty dreamy, too. Love the accent." Amy winced after the joke was out, but still chuckled a little.

Ramona smiled. "Don't worry my dear, I know my worth. But you know what I mean. I can't erase what happened, but I thought maybe I could try to help to ease your burden a little going forward."

"Thanks, but seriously, you don't have to go out of your way for me. I'm doing better, really." Never mind that someone had slammed their door last night and she'd had another panic attack in her room. Nothing as dramatic as some of the big ones, but the little ones were more than awful enough.

"Sure. But, um... Well, I'll just come out with it. There are rules – laws, actually – about college officials like myself and what we can and can't share with parents or guardians. Broadly speaking, the can't outweighs the can about a hundred to one. The hippies fought for their emancipation from mom and pop, and now their kids want back in. It's a mess."

"Well, good news, my mom is dead and my dad is AWOL, so."

"I called your Aunt Julia."

Amy blinked. "You what? Didn't someone *just* say something about a hundred to one...?"

"I... was circumspect. I called her to inform her that I had information about her niece. Which, um, is technically true, and technically doesn't actually share any information. She told me the two of you weren't on speaking terms. I said that was too

bad, and with a little of the old school gypsy trickery, I got her talking a little. A very little. But, without quite risking my career, I gave her an inkling about what an asset you've been to your community, but that I'm worried that you're struggling."

"You... what? Asset? What?"

Ramona nodded. "I've had ample opportunity to speak with your floormates. Including Spencer. Not to stir anything up, but just full disclosure. People had a lot of good things to say about you. They really like you, it turns out. Sort of the cool fun big sister of the floor. He told me you've been tutoring some of them with your friend Katrina—"

"He knows about that?"

"That, as a townie, you've helped show people around, make them feel at home. I checked, and saw you're excelling academically, you're a regular at floor events, and all that while you're grappling with everything you have on your plate. Which, again, is awesome, truly." She said "awesome" in that old school "inspiring awe" kind of way. The chick had a hot way of talking, for sure.

"So... what did my aunt say?" she asked.

"She mostly listened. But I did my best, without crossing too many lines, to impress how glad we are to have you, and how proud I am of you for powering through some things. She seemed... surprised? I don't know. You didn't tell me what she knows and doesn't, and neither did she, and nor would I ask. Anyway, I just wanted to suggest that you give her another try. I don't pretend to be a miracle worker, but... who knows." Ramona shrugged. "For what it's worth. I hope I didn't overstep."

"No. No, you..." Amy sniffled. Goddamn waterworks. "That's awesome. Thank you. I'm, um, sorry I yelled at you the other night."

"I'm glad you did. It's not always easy, managing Spencer and all you 'Hotties,' but I try to keep things from getting messier than they're bound to be. By the way, have you thought about what I said about the transfer?"

"Still thinking," Amy told her.

She was still thinking about it several days and several phone calls later when, once more, there was a knock at her door. Her friends should know better than to knock. They'd all seen each other naked and/or jilling themselves off by then, so why be shy. She stretched, walked over and peered out the peephole.

Spencer.

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck. Had Ramona told him what she'd said? Kaiden? No, they weren't friends. Quinn was sure. So here for Amy for himself. To collect her finally. Taken all her practiced smiles and phoned in don't-rock-the-boat flirtations she'd mastered practicing on Ben to mean she was his. Oh no. Oh god. Fuck.

Amy gritted her teeth. She thought about what her therapist had said about what Ramona had said. It had pissed her off, but... maybe she was right. Amy opened the door and deliberately yawned.

“Spencer? Um... yeah?” She tried to look tired. Maybe he’d feel bad, go away. Fuck. Fuck fuck. Don’t kill me. Fuck. Don’t panic. Don’t die. Don’t die panicked.

“I’m sorry, Amy. I didn’t mean to wake you.” He smiled that Benny smile of his. A mean kid smiling as he adjusted his magnifying glass over the anthill.

“Yep. Well.”

“I just wanted to touch base. It feels like we haven’t talked in a while, and I wanted to make sure you’re doing OK, that’s all. If I’d known I’d be getting you out of bed to ask you, I’d have tried later in the day.”

“Yeah, I guess getting us *into* bed is more your thing, huh.” Amy issued a sardonic smile. Inwardly, she was trying to keep her knees rigid enough to stay standing. If she weighed any more or leaned on it any harder, the pressure she was putting on the doorknob might break it off.

Again, she thought on that advice. What she’d studied. Leigh, pouting that he’d told her no, time and again. Charlie with her big wise heart and her unshakeable adoration. Level-headed, insightful Katrina, unable to completely write him off. Quinn, who had always insisted she’d been the instigator, the driver, and the closer of their hookup, no matter how much Amy had refused to believe her. All that she’d seen and heard and read about these girls throwing themselves at the guy.

He’s not Ben, she told herself. As her therapist had told her when Amy had failed to find any way to describe Spencer’s words or actions that put them in the same category. *He’s not Ben. You’re safe. This is your home. You’re safe. You’re safe. If he tries to kill you Katrina and Tori are right there in screaming distance and would take a bat to his head for you if needs be. And needs been’t. You’re safe.*

All that flashed through her mind. Somehow, her voice remained steady as she said, “You can come in, if you want. Sorry the place is a mess.”

She let him in. He played that sensitive nice-guy role of his to the T, talking about how he’d patched things up with Tori. Fat fucking chance; Amy had had to listen to a massive rant about how she was going to wreck his little pre-Halloween olive branch party collaboration. Hence why she’d skipped it last night. He talked, and in return she said words, roleplayed an Amy who wasn’t on the cusp of pissing herself in terror.

The last time she’d had a guy alone in her home with her, she’d called him Benny instead of Ben and for that crime he’d raped her body, broken her mind, and torn her life and her soul to shreds. She hadn’t known a single day’s peace since.

He’s not Ben. You’re safe. This is your home. You have friends. You have family. You have people who love you. You’re safe. He’s not Ben. Don’t run. This is your home.

Imagining him as one of the guys at Jack's helped. She imagined Seiji, waiting in the corner to roundhouse Spencer's head with that melon-exploding force of his. *You're safe. You're safe.*

He'd been sitting, but as he finished his spiel and Amy didn't immediately answer, he quickly crossed the room and closed the door. They were alone. Trapped. Fox and bear. *Fight. Run. Leave. Fuck. FUCK!*

No.

Amy took three deep breaths, like she'd practiced. Three more. Spencer sat back down and watched her for an answer. He was quiet. Patient. He didn't touch her. Didn't approach her. Gave no sign that he would. Kept his distance, in fact. He wasn't going to hurt her. He wasn't Ben. She was safe. She was *safe*.

And suddenly...

She was. Spencer might have no business being here, but... he wasn't Ben. He was just another guy, like the ones in her classes and the ones at Jumping Jack's and the ones subbing to her site. Like her brother. Fucking up left, right and center, but not because he was a monster. He was just a big dumb slut who sucked at responding to the on-going competition of three dozen sex-starved women who all wanted to jump his bones.

He leaned in expectantly when she didn't respond to his question about her welfare. It brought him six inches closer, but somehow, Amy didn't die.

"You said you put in a work order for those squeaky-ass hinges. Like, back in move-in week. But they're still loud as fuck." She pointed.

The simplicity of her response took him aback. "Oh. All right. I'll see what I can do. So... what else?"

Amy shrugged. "That about covers my gripes." Holy shit, was *he* nervous being in here with *her*? The guy looked like he'd been expecting her to punt his balls into his throat but instead got a poke in the tummy.

"Wait, that's it?"

She shrugged. Just a guy. Just another horny guy, helpless in the face of a bunch of horny girls. Jumping Jack's was a microcosm of the world, somehow. She did take the opportunity to chastise him for how he'd treated Lex, although, as she'd conceded to Quinn, "That chick was *always* busting those damn things out anyway. I know people got pissed, but like, whatever. Don't want guys to ask to see your boobies, maybe don't show your boobies so much." Didn't make it right, but it made it have a reason. She'd sorta forgotten the world could do that.

He waited for her to say more, to chew him out. He was like those guys her age at the club, terrified to be talking to a pretty girl. It was almost funny. "But... what about, you know, the sex, and whatnot?"

“You mean, do I hate living down the hall from a super hot guy who can’t keep it in his pants? Oh, woe is me.” Amy laughed as her flirtatious side emerged out of nowhere, crawling out of the grave. He looked like he was the one on the verge of the panic attack instead of her. “Just don’t get why you haven’t come knocking before now is all. I’m way prettier than most of these chicks. Just hate that goddamn door.”

“That’s it? Just the door? That’s really it?”

Maybe someday she would say more. For today, she’d looked death in the eye and told it to fuck off. She’d taken back her home. Sure, progress was never linear, and maybe the next time he came knocking she’d lose it. Today, though, she’d fought back, and she’d won.

“You say that like it isn’t fricking infuriating. Every time I come and go it’s like a gong goes off. Drives me *insane*.” They were just talking. Like he was another Hottie. Which, she supposed, he was. The guy was obnoxiously attractive. There was just something about him. Maybe she should fuck him and get it over with? Get to wear that hot little choker Terri and Toni had given her after they’d collabed on that photo shoot for their respective sites the other day, finally. That shit was so hot she sorta hoped somebody leaked it to Katrina.

Spencer laughed. “Well hold up.”

That guy from the center desk responded to Spencer’s call in minutes. All it took was a little WD-40 and the hinges swung open and closed as quietly as anyone else’s. And look at her, with two men in her dorm room at the same time! Such a stupid thing to feel badass over, but nevertheless.

“Are you coming to the party tonight?” he asked on his way out.

“Wasn’t the party *last* night...?”

“That was just the warm-up.”

Amy considered. She had plans this evening, but she’d probably be back in time. “Well I guess you got me feeling good and warm then, bud.” She clapped him on the shoulder on his way out the now-silent door and thrilled at the way he flinched.

“HAPPY HALLOWEEN!”

“Hey you guys.” Jonah’s head cocked to one side. “What the fuck are you wearing?”

She grinned at her brother’s face on her Aunt Julia’s phone. He looked like shit, but nothing to be gained by pointing it out. “Princess Leia, dumbass. From Star Wars...?”

“I know what Star Wars is, but... *Tienes cojones*, Amy.”

Aunt Julia gave her niece a sidelong glance. “Don’t encourage her, *sobriño*. She looks like another *puta universitaria*.”

“I look hot is what I look.” She’d bought the costume for the Kappa Nu Halloween party last year. She’d thought it would go over well, showcasing her obvious hotness, but Ben had thrown a fit. Then thrown a punch. She’d wound up skipping the party to ice her jaw. Later she’d find out that was where Ben first cheated on her with Skyler.

Well, fuck it. She’d bought the thing, and she was going to wear it. Admittedly, it didn’t fit as well as it had thanks to the boob job, but that only made it look better. She didn’t know what Lex’s problem was. Tits were hot. Revel.

“I wish I could screenshot this shit. I could trade it to the guys in here for a proper vape, you know?”

“You did *not* just say you could sell sexy pics of your sister for one of those fucking cancer gizmos!” griped Aunt Julia.

Amy laughed, even blushed a bit. The subject of her newest source of income was yet to be broached. She was pacing herself. In the meantime, she made a mental note to see if she could score a pic or two at the Higgins 3 party tonight and print them off for him. She had no doubt the girls wouldn’t disappoint.

The three of them talked for a half hour. That was all the more time they gave him. It was so good to hear his voice though, to see his face, even if only on a screen. He was alive, and he was fighting. His lawyer thought he had a shot at a decent plea deal that might have him back home before Easter. The food was pretty bad, he said, and it was pretty boring. And lonely, though he didn’t quite say that.

“I love you, Jonah. We’ll talk again soon, OK? I’ll visit, as long as you think you can keep the fellas off of me.”

“Yeah, well, don’t wear *that* shit or I won’t be able to do nothing for you,” he said, grinning. “I love you too, Amy. And you, Tía. Thanks for calling. Sucks a little less.”

They both started crying the moment the screen went dark, but they had each other to hold. It made her cry harder, but for once in her stupid life crying didn’t feel so bad.

“Come on, we better get down to the street if we’re gonna give out all that candy, *sobrina*,” her aunt said, dabbing at her eyes with a tissue and offering a wad to Amy.

Amy eyed the bucket of candy bars and peanut butter cups and stroked her chin. “Or,” she said, “we could stay up here and turn on a murder doc and get fat on it ourselves.”

Her aunt laughed, then hugged her again. “Sold. Turn on the Netflix, *chica*. They got a ton of new shit for Halloween. There’s this one about this guy, *le dio de comer su esposa a su schnauzer!*”

“*Por supuesto que es el marido!*” Amy started it, but they finished it together.

Amy made it to the party just after it ended. So much for Jonah's spicy photo. Ah well, not like the girls wouldn't give her a hundred more opportunities.

She passed Tori and Spencer in the stairwell, the two lugging a mountain of trash with them. "Oh. Am I too late?"

"Alas, yes. Did you have a good time? You look great, by the way."

Duh. "Thanks. And yeah, I did. Best day I've had in a long time."

Spencer smiled. "Same."

Tori made a very un-Tori whining noise, and Spencer nodded. "I'm coming, I'm coming. But yeah, Katrina's still finishing up in the lounge, but I think everybody else called it a night. There's still some snacks and stuff, if you're hungry. Help yourself."

Amy left them to it. Tori and Spencer, working together again. Strange, but Amy had long since given up on the notion that the world was supposed to make sense. Up in the lounge she found Katrina wiping down counters. They complimented one another's costumes, and Amy pitched in. She wasn't one to clean up other people's messes, but Katrina would have done it for her. Besides, her ass looked fine as fuck in a metal bikini and loin cloth, and maybe it wouldn't be so bad if Katrina noticed. She was in a good mood, and good mood sex was fucking *good*.

They were in the midst of shoving the furniture back into place when Amy noticed something and stopped, nearly tripping Katrina with the sudden lack of help on the other end of the sofa. "Fuck, sorry! Are you OK?"

"Yeah, just... yeah. These things are heavy."

"Sorry," Amy repeated. Then she pointed. "You put it up!"

Katrina followed her finger. "Oh! Yeah. I felt weird hanging it in my room, sort of. I don't know why, but... yeah. I'd sort of forgotten about it, but I stumbled on it while I was unloading party decorations and thought it was too awesome not to hang up, so I put it in here. I hope that's OK."

Amy was still staring at the wall hanging though. It was in pretty good shape, considering how many times it had been moved and removed. The ladybug was as cute as it ever had been. "I, um, actually made that on my first date with Ben."

"Oh. OH! Oh gosh, I'm sorry, I'll--"

"No! No, leave it. I like it."

"Me too." Katrina smiled in relief. "So, slave Leia, huh? Very progressive of you. You missed Shauna – I think she was trying to pull off the same, just with..." She held out her hands in front of her chests and made honking motions in reference to the girl's crazy gigantic boobs.

"It is progressive, actually. You know, my mom was a huge Star Wars fan. I remember she had me sit down with her and watch all the movies. Well, all the movies then. Tons more now. She was such a nerd about it, it was awesome. I was super into it

as a little kid, and I guess I hung onto some of that after she died. Anyway yeah, I saw this interview with Carrie Fisher. She played—”

“I know who Carrie Fisher is. I’m American, Amy.”

Amy laughed. “Right. But she was talking about how this guy came up to her after *Return of the Jedi* and got in her face and demanded to know what he was supposed to tell his little girl when she saw her dressed like this in the movie, how to explain what a powerful woman like her was doing in an outfit like this.”

“Carrie Fisher grew up famous and starred in one of the most successful movie trilogies of all time,” Katrina pointed out.

“So?” Amy tried not to sound annoyed.

“So, I highly doubt random dudes were walking up to her and demanding anything. It sounds apocryphal.”

“*Anyway,*” Amy went on, “he asks what to say to his daughter, and she just looks at him and goes, ‘Tell him someone captured me and forced me to wear it, and I didn’t like it, so I killed him. Then I took it off, backstage.’”

Katrina chuckled. “All right, your anecdote is sufficiently cool. Criticism rescinded, and you’re once again worthy of your sign.”

Amy smiled at it, then walked over and tapped one corner a millimeter upwards. Nice and level. In fact... She fished her phone out of the hot pocket she was wearing under the plastic-metal bikini bottoms and snapped a selfie of her standing in front of it, and sent it to Aunt Julia.

Her aunt responded immediately. *Damn right, sobrina. Pelea como una chica!*

Amy smiled proudly up at her sign. *Fight like a girl.* With her friend’s help, Amy picked up her end of the couch and got back to work.

END, PART THREE

Part Four: The Lesbians' Tale

Sydney crunched the last of her tic tac and slipped into the room at the end of the upstairs hallway.

“Is that you over there, um, Peyton?” It felt strange hearing this stranger’s name on her tongue. Good strange. It went well with the mint.

The girl slumped facedown on the bed grunted. “Ymm.” Her dress was disheveled, hiked up nearly to her waist. A pair of dark-colored panties were easily discernible. On *that* body, it was the first thing Sydney saw, even if the darkness in this strange bedroom kept her from seeing it well. As well as she would have liked.

Telling herself she was protecting this girl from anyone walking in and taking advantage of her, Sydney locked the door and crept over to the bed and sat down. The bedspread was cool, pillowy. She brushed Peyton’s thick veil of brown hair aside, revealing that heavenly face. Her eyes were open, but barely.

“Do you feel OK?”

Her eyes opened a little more, sought out the face speaking to her in the dark. “Yeah. Just... wanted to rest.”

Sydney was still brushing that hair aside, for some reason. She just didn’t want to stop touching it. “Yeah. That was... pretty wild out there.”

A thin smile touched the recumbent girl’s lips. “You dance good, for a harpy.”

Sydney, a graduate of Harper High as of that afternoon, nodded to the Douglass grad on the bed. “You dance good, too, for a ditch digger.” Neither were very good put-downs, but when you had two high schools in one town, there was no avoiding the necessity for hurtful nicknames. Better than middle school, when her fellow students of Thomas Jefferson – TJ, it was generally called – had been harangued as “toilet jockeys.” Meanwhile the Benjamin Franklin students received a decided advantage in acronymic put-downs.

For tonight, though, she had no pejoratives to sling. Their rivalry had died at their respective commencements, and right now, Sydney wasn’t interested in anything that put distance between her and this soft, gorgeous creature.

“Can I rest with you?” Sydney asked softly. It was an undisguised euphemism, though Peyton was probably too drunk to pick up on it. Two kegs downstairs, and this party didn’t have thirty people at it. It was nuts. If this was what college parties were going to be like, she was going to have to work on building up her tolerance.

“Yeah. Big bed.”

Sydney lay down as near as she dared. God, she was hot. No. Perfect. She’d struggled for years now, trying to decide if she was bi, bi-curious, unlucky with boys. No, Sydney was definitely that last one, whatever other labels applied. Dancing with this girl,

some friend of a friend's friend from her erstwhile rival, had sold her. She never wanted anything but that, ever again. The softness of her. The fullness. The way everything on her moved, sensuous and eye-drawing and tantalizing.

Had Peyton felt the same way? She'd acted like she was only teasing the boys, but so had Sydney. "Squeeze my ass until their eyes bleed," she'd said, dark eyes glittering in the light of that cheesy disco ball. If they'd bled, Sydney didn't know. She'd been far too focused on that ass.

The two lie there, staring. At long intervals, they dared to break eye contact, stare elsewhere, but never anywhere but the other. What was this girl thinking about? Sydney didn't know her from Eve. They'd shouted their names at one another, but with the music pumping so loud they could probably hear it for blocks, she'd thought Peyton was Hayden right up until she'd started asking if anybody had seen where Hayden went, and had been corrected.

Peyton. That was a hot name. Androgynous out loud, like Sydney's own name, but the girl bearing it brought all the femininity in the world to bear claiming it for their sex.

Sydney's hips were wriggling of their own accord. It felt like every few seconds she had to make a conscious effort to still them. Was it obvious? How long before Peyton realized what that motion softly disturbing the mattress was? It would be so embarrassing. *Hi, I know you don't know me but you make me so horny I can't stop rubbing my thighs together to try to work my clit.*

So... maybe she ought to kiss her before she noticed. It didn't make any sense, but—

Mmmmm.

Fuck.

Peyton's lips tasted like strawberries and cream. Imitation, though. Better than the real thing. Had she ever even had the real—

Peyton's mouth opened – just like that – and let Sydney's tongue inside. Another taste. Cheap perfume. *Her* perfume. Peyton had licked her neck once while they were dancing. The taste was still on her. Nasty, but it was on Peyton's tongue so she could give a fuck.

Or... fuck. Fuck fuck fuck! Sydney choked down panic. Was Peyton kissing her, opening her mouth to her, letting Sydney touch her arm that way – or was she so drunk she didn't know what was happening to her? Oh *shit*. She recoiled.

"Um, are you drunk?"

"Hammered." Peyton's eyes slid open slowly, like there were weights hanging from them. "You?"

No. She'd had one cup of beer almost an hour ago, then chased it with two Capri Suns she'd swiped from the refrigerator. "Um, yeah, same." If the girl got mad, or grossed out (*god no*), it would be some small fig leaf to hide behind.

They were back to staring. Though Sydney's hand still rested on Peyton's bicep.

"You can keep going, if you want," Peyton said after a moment. "So drunk I probably won't even 'member it."

Sydney really liked that first thing she said. So much she decided not to think about the second part so much. So she kissed her again. Those eyes slid closed once more, leaving her to wonder if the girl was passing out or simply enjoying herself. In time, though, she thought her lips could feel the curvature of a smile on the adjacent pair.

One arm was pinned underneath her body, but with her free one, Sydney explored. It was so different from being with a boy. Boys just wanted their cocks played with. Stroke it, suck it, ride it, she could take her pick as long as she didn't waste time on anything else. At least that had been her limited experience. Sydney liked to be touched almost anywhere. A kiss on the neck, a caress down her back, a palm on her butt. Even holding hands turned her on a little, if she liked the person.

She tried to think what she'd want Peyton to do to her, and did that. The arm first, because it was near and easy and safe. Her waist. Brushing her hair aside, first as a necessity since it had flopped back over the girl's eyes, but then because it was soft and a little sweaty and sexy as fuck.

"Eat my pussy," the girl said.

Sydney's eyes shot open. "You want me to...?!" Holy shit. This was making out, but *that...* That was like... actual sex. Like, lesbian sex. Hot, insane, secret lesbian sex.

"Maybe not as much as you want it," said Peyton, smirking. "But maybe you could change the score, if you're good."

"Um, OK," agreed Sydney. *Way to talk sexy, Syd*, she chided herself as she crawled down to the end of the bed. Thankfully, she still had another tool in her belt. Kneeling at the bottom of the bed, she reached behind her. The sound of her zipper falling was lost beneath pulsing of the bass through the entire house, but there was no missing her peeling this tight, slutty dress down her body, wriggling out of it and nudging it to the floor. Sydney might not be confident when it came to this, the first minutes of what she hoped would be a long and extensive life of lesbianism, but she knew her worth. She was fucking hot, and she wanted this girl to know it.

Peyton studied her with fresh interest, the way her body sat in her sexiest matching set of underwear. She'd gotten it for homecoming, a gift for her boyfriend, but he'd just torn it off and put his dick in her hand without slowing to appreciate it.

Peyton stared. Leered. The leer she'd bought this to inspire. Sydney held her pose, chest heaving in anticipation.

The girl on the bed raised her hips. Her dress drifted up over her panties, and she waited. *For me*, Sydney realized. Oh fuck. She was about to take this girl's underwear off. Oh, wow. She felt like her hands were shaking so hard she'd wind up scratching Peyton's soft, slender hips with her nails, but her underwear slid off easily. Sydney studied those panties. Gray cotton. Normal, non-sexy underwear. That was so fucking sexy. It was the sort of underwear Sydney wore when she was sure nobody would see them, comfy and casual and flattering only because her ass was indomitable. Peyton hadn't come here looking for sex, but Sydney had brought her to it. That was the narrative she told herself as she set them down and returned her full attention to the girl on the bed.

Her knees were bent, legs spread. Fearless. Her pussy, her ass, both right there, naked and available. Sydney had seen plenty of pussies before, sort of, but only in the locker room. She'd seldom even paid much attention to her own. She'd certainly never presented for her, spread open. Peyton's hips were still raised though, and she took that as an instruction to help undress her the rest of the way. Peyton helped, but Sydney was determined.

The girl still had a bra on, though. It didn't go with her panties at all, black satin that reflected the light filtering in from a street light outside. Sydney had never been much for tits, but most tits weren't this girl's tits. If she was going to do this, she wanted it all.

"Can I...?" She pointed.

Peyton smirked. "Ask me right."

Somehow, lessons learned from her stern sixth grade teacher kicked in at an odd moment. "I'm sorry. *May I*." Only then did she realize what she was being told to say, quickly adding, "Take your bra off. Please."

Peyton raised an arm, wrist arched up, and let Sydney help her sit upright. She leaned down and went after the clasp. It was surprisingly hard. Nerves, mostly, but such a different angle from taking her own off, and—

Peyton grasped her hair and roughly forced their mouths together again. With their tongues meeting, suddenly there was no rush. When the bra came off, it felt all too soon.

"Go on," urged Peyton. With agility beyond even what she'd showcased on the dance floor, she threw a slender leg over Sydney's head and fell back down to the bed. *I'm between her thighs*, Sydney realized. *My face is between the thighs of the hottest girl I've ever seen.*

And I love it.

"I've, um, never done this before," she said after she'd kissed her way up Peyton's smooth, sumptuous thighs. Their heat radiated against her cheeks, but it was a candle next to that inferno pussy melting her nose.

“I know. For tonight, just find my clit.” Peyton sat up, grinning down at her between the slopes of her own breasts. “Tomorrow, I’ll teach you to do it proper.”

Sydney stared, entranced, at the vagina before her. It was so fucking pretty. “Does, um, this make me, you know, gay...?”

Peyton propped herself up on her elbows so they could make eye contact. She was grinning ear to ear. “Girl, this is gay as fuck.”

Sydney smiled back in kind, and dove in.

“Are you sure this is a good idea?”

“Yes, but you obviously don’t, so... why.”

Sydney held out a needy hand. Peyton took it firmly, possessively. Mm. “I don’t know. I was reading about it, and there’s so much stuff online about how you shouldn’t room with a friend in college, how friends who live together in college wind up hating each other.” She looked down at her lap. “I don’t want you to hate me.”

Peyton sneered. “Why would I hate you, baby?”

“I don’t know. Because I’m too tidy. Or too messy. Maybe I get tempted and borrow some of your clothes without permission. Maybe I fart in my sleep! I don’t know! I’m just scared.”

Peyton slid the tablet back in front of her, taking Sydney’s hand and grasping her fingertip like a stylus. “Well if you won’t do it, I will.” She murmured to herself as she typed slowly, irritably, upside down. “P-e-y-t-o-n. M-o-t-a.”

Sydney kept her wrist limp as Peyton filled in the box for the requested roommate’s address. She had to check her email to find her student ID number. “Are we really doing this?”

“Don’t be such a baby. This is college. There’s going to be lesbians everywhere. If you’re lucky, maybe I’ll let you help me pick out a playmate for us once in a while. See if you can make those other bitches come like you make me come.”

Sydney’s thighs rubbed together again of their own accord. Peyton always seemed to make them do that. “Baby likes making Mama come.”

Peyton glanced up. “Don’t call me that. My mom is a fucking bitch. It dries me up when you use that word.” Her expression softened slightly. “But ‘baby’ suits you. Precious, innocent little thing.”

Sydney slipped off her sandal under the table and extended her foot between Peyton’s thighs. They were in a crowded restaurant, but so what. If they kicked them out and banned them for life, what did she care? In a few weeks’ time, they’d be at Lakeview together, and they’d have a whole new town of restaurants to get banned from for doing hot lesbian shit to each other. To think, Sydney had only applied as a safety school.

Everything was happening so fast, but that only made it more exciting. When Peyton said she wanted to go to school together, she'd abandoned any other plans instantly. Now, rooming together? Not just rooming together, but being *told* she was *going to* room with her.

"I love you," she sighed, wiggling her toes against the moistened crotch of Peyton's panties. "Can I call you that, then? Love?"

Peyton smiled. "I insist."

They stopped twice on the drive to Lakeview for sex. It was only an hour's drive, but the traffic was brutal. It stressed Peyton out big-time, but her baby was there to help relax her. At a gas station/White Castle, they went into the bathroom together, Sydney dutifully following her girlfriend into a stall and fingering her as roughly as she dared. Peyton tended to come loudly, and there was definitely someone else in there.

Forty-five minutes later, during which they hardly made it ten miles, they pulled off at a scenic overlook. Peyton led them to a picnic table in a shady little conifer grove. "Give me your panties, baby."

Sydney looked around. "There's people around! They'll *see*," she whispered.

Peyton didn't like it when Sydney balked. Or at least, she liked to act like she didn't like it. Sydney *loved* it. "Stand up."

Knowing it was a precursor to something probably really embarrassing but probably also really hot, Sydney obeyed. Peyton pivoted on her bench to face her, then slowly reached up under Sydney's dress and hooked her index fingers in the waistband of her panties. A thong – Peyton liked her in thongs.

People were definitely looking. Oh fuck. She pulled them down – but only so far, leaving them suspended around Sydney's knees, in plain view of everyone. "Everybody can see me!" she whined, which only made sure anyone in earshot not already looking, began to.

"In a little bit, we're going to be at Lakeview. I'm going to make sure everybody knows your pretty little pussy is *my* pussy. Everybody. That whole campus will know that Sydney is Peyton's baby. If you're not ready for people to know you're mine – if you don't think you can handle being out with me – then maybe I ought to just leave you on this bench and go by myself. I'll bet some hairy fucking thug-boy will be along soon enough, let you suck his wrinkly fucking dick for a ride."

Sydney frowned. "Don't say that, love."

"Then show me I don't need to."

Heedless of the stares, Sydney melted into her girlfriend's lap. *Her girlfriend*. Months ago, those words would have been unthinkable. Now, after the summer's

non-stop lickathon, she couldn't imagine *not* being gay. Ugh, to think she'd denied it for so long!

She kissed Peyton, stroking her cheek first, but as the girl began to show some enjoyment, her hand slipped down her shoulder and cupped her breast. Peyton was way more into breast play than she was. It was weird; with boys, she'd generalized everything her boyfriend did to all boys. Now that it was she and Peyton, she was realizing how unique and exciting every separate girl's body was.

"Can I still live with you?" she pleaded as Peyton stood up from the bench sometime later. As they regained a field of vision broader than one another, their audience quickly pretended that they weren't, aside from a dour-faced elderly couple giving them a scolding kids-these-days look.

Peyton grinned. "Oh, at this point it'd be too much of a hassle to replace you." She crooked her finger, and Sydney followed along behind her. Her thong slipped down to her ankles and she stepped out of it, discarding her underwear on the bedding of pine needles.

They arrived at Lakeview a short while later, maneuvering through the lines of confused, meandering new arrivals like themselves until they were parked behind their dorm. Higgins Hall. Sydney liked the alliteration of it. The pair emerged from Peyton's SUV, stretching cramped legs. All around them, other girls were in the process of moving in with help from their dads and brothers and boyfriends. The back end of their vehicle was packed to the brim; this was going to be a real chore. Not enough to make her regret forsaking men, though.

"All right, so should we start with electronics? It's freaking hot out here, so I was thinking—"

"Can we go to our room and fuck?" Sydney whimpered pleadingly. "Ever since you took me as your roommate I've been thinking about it, and now we're here, and I want you so bad, love, and I'll do all the rest of the loading by myself if you—"

Peyton put a finger to her lips. "All right, baby. Leave the boxes. It'll be hotter up there anyway."

Her lover took her by the hand and led her up to their room. She threw Sydney onto the bottom bunk, lunging after her, hands following closely behind her mouth. She tore off Sydney's clothes in seconds – except her underwear, which was now the trophy of the little brother of another Lakeview freshman whose family had paused at the same rest stop, a boy who'd very much preferred admiring the young couple's scenery to god's.

Sydney's sweaty body stuck to the bare mattress, first one side and then the other as Peyton flipped her so she could chew on her ass a bit before diving into her pussy. It had weirded her out for a moment the first time she'd felt teeth sinking into her butt,

but Peyton sold her on it without speaking a word. It felt so sexy to be so hot to someone that you transcended hotness and became *edible*. Her ass, a literal snack.

She lay there, basking in her lover's needful affections. Sydney had never thought of herself as a sub before Peyton. It was only that she'd never met somebody she wanted to submit to. It wasn't a formally recognized arrangement, but they understood it. The best was when Peyton proved her dominance just for sport. The fucking slutty little bikini she'd made her wear to the beach when she introduced her to her friends... just the memory of the breeze on her bare ass cheeks still made her want to get fucked outdoors again.

There had to be a lake around here somewhere, didn't there? She knew exactly which box that bikini was packed in.

Peyton's tongue didn't relent until Sydney was trembling so hard she had to beg for respite. Her lover – her *roommate*, mmm – didn't concede right away, of course, but Sydney wouldn't want her to. Peyton's way was to pleasure her until *she* felt Sydney had had enough. Sydney wouldn't have it any other way. The thrill of irresistibility was almost as hot as the sex itself. A hot little plaything Peyton always wanted to play with.

Peyton climbed up beside her and rolled Sydney's body on top of hers. (They had no way of knowing that they did so right where their RA had paused during his room condition reports to take a call from his mother. They hadn't turned the AC on until that morning, so, being alone on the floor, he'd lain there while his mother chatted his ear off, shirtless, for quite some time.)

"We get to do this every goddamn day, baby." Peyton pulled Sydney's lips to hers, repeating right into her mouth. It echoed into her ears from the inside. "Every. Day."

Sydney melted into her arms. No more nosy parents wondering who this random new girl was that their daughter spontaneously decided to spend every day of her summer with. No more curfews. No more making out in the back of Peyton's SUV in the dark and hoping nobody saw. They had this whole tiny glorious room all to themselves for an entire school year.

It was the start of a brand new day, and she hoped it never ended.

"I know. I hear you. It isn't right."

"No, it's not 'not right.' It's fucking *bullshit!* It was one thing when we enrolled so late they said they were sticking us on a coed floor. But then we get here, and 'coed' turns out to mean thirty women – thirty smoking fucking hot women..." She caught Sydney's pout. "None of them as hot as you, baby. You know that."

Sydney smiled, and nodded a request for Peyton to resume venting. Sometimes she messed something up on purpose a little – a *little* – just because Peyton fucked so *good* when she was mad. Nothing held back.

“But I’m serious! How big of a donation do you think his dickhead daddy made to get the school to set him up with this? I bet they’re naming a new fucking theme park after that turd-gargling gigachad!”

“Do you think that fight was real?” Sydney didn’t think it was real, but she knew Peyton would put it better.

“It was real like every cum my baby phoned in on some spaghetti noodle of a dick,” Peyton growled. Sydney *had* climaxed sometimes with boys – cocks simply felt good inside a pussy, not her fault – but she’d never tell Peyton that. “I mean seriously. He fucks that psycho chick on the *first fucking night!* Then, the very next fucking day they have a naked brawl in the shower, with him, just... flopping! and pulsing! My *ass*. And these fucking cock hounds around here are eating it up! Did you see that chat on the, um, what’s it called...”

“Discord,” Sydney offered, uncrossing and crossing her legs. She was already starting to get damp. Angry Peyton was such a short trip to horny Peyton. If that RA guy made her this pissed off, Sydney hoped he stayed all year, and popped in for another of his cheesy “hi how ya acclimating?” talks every morning, afternoon and night.

Peyton grunted. “I had to disable notifications, these girls writing fucking short novels, all ‘omg his peepee so beeeeg!’ *My* dick is bigger than that thing.”

Sydney nodded, trying to project sympathy, but that last bit finally broke her into a gentle grin. “I don’t know if it’s quite *that* big, love.”

Peyton dialed her snarl back a bit. “I’m just saying, a bunch of girls raving online about their *male* RA’s dick is fucking gross. It’s degrading.”

“I know. You’re completely right.”

Her girlfriend’s eyes narrowed. She didn’t like being placated, but she’d been ranting about it so much the past couple days that Sydney was a little more annoyed by the complaints about a boy RA than the boy RA himself.

Honestly? Sydney thought he seemed like a sweet guy, a teddy bear’s teddy bear. When Peyton had told him she and Sydney were girlfriends, the challenge sparkling in her eyes, he’d taken it totally in stride, like it was the most normal thing in the world. Sydney liked how it had felt, being accepted. She’d been nervous people would be crappy to her over the whole gay thing, but having an authority figure who seemed to accept them instantly and wholeheartedly had put her much more at ease.

And that video, staged or no, *had* been pretty damn hot. She and Peyton had watched it on loop while they’d made out last night, debating whether they’d rather fuck Leigh or Quinn. Sydney liked Quinn’s take no prisoners vibe, savage and commanding.

Reminded her of someone she knew. Peyton, however, always had an eye for pinup girl types.

They'd resolved the argument with a mutually agreed "both," then sandwiched their biggest vibrator – Sydney had dubbed it "The Elder Wand" – between their pussies and did their best to suck each other's cum out through each other's throats.

"I think we should put in for a transfer," Peyton said.

"What do you mean? Classes just started, love. It's too late to—"

Peyton held a finger to her lips. It was one of very few domineering acts her girlfriend perpetrated against her that genuinely pissed her off. At some point she'd have to say something – some point when she was out of arm's reach, because if Peyton decided to fuck her into submission she knew she'd wind up submitting. For now, she fell silent, and once more kicked that can down the road.

"Not transfer schools. Floors, baby. We wouldn't even have to leave the building. I was talking to that downstairs RA in line at the food court this morning while you were getting your beauty sleep. She said—"

"Which downstairs RA?"

"The, I don't know, downstairs one."

"The pretty one, the cute one, the hot one, or the goddess one?" They'd met the other Higgins RAs on the campus tour, and decided on those nicknames during the walk. They all lived downstairs from them, except for the hate-fuckable one.

"Goddess. Baby I was talking about dorm shit, not trying to pull her into bed."

Sydney retained her sulk. She was prone to jealousy, and she was jealous of that girl without needing a story of her alone, talking about who knew what, with Peyton. "Fine."

Peyton decided to finish her story rather than mollify her lover. "But she said she has an open room on her floor. It's a single, she said, but I said you and I didn't care, we shared a bed anyway. She said if they don't kick out Captain Dickstick, we can take our complaints to the head dorm lady and see if we can do it."

"But I like it here. We already made some friends here."

"It's been like seventy-two hours! We barely know them. Plus it's just a few flights of stairs anyway! Not like we'd be going to Canada."

"I like it here," Sydney repeated in a despondent mumble. She did. As someone who'd been too afraid to wonder aloud if she might be attracted to women in high school, going to college completely and totally out and finding a community so accepting of it? It felt too good to be true.

More anxiety than Sydney had ever realized she'd been harboring had melted away in Spencer's casual rule discussion at their floor meeting opening night. He'd been talking about guest and visitation policies. "We don't have any hard visitation hours here, so your friends, boyfriends, girlfriends, can stay over with your roommate's

blessing whenever you like.” Just like that, like having a girlfriend was no less normal. With a chuckle, he went on, “Technically the policy is that visitors can’t *sleep* in your room, so if you can find a way to keep them awake...”

The girls laughed, but Sydney had to cut in. She’d been upset over his offering of genitalia even before the meeting started. “What if your girlfriend sleeps over every night?”

She’d said it to throw him off, be edgy, poke a hole in his veneer of tolerance. And to let everybody know that pretty Sydney and her pretty kitty were *hers*. Mmm. He responded so quickly though, nodding to where she was holding Sydney’s hand, “Well then you are making a lot of Lakeview ladies very jealous, I’m sure,” that the girls had laughed, and Sydney and even Peyton had laughed with them. It was hard to be mad when you were being politely flattered. The whole floor, laughing at the quirky idiosyncrasy of a perk of lesbianism. A thousand pounds melted off her shoulders, just like that.

What if the goddess one’s residents didn’t feel that way? What if they had to go back to muffling their sex for fear some asshole would overhear and be a bitch? She’d been gay, or bi, or whatever this was for all of three months. However brief, that had been plenty of time to be subjected to Peyton’s educational lectures on the risks and hardships of the LGBTQ+ community.

The morning after that rant, for the first time, Sydney lied to her girlfriend. She told her she’d gone to the Lakeview housing website and filled out a form for them to transfer rooms. She had not. She wanted to stay.

“Aw, thanks baby.” She kissed the top of Sydney’s head.

“Do you think we have a real shot with the goddess one?”

Peyton laughed. “Gonna be an uphill battle there. Her boyfriend was with her when we were talking, some jock-looking dude. ‘Price,’ she said his name was. Fucking ‘Price.’ Got some blue collar dude job, drove up for the weekend to see her. Three whole-ass hours, which he made it a point to say twice in the three minutes we were chatting.”

“Isn’t this weekend like super busy for her? Spencer had a list of orientation stuff going on as long as these legs.” Sydney giddily stroked Peyton’s. Tall girls were so fucking hot. “What kind of d-bag visits when their girlfriend is busy working the whole time?”

“Fucking Price,” grumbled Peyton. “Thief of opportunity, murderer of love.”

The lie morphed as need arose, as lies will.

No, Sydney hadn’t heard back. OK now she’d heard back.

Why hadn't Peyton gotten any kind of email? Was Sydney sure she'd filled it out for both and not just one of them? Yes she was sure, she'd just filled out both requests under her login. Other people had put in for that room, so they were reviewing applications.

Could they talk to the dorm manager directly? Sydney already had, but the woman had simply said to bide their time, give the system time.

If there were over ten thousand students in campus housing, how could there possibly not be a space open somewhere? Um, Sydney stuttered, she thought they'd said something about prioritizing requests by upperclassmen over freshmen. Yes, *freshmen* was a bullshit word. Yes, she was impatient, too. Yes, at least this floor was pretty chill, RA aside. No, she still wanted to go if Peyton did. If Peyton changed her mind, though, she wouldn't mind staying much. Yes, packing again would be so annoying.

No, maybe Spencer wasn't the worst thing. Bottom five, maybe, but not the absolute worst.

Yes, they'd said they could cancel their request at no fee.

Meanwhile, true to her promise, Peyton fucked her every single day. Sometimes she almost felt like it was too much, constantly being touched, fondled, kissed, licked, sucked, used. Not that she didn't love it, but surely there was some objective upper limit? She wasn't supposed to still be horny after coming her ovaries out three times in a row, was she?

But Sydney always found she was still horny. She'd never been so in love. She'd never been this happy, and as she and her love celebrated her nineteenth birthday with nineteen world-altering orgasms, she suspected she might never be again.

Higgins 3 was paradise, and Sydney got to live there with a woman who made her toes curl on cue. She never wanted to leave.

"Pass."

Peyton gaped, then swiveled the mouse wheel, zooming in on what Sydney had already acknowledged were a fantastic pair of tits. "Seriously? Jo? *Pass on Jo?*"

"She seems... selfish." Sydney wrinkled her nose. "I dunno, she just gives me a vibe, like we'd lick her until she couldn't close her legs again for a week, and then..." She giggled. "I guess she couldn't walk like that, but I dunno, she could maybe crawl away. And then not even blow a kiss behind her. You know?"

"Man. No wonder you were a virgin lesbian when I found you. All right, swipe left on Jo."

Sydney nestled deeper into her lover's lap, keeping her tits right at mouth level. Peyton clicked to the next image, but gave her a little lick in recognition of how much

she liked Sydney recognizing that Peyton loved her tits. To think, she'd been uncomfortable when guys used the term "tits." But with what they did to Peyton, she had to concede, "tits" was fucking tits. She'd contemplated taking "titties" out for a spin, but there had to be a line somewhere.

"Laura...?" Peyton sneered. "Why the fuck is she in here?"

"You said, one of everybody on the floor, love. You said." The slide was set to random order so they didn't get to thinking ahead alphabetically or by roommate. To focus on one Hottie body at a time.

"Yeah, well. Swipe left, next." She clicked; the next shot brought up a bikini pic. Peyton had asked her to find flattering photos, so bikinis were well-represented. Just about every girl of their caliber had at least a few bikini pics somewhere in their socials, even the ones who acted like they were above it like that girl Toni a few rooms down who always acted offended if somebody brought up something from the Higgins 3 discord. Still, abundant bikini pics or no, Sydney had slipped some sexy dresses and booty shorts into the mix. This particular shot was one of the more top-heavy girls, weighty tits oozing out of a bikini top she'd long since outgrown.

"Danielle. Hmmm. Danni, Danni, Danni." Peyton studied the image, then zoomed in and panned around, looking for flaws. Sydney doubted she'd ever find any detail that might sway her vote. It just made her horny to look at them. Sydney could hardly blame her. She wasn't sold on her girlfriend's conspiracy theories of how this much prime girl-flesh landed on the same floor, but she wasn't going to look this gift horse in the mouth.

Danielle, though... "She's got kind of an RBF thing going on."

"Yeah, I see how you mean, though I think it's just the light."

"No, I meant like all the time. Every time we cross paths it's like she's thinking something petty and judgy about me."

"So a pass for you on Danielle, huh?"

"No! No, I actually kind of like that. Like, she looks like you'd make her come and it would explode that bratty look right off her stupid face. Smash."

Peyton smiled. "You're such a bad little bitch, baby. God I fucking love how that twisted brain of yours works."

Sydney bent down and licked up Peyton's neck until she hit mouth, then kissed her hungrily. This game was making her insanely horny. More so than usual. It felt like ever since they'd gotten here, her pussy never stopped rumbling for more. "Back at you. How 'bout you? Danielle: go."

"Eh, smash. For you."

"We promised! No voting just to make the other happy."

Peyton nodded. "Sorry. Fine. Pass. She's fine, but... meh."

“Next!” she clicked. Kyu-Ri. Kyu-Ri hadn’t had any swimsuit pics online; Sydney had gotten the sense that she was rather modest, at least in what she posted. The picture was her on a bridge somewhere, probably back wherever she came from since all the comments were in those incomprehensible squiggles. A turtleneck, not especially tight but what could possibly be loose on that frame. She was making a dorky face, her eyes crossed and her nose and mouth scrunched in an ugly way.

“Smash,” the girls said in unison, laughing and fondling and sucking each other’s tongues.

Next up was Nikki, her picture showing her playing chicken in a swimming pool with some friends. Not as clean a shot as most she’d put in the folder, but Sydney had wanted a little variety, not just a bunch of hot girls looking hot in the same hot pose. Double smash. Peyton for Nikki’s “lesbian vibage,” whatever that meant, and Sydney because Nikki had let her borrow this super hot top for a party they’d gone to at the Kappa Nu house last weekend.

Shauna, clad in a tight white sleeveless top that clung to her chest like a second skin. Smash, no discussion. Talking about all the things they wanted to do to Shauna had been what had started this whole game in the first place. Sydney had dubbed it “fantasy fuckball.” Her dad was fanatical about the football edition. Peyton thought it was too butch, but Sydney kept pushing the term when she had her love good and horny. Peyton was much more agreeable mid-coitus.

Peyton clicked for the next shot as her fingernails traced up and down the soft skin of Sydney’s back. When they saw who it was, her fingers froze, nails suddenly digging into Sydney’s skin. “What the fuck is this.”

“You said, *everyone*. He’s part of everyone.”

“He’s a fucking *he*.”

The image of Spencer on the screen was a still from that video of his “staged” – Peyton never let Sydney refer to it without including “staged” – shower fight. The video quality had already been reduced to accommodate the discord file size maximum, and the screenshot was even worse. Still, no mistaking those glistening pecs, that turgid rod frozen mid-swing between leanly muscled thighs. She’d almost gone with one of the scores of AI-generated shots the girls had uploaded, inspired by that day. Leigh had shared some really hot ones, plainly inspired by her own perspective looking up at that cock thrust forth proudly above her. In the end, though, she’d settled for a pic of the real thing. Not like he was a viable contender for smashing, but Peyton usually rewarded strict obedience. Sydney liked being rewarded.

“So... pass, for you.”

“No, not pass for me,” Peyton snapped. “Pass means I’ve thought about it and decided no. I don’t even need to think about *that*. Are you trying to suggest something Sydney?”

Sydney. It felt like she hadn't heard Peyton say her real name in weeks. "No, love, I swear I was only—"

"Because if you miss being penetrated so much, we can go back to the frat house, let those sasquatches run a train on you. Sound fun? Cock cock cock, dick dick dick. Yeah? That what you want?"

Sydney eased off of her girlfriend's lap and down to her knees. "What? No! Peyton, I didn't mean anything! I know you like to blow off steam about him is all, and—"

"Of course I blow off steam! He's a man, lording over a floor full of girls. Fucking *hot* girls, girls like us, like some fucking medieval baron going all prima mother fucking nocta!" Peyton shot to her feet, the chair skidding backwards. "But here's a question: why is it I'm the only one with anything to complain about where this jagoff is concerned?"

Sydney shook her head. "What do you...? I don't..."

"Damn right you don't. Just admit it. I won't be pissed, but I want to hear you say it."

"Say what?"

"Say you miss guys! Say you want to drag that big, purple, veiny man-dick into *our* fucking bed!" It was hard to use a mouse wrathfully, but she did a decent job of it, zooming the shot in on Spencer's cock, in and out and in again.

Sydney started to cry in spite of herself. "I don't! I only want you, Peyton, I swear!"

Like that, they were somehow fighting. This was their first real fight. They disagreed all the time, argued occasionally, sometimes passionately – but never over anything important. Never over something Sydney wasn't grateful to get to lick her way back into Peyton's good graces. This was different.

"No, it's fine. Let's go ask him! Hey, stud, wanna put a couple lesbian notches on your bedpost? Because damn, I bet those are hella braggable down at the lodge. Let's not even bother getting dressed, you know? Really sweeten the pot for him, see if you can't score yourself a little pity fuck!"

"Why are you being like this?" Sydney moaned. "I love you – I only want you, just you, I love you..." She rambled on between sobs.

"You love getting your fucking cunt stuffed! I was a fucking vacation for you, a little break from the dickheads at your high school. But hey, we're in college now, so I guess it's time to trade up, yeah?! You fucking backstabbing—"

There was a knock at the slightly ajar door – Peyton's idea; easy recruiting for anybody who overheard their game transpiring and took interest – but it wasn't nearly loud enough to interrupt Peyton's vitriol. "Whoa, hey ladies, what's going OH SHIT

sorry sorry sorry!” Spencer’s voice, however, did the trick. Seeing the girls naked spun him about. He blushed easily, for an alleged fuckboy.

“You want to ask him, or should I?” Peyton thundered coldly. Sydney was beyond words, weeping openly. Peyton pushed past him, heedless of the way her breasts brushed against his chest as she forced her way into the hall.

Spencer stared between the two for a moment. “Sydney, are you all right?”

She shook her head. “*NO!*” she whined piteously.

“Hey, why don’t you throw on some clothes, and... let’s talk. I don’t want to get involved in a lover’s quarrel, but... um...” Suddenly he noticed the dick filling Peyton’s monitor. There was no sign he recognized it as his own, though, and there was nothing in the background to provide context for what looked to be low-grade porn. “Whoa. Sorry. Um, but yeah, why don’t you and I—”

“*GET OUT!*” Sydney didn’t want to be mean to him. Still, right now she was naked and alone in a room with him, and all she wanted was to make Peyton believe that that was the last thing she wanted. Sure, he was plenty hot, and sure, she hadn’t forgotten the allure of men when she first made love to a woman. Sydney had, however, forgotten anyone else but her Peyton.

She darted past Spencer even as he stumbled back into the hall. A moment later she found Peyton, huddled on the floor in the corner of a shower stall. The water wasn’t even running, except down her cheeks. Sydney had never seen her cry before. She seemed so strong, so fearless, that seeing her peering up at her through bleary eyes in the gap between her knees...

Sydney rushed down beside her and threw her arms around her. “I’m sorry, love. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

Peyton tolerated the hug for a moment, then melted into it and reciprocated it with twice the intensity. “No I’m sorry. You’re so good and perfect and, and good, I’m sorry baby, don’t leave me baby...”

It was Sydney who first recovered enough to realize they were cold and naked and didn’t even have towels. She resolved the cold issue first, turning on the water and helping Peyton stand, holding each other under the steamy stream. Peyton was still crying, hard, so it was again Sydney who tasked herself with solving the towel problem. She kept her ears perked for the arrival of someone, anyone. She finally heard someone latching the adjacent stall. Peyton didn’t react, but right before she could check who it was and if they might be willing to do a favor, the third and final stall door latched audibly.

“How traffics the riff raff, homie?” It could only be that stoner chick, Casey. A split smash/pass. She’d tried to sell them drugs the second day they’d been here. Sydney didn’t like living down the hall from a drug dealer but Peyton was a sucker for anything blonde with huge tits. (Not that dark-haired dark-skinned B cup Sydney was threatened.

Her love made sure she knew where she stood in the rankings. First pick in fantasy fuckball, every time. It was part of the game, now.)

The occupant of the third stall had been addressing the prior arrival, though. “Uh, what...?” Spencer. Crap. Had she been lurking in here, waiting for him to come shower? Heck of a coincidence otherwise, arriving together like that.

“You were checking on the lezzie squabbles, right? They fight loud for such a fine-ass couple.”

“Casey, sometimes couples argue. Nothing wrong with that, and I hope everybody on this floor knows I’m happy to help them work through any troubles they might be having – or if I can’t, then I’ll find someone who can.”

Sydney frowned. Great. An answer that delicately crafted meant he knew damn well they were in here. Not a hard guess, she supposed, two naked girls storming off the way they had. Not like they could go finish their argument sharing fries at the food court, not without clothes. Still, it was sweet of him to pretend otherwise. Peyton, however, glared through that divider between their showers.

“I got some troubles you could come help solve, homie,” Casey teased.

“Slut,” mumbled Peyton, her voice soft enough to reach Sydney’s ears alone. “Change my vote to pass.”

There was nothing to do but wait it out. Sydney didn’t mind. She wanted to be held, and to hold, and to never let go. Peyton had some trust issues; Sydney would prove that she was deserving.

So they stood there, soaking, breathing in the thick mist of the triple-occupied shower area, the steam as it melted off of Spencer’s body and carried what it carried into the air, into their lungs, into their bodies. For his part, he was playing a waiting game with Casey, who in turn was bidding her time for him to make his exit. They showered side by side for over half an hour, breathing in, and out, and in again.

It was Sydney who finally put an end to their little game of shower chicken. “Let me take you to bed and show you you’re the only one I’m gonna smash, love.”

“I’m sorry. Smash me, baby.”

“OK, next question... They write, ‘Is “gay for the stay” a thing?’” Spencer’s ex-girlfriend nodded. She did that for all the questions. Unfold it, read it, laugh a little if it was meant to be funny, but always the nod. It signaled she was thinking. Whether it was a deep question – “*does the morning after pill always work, and are there long-term side effects?*” – or more of the frivolous and nosy questions about Spencer – “*did you ever get him to do any cosplay, and if so, of what?*” – this woman gave real answers.

Sydney had been drawn in by her early in the process. Her hand had been shaking when she wrote her question, folded it and put it in with the rest. It was anonymous, but a lot of the girls had been pretty obvious when theirs came up. Others had just asked questions that made it clear. (“How are Spencer’s feelings about the women of Asia?” and “Is constant, casual nudity something you two ever tried?” asked Kyu-Ri and Lex respectively.)

Sydney was glad she’d taken the small risk of asking a hard question. The girls looked around, wondering who had asked. Plenty started with her and Dawn, the two known lesbians among them, but the question sounded more bi-curious, so as Marisa began to answer, there was no sense of people watching for her reaction.

“Right, great question. So we’re getting a little bit into the whole LGBTQIA area here. Some of you have probably been in that area for a while, I bet. You might have heard people talk about sexual preference as a spectrum, like some people are a hundred percent gay, some a hundred percent hetero—”

“Heyo,” called out Sammi, earning a rebuking look from Spencer.

“And then there’s this sliding scale in between where most of us are. Now, thinking of it as a line is reductive in a lot of ways,” Marisa went on. How many times had she used the word *reductive* tonight? It felt like a lot. “Like if I were *here* on the line, I’d hook up with a girl, but if I just scooped over a smidgeon to *here*, I’d be dtf with her fat friend, too.”

The girls laughed. Hooking up with fat people! Hilarious. What had ever happened to the Three? Sydney didn’t see any of them here.

“But there’s a lot more to our sexual identities than just sex and gender. Things that turn us on irrespective of those things. Raise your hand if you’ve ever slipped into a nice hot bath and felt turned on.”

A few hands went up. Sydney’s was one. She loved the feeling of wetness. One time that summer, Peyton had fingered her in the community pool, all sneaky like, and even with the dread of all these people noticing, those droplets Peyton sprinkled across her chest and shoulders, even cold, had felt divine.

“Hard one, but hashtag safe space,” Marisa went on. “Raise your hand if you’ve ever felt a little turned on petting your cat? And I’m not being euphemistic here; I mean four legs sixteen claws mew-mew-mew cat. Anybody?”

Kyu-Ri raised her hand, but she’d raised her hand in every single question Marisa asked. Sydney wasn’t convinced she was following it well enough to know what she was responding to. She seemed to be having fun engaging, though. Sydney had heard Dawn and some of the girls were tutoring her in English. She’d been kicking herself for not thinking of it first. Peyton was still dead set on that international threesome. Sydney wished she were here tonight.

Marisa flashed a knowing smile. “All right, we’ll pretend it’s just the one. If you wanted to raise your hand but felt weird about it, rest assured you’re not a weirdo. The brain doesn’t do the best job disassociating our feelings and expressions of physical love for a cat, and for a person. Likewise, it tends to process smallness, softness, reciprocity of affection in a similar way it might to, say, a gentle pat on the shoulder from a boy we’re attracted to.

“Coming back to the question at hand, my point is that our sexual appetites are always fluid. You find me a woman who says she’s craved her husband’s touch alone since the day they met, and I’ll show you a lady who’s gonna be the first one to catch the clap in the nursing home once dear Winston has passed.”

She eyed the crowd of awkwardly giggling Hotties. “Take a moment, imagine the first person you remember being attracted to. A celebrity, your fifth grade teacher—”

“Our cat,” interjected Kendall to broad laughter.

“Boopsie, sure.” Marisa grinned. “Now raise your hand once you have the person in mind. First person to really get you turned on.”

Sydney thought. She wanted to be romantic about it and tell herself she’d never really known what lust was before Peyton, but truthfully, there had been plenty. She picked one and put her hand up.

Once most of their hands were up, she went on. “All right, now keep your hand up if you’re *still* attracted to that person.”

Every hand went down. Even Kyu-Ri’s. Sydney suspected that, like her, they’d been imagining someone from a very different stage of life. Hers had been a kid she’d sat in a desk cluster with in fifth grade. Every day when the class came in from recess, he rushed ahead so he could pull out Sydney’s chair for her. Such a stupid, wonderful little gentleman.

“Right?” said Marisa. “My point is this. Tastes change. What feels incredible to us today might hold no appeal at all in another decade. ‘Gay for the stay’ is just a very visible example, and for many people a tricky thing to wrap their head around. Like if you kiss a girl, and you like it, it’s somehow changed something about you. Which, to be fair, it might. But it also might just be that you really had a connection with someone and their sex played no role in that feeling. Your mood, a pretty fall day, the arrangement of the stars in the heavens, a woman on the Lakeview Dance Team heel-toeing down the sidewalk in front of you in skinny jeans – factors aligned to create a response.”

“My advice, as always, is to experiment, explore, and give yourself freedom to tell Robert Frost to go fuck himself and go back to where the path split whenever you want. So sure, gay for the stay is absolutely a thing.”

Spencer chimed in, something he had generally not been willing to do as the girls used this exercise to probe his own sexual history, repeatedly, relentlessly. “And while I

hope we're creating an inclusive, supportive community here, if you're struggling with urges or feelings—"

Casey interjected. "Oh I'm strugglin', homie. Big damn feelings over here, and some hella urges." Sammi and Lex high-fived her on either side as the girls cackled.

"Hysterical. But seriously, Lakeview has support for you, and so do I. Talk to me." He cut it there, gesturing to invite Marisa to draw another question.

A short while later, Sydney returned to her room. Lots of girls had stayed in the lounge to giggle and gossip over Marisa's myriad salacious revelations about her ex-boyfriend. The question about whether or not a penis could be so big it hurt had been a particular hit; they seemed pretty excited to be told that yes, since their pussies were also designed to eject a freaking baby, they could all almost certainly accommodate a cock like Spencer's. (That was, she noted, reductive, and she hadn't put it exactly that way. Not quite.)

Peyton was sitting in bed, textbook in her lap and a notebook in hand. She didn't look up. "Have fun? I could hear you all giggling and gasping from down here."

Sydney sat down across from her and said nothing, waiting for Peyton to look up. Peyton could sense it, and like any other time Sydney was trying to get her to do something, it made her dig in her feet. It was minutes before she finally gave in.

"What."

"You have to be a little nicer, my love." Sydney's voice was quiet, but firm.

"What, your boy and his pet slut didn't like my question?"

"No, he didn't. And I didn't. I don't think 'Hey Spencer, did you ever want to fuck a dyke' was a productive discussion topic."

Peyton smirked, though Sydney saw a tinge of regret in her eyes. "Well, did he? Asking for a friend."

"He just made this awful sad face and didn't answer. Marisa – that was her name, not 'pet slut' – tried to say a few words, but it was just awkward for everybody. If it makes you feel better, I think most people thought it was Dawn's question, and she looked incredibly embarrassed."

There went the smirk. Good. "Shit. I'll talk to her. I didn't mean to... shit."

"These are our neighbors and our friends, love. We decided to stay, so we need to accept the whole situation. Neither of us like the boy RA thing as a concept, but I'm telling you, he's not a monster. Maybe he's kind of a man-whore, sure, but the way half these girls hit on him day and night, I can't believe he hasn't slept with a dozen of them yet."

"That you know of."

Sydney gave her a dubious look. "Really? You don't think *these* girls would be crowing about hooking up with him at the top of their lungs? They'd be pausing to take selfies mid-coitus just to brag on the Haven. Which I know you say you don't pay any

attention to, but you know I'm right. Do you think if he really was some lowlife, he wouldn't have slept with Casey? Or Leigh? Or Charlie?"

"Like the blondes, do you," muttered her light-brown-haired girlfriend.

"You have to be nice," Sydney repeated. "This is our home now. We've been in here fucking like little interracial lesbian bunnies for weeks, with these thin-ass doors and thin-ass walls, and has anybody said or done a single thing to complain or criticize or even tease? These are really nice people, and this a really nice place. I like it here. I want you to like it here with me."

"It's... not right," Peyton insisted sullenly after a moment.

"You know what I think?" Sydney scooted closer, took Peyton's hands in hers. "I think you like him, and you don't like that you like him."

Her girlfriend's eyes blazed at the accusation. "I do *NOT*—"

But a gentle pressure from Sydney's hands compelled her silence. "Sometimes you forget to be mad about it. Like remember when he did that roommate agreement thing? And we were laughing, he joked about how with us it was almost more like couple's therapy? Oh my god, that one question about having opposite-gendered overnight guests – you freaking lost it, remember?"

In spite of herself, Peyton laughed. It had been so absurd, sitting there, lesbian as hell with her lesbian-leaning bi girlfriend, discussing with this anomaly of an RA about how they'd feel about having a boy over. Practically an SNL sketch.

"You wear that anger like armor, love, but I'm telling you, you don't need it here. It's safe. *We're* safe. I know, safe isn't what you've known. I know people have misunderstood you and judged you and hurt you. Just because it wasn't the same for me doesn't mean I don't hear the things you mutter in your sleep. I hear *all* of it." She squeezed those trembling hands gently. "But we've started over. It's not where you were any more. You can let go, and start over, with me."

Peyton sniffled. She didn't cry – she wouldn't, not again – but the sniffle was necessary to keep it that way. "I'll be nice to him," she said at last.

Sydney drew her into a hug, drew her down onto their big shared bed and held her and kissed her until Peyton well and truly felt like being very nice, to one Higgins 3 resident in particular.

"Maybe he's not the devil," Peyton relented.

"Hey now, is it *my* turn to start yelling at *you* not to fuck him? Because—"

"Oh shut up and get that dress off before I tear it off you, baby."

It was a cheap dress, and Sydney was not fond of it. She let her tear it off.

Sydney was so proud of the way her girlfriend rose to the challenge. With only a little goading, she started coming to movie nights, joining groups for dinner at Penderdast or off-campus, making friends with Sydney's friends. Some of it, Sydney knew, was her ongoing quest for the apparently elusive lesbian threesome. (They could always fetch Dawn, of course; that girl was so much bottled lesbian horniness that a wink would shoot the cork off of her and right through the roof. But there was no prestige in Dawn.) When Sydney speculated that they might want to consider looking around outside of Higgins 3, Peyton dismissed it handily. Higgins 3 was full of gorgeous, frantically horny girls. Wouldn't it be better, her girlfriend argued, to only have to walk down the hall to find another playmate, instead of trek across campus? Peyton liked to fantasize that by the end of the school year, hooking up with the hot couple in 313 would be considered a Higgins 3 rite of passage.

The more she obsessed over what had at first been nothing more than a game, no more serious than, say, fuck/marry/kill, the more Sydney felt like she'd be happier having Peyton all to herself. Still, Peyton did want this, and the prospect wasn't entirely unenticing. She'd learned to trust Peyton when it came to having a good time being gay. Sydney walked around turned on basically all the time, it felt like. Peyton aroused her *that* much.

In hindsight, their summer had actually been pretty humdrum. Sneaking off to hook up with her girlfriend two, maybe three times a week had made her feel like a nymphomaniac, then. Here at Higgins? "Daily" didn't come close. It wasn't abnormal for them to both wake up to find they'd started making out in their sleep. They touched each other constantly. Whenever Peyton wanted tits in her hands, or her mouth, she walked across the room and took them. That girl who'd been bold even during their first night together at that party wouldn't believe herself now. There was never a need to ask permission. Just lick. Caress. Suck. Strip – if their girlfriend were even wearing clothes to begin with, which was more and more often not the case.

For a while they'd had to be careful opening the door, but by mid-September it was clear nobody cared. Girls changed with their doors cracked open all the time. They brushed their teeth in bra and panties. Word had it that Lex had almost gotten herself written up for walking to and from the shower with a towel wrapped around her waist and nothing more, but everybody just laughed it off. Lexi gonna Lex, they giggled.

Sydney was as bad as Peyton. "Love...?" and a little pout was usually all it took to get Peyton's teeth nibbling commandingly on her nipples. "Harder, pwease?" had been enough to get her pounded so brutally with her favorite dildo that she'd had to take a few days off to let her poor little pussy recover. If one of them wasn't in the mood, it barely mattered. Sydney could keep doing her homework while Peyton's hands mauled her tits; if Peyton was late to work at the library because Sydney caught her at the door

to raise up her dress and eat her ass, they agreed that it was a college town, and a new job would be easy to come by if it came to that.

One weekend, Sydney had to return home, a family health thing that involved family she didn't know. Sydney had been adopted as a baby, and while it had never mattered to her or to her parents, the extended family had had mixed reactions to the little brown-ish infiltrator. Some, not so mixed. One such was her Great Aunt Whatsername, who was presently not doing well, and not expected to do at all for very much longer.

While her folks visited the hospice, though, someone had to take care of Muggle, though, and Sydney missed her little man. Peyton declined to accompany her, but loaned Sydney her vehicle. Neither of them wanted to deal with the whole dramatic "Mom, Dad, this is my lesbian girlfriend" drama just yet. Peyton's parents wouldn't be surprised, but neither would they approve, so that meeting may or may not ever happen. Sydney's parents could acclimate, but they had enough stress on them without having to nail the Loving and Accepting Parent of a Gay reaction.

So Sydney had dinner with her family Friday night, told them about how much she loved school and how much fun she was very vaguely having. Then they left to go tend to her great aunt, leaving the house to herself. Two whole days where nobody complimented her tasty pussy. Nobody seized her by the nipples and dragged her to bed because they couldn't wait for her to obey a summons. She showered... *alone*.

She lay there in her old bedroom, masturbating fretfully at just how inadequate she was to replicate Peyton's affections, sulking up at a twelve year old poster of a unicorn splashing across a creek under a rainbow. (Maybe her parents wouldn't be so shocked.) She didn't just miss the sex. She missed having someone who was so completely obsessed with her. Her body, her pleasure, her happiness.

It was love.

The following weekend, the floor planned an outing to Bear Lake. She asked Peyton to dress her, and she put her into one of her own bikinis, strapless and bound with a big ring in the middle that really showed off her titties. ("Titties" had at last been added into Peyton's latest salvo of dirty talk. They used to giggle at how Pubescent Boy it sounded, but increasingly they found they really liked for Peyton to dig deep for vulgarities. Dirty was hot was cum. Mmm.) Peyton must have been sparing Spencer the brunt of her foul mouth of late, because he even invited them to ride in his car to and from the lake.

"Wow, looks like somebody's been a good girl," Sydney teased as they made their way down to the lot.

"No I'm... wasn't!" Peyton squeaked.

Sydney let her off the hook, and to show she appreciated it, even went to continue working on grooming Terri, who was hustling down the stairwell behind them. "Terri!

Hey, I saw your latest TikTok. You looked *amazing*. That was so fun. Are you going to do any at the lake today? Because Peyton and I were saying how we'd like to help, if we can."

Peyton's dark eyes glittered at the sight of their comely neighbor swishing giddily down the hall in her own skimpy bikini. She dragged Sydney back into their room for a quickie; she said she didn't want to get overwhelmed by how horny she was for her baby and fuck her in the backseat of Spencer's car.

The couple didn't say a single word on the ride over that wasn't either a question or a compliment. Terri took the bait, ate it right up, and squeezed into the backseat with them. Watching Peyton's hip pressed against Terri's, she couldn't help but wonder what it would be like to see her girlfriend touching another girl. It troubled her a bit, but she trusted Peyton not to do anything to hurt her. She and Peyton just chatted the girl up, sitting without realizing that only the night before, Spencer had snuck out of Higgins for some much needed alone time, and, tired of his Hotties thronging him day and night, abusing his open door policy like they'd paid for a space in his bedroom, beat off in the back seat. He'd popped off suddenly, so suddenly he'd missed most of it, but he was unearned and inaccurately confident that he'd mopped it all up.

At any rate, Sydney and Peyton both liked the way the cool imitation leather seats felt on their bare behinds.

Hours of dancing – really just jiggling and bouncing – to help Terri generate fresh content took its toll. (Toni helped, but mostly only when she seemed to think Spencer might be watching.) Back at Higgins, they rushed into the first available shower stall. The discord hive mind had long since uncovered a way to check if Spencer was in there. The shower area was separated by a short divider to make sure water didn't flow into the main bathroom; so long as you weren't especially short, it was enough to let you see his hair over the tops of the stalls. (Technically, it worked on Leigh and Jacqui, too, but who cared.)

Spencer was in, rinsing away a morning of particularly relentless flirtation. Even the lesbians, who seldom troubled themselves with the urges and moods of men, instinctively assumed he was in there jerking it. Since Toni had insisted on filming where he could see them, the girlfriends were as guilty of driving the guy to it as any. Sydney would never ever say it out loud – if Peyton were in the room then not even at gunpoint – but he really was attractive. The other girls took it pretty far sometimes, but so long as he didn't object – and how could any man object to *that* – it seemed like a victimless crime.

She made sure Peyton noticed, too, then joined her in the shower. They didn't often do shower sex, usually only at weird hours three or four times a week. (Was that often? It wasn't as often as she wanted to.) They might be eternally horny for one another, but it wasn't fair to ask everybody else to be comfortable with it in a

quasi-public space. Today, though, their pussies were absolutely on fire. Sydney credited that tasty little micro bikini and what it did to Peyton's libido to parade her around in it. It was so *hot* being dressed up and shown off.

They turned on the water. (God bless these new shower heads! even with Peyton making her come five times a day, it was nice to take care of her pussy herself sometimes.) "Shhh, he's *right there*," she whispered.

Peyton handed the nozzle to Sydney, who began rinsing down their bodies. "I have something for you," she murmured.

Sydney grinned, bouncing excitedly on the balls of her feet. "Mmm, lezzies like prezzies."

"You're so bad. And shh."

Peyton spun her around, gently, and pushed her up against the stall wall. An inch of heavy duty plastic between her and the object of adoration of almost every beautiful babe on Higgins 3. Almost. What was Peyton...

"OH MY *FUUUUUUUUUUUH...*" she groaned as Peyton slipped the phallus inside her. In her head, she'd anticipated the feel of the Elder Wand, but as her pussy strained to accommodate it, she dimly remembered. She hadn't felt this full even with an actual cock. Not even close.

"Baby likes?" teased Peyton's voice in her ear as she gave it a twist.

"Everything OK over there?" Spencer asked from the other side of the wall. He sounded distracted.

"Yeah sorry, just, um, stretching," she lied. Sort of. It *was* stretching her out. Big-time.

Peyton started working the dildo inside her. If Sydney didn't know better, she'd think the girl actually knew what a cock was supposed to do to a pussy. *THRUST*. Back. Wiggle, adjust, make her want it, make her fucking beg for it, *THRUST*.

"Is... is this the, um..."

Peyton's laughter rumbled in her ear. "The Spencetronic 3000? Why, so it is."

That wasn't its brand name, only the name by which it was best known to the women of Higgins 3. It was endorsed by Andi herself (who was credibly alleged to have actually managed to get him to fuck her) as the dildo on the market that best replicated the real Spencer. Sydney very much had her doubts – like, had the girl just bought a thousand different dildos and tried them all and decided on this one, or what? – but it had put one in every room on the floor. (Or two, in some.) And now, in theirs.

Sydney would never have believed it, but as she gasped and clawed and grinded there in the shower, breathing in that sweet musky steam misting in from Spencer's stall, she wasn't about to complain.

Suddenly it was gone, though. She waited, spread her stance wider, whimpered pleadingly, but nothing doing. Turning, she saw Peyton braced against the far wall, her

high, round ass jutting outward in invitation. The dildo was loosely held in one hand, waiting for Sydney to take it. Which she did.

“Um, do you... want me to...?”

This was a twist. It couldn't be. Peyton beckoned her with a finger, keeping her voice to a whisper. He was still there. He had to know what they were doing on this side of the divider, didn't he? There was an intensity, a cadence, to the breathing of the hot lesbian mid-fuck. Sydney simply couldn't be quiet enough to avoid it. Still, if Peyton wanted to be coy...

Sydney put her ear by her lover's mouth. She was so quiet, it was hard to hear her. “You're the one who said I should be nice to the guy, right? Well, what's nicer than this?”

“Are you sure? You usually get mad if I even suggest using my—”

A handful of wet black hair jerked her to Peyton's side, and there, thrust the synthetic cock into her hand, squeezing her fingers closed around it. “Fuck me, baby. If I'm gonna be a bitch about letting you have your threesome, we can at least invite his cock to play.”

If Sydney didn't know better, she would have thought Peyton hated it. Her cheek pressed to the wall, lips drawn back in what was almost a snarl as Sydney strived to execute the same level of cock aptitude Peyton wielded against her. Her body, however, said otherwise. If she'd seen Peyton bouncing on any man's dick half so enthusiastically, her thighs trembling, her ass clenching and unclenching, her nipples hard as daggers as she savagely squeezed her tits like they both knew gentle Sydney never would... Sydney never would have imagined the girl could want anything but dick, dick, dick forever.

“Thank you, Spencer,” said Peyton as she slid down the wall sometime later, landing on hands and knees under the stream.

“Don't mention it,” said a dry voice from the other side of the divider. The water over there turned off, and a moment later, they heard him leave.

Peyton laughed between heaving breaths. “Baby, you've been holding out on me.”

“You guys! You *guys!*”

Sydney opened the door, recoiling as the harsh light of the hallway hit her in the eyes, eyes which had only opened seconds earlier. It was Destiny, she realized when she could see well enough to make out details. Destiny in her bra and panties, which was worth waking up for to be sure, but nevertheless a surprise.

“Um, Destiny? What's... What time is it?”

“I don't know. But everybody's going. Come on!”

That was all the girl said before Charlie tugged on her arm and pulled her around the corner, both suppressing giggles with hands over their mouths.

Peyton slept through it. She slept through almost anything. Sydney liked to tickle her in her sleep. Not gitchie-gitchie-goo tickling, but running her fingertips over bare skin tickling. She adored every inch of that body. Touching it would never, ever get old.

Sydney grabbed her faux silk robe, cinching it over her naked body, and followed, shutting the door as quietly as possible. It didn't take long to find out where everybody was – a small mob had formed outside of room 310. Spencer's room. Twenty-some Hotties were gathered around. Casey had her ear to the door, as did Sammi. Some of the girls were standing, but most sat. Whatever was happening, the girls were staking the place out.

Sydney shook her head, rubbed sleep from her eyes. Charlie and Destiny were closest to her, near the back of the pack. Nobody was making any noise, so she kept it to a whisper. "What's going on? Is this, um, a... protest?"

Charlie's head flew back, her body shaking with silent laughter. Her roommate shook her head. "No. He's, um, in there. With company."

"What? Company?" Her eyes flitted to the door. "You mean a girl?"

She nodded. "Not just any girl. One of the other RAs. The one from the bottom floor, the really pretty one."

The goddess one, Sydney thought. She'd only seen her a handful of times, usually doing their rounds – snitchscapades, the girls called them – but she had never actually spoken to her. There was no forgetting perfection that casual, though.

"So, what are we—"

"What are they saying?" Tori stage whispered.

Sydney knew full well that noise would be audible in his room unless he was wearing headphones or was otherwise thoroughly occupied. She and Peyton had turned in early after a long day of breaking in the Spencetron 3000. Long, and thick, and vigorous. Hero, Peyton had taken to calling him – it – in recognition of what she still believed were the staged heroics of their RA in the bathroom that August evening. She had no clue what time it was.

Casey turned, cupping her hands and addressing the Hottie assembly in kind. "She has some kind of scar."

"Look who's mortal after all," muttered Danielle.

Charlie addressed the girls at the door. "What about him? Is he grossed out?"

Sammi answered, irritated. "Nah, he's being chill about it. It's *Spencer*." She rolled her eyes.

"Shh!" hissed Lex. Sydney gaped – was she... touching herself? In the freaking hallway? Sure, the idea of what was happening behind that door, or about to happen, was hot. This whole day, surrounded by gorgeous women prancing around in bikinis,

flaunting every ounce of their sensuality, had made her hornier than she'd ever felt in her life. But this was... nuts. Could she...?

"Would you guys shut up out there?" yelled Spencer from inside his room. Not angrily, quite, but not far from it.

Sydney took a breath. No. Absolutely not. No. If Peyton even knew she'd stood here listening to this, she'd go berserk. Rightly so. No. Whatever the other girls wanted to do was their business. Sydney wasn't about to get involved in whatever this was, no matter how hot it made her seeing Tori slip a hand down her panties as she watched. Tori, always so tough and kickass and no-holds-barred, reduced to a quivering puddle of girly needfulness, helpless to restrain herself.

Maybe they were more alike than Sydney had previously considered.

She turned and fled back to her room, quick and quiet as she could. When she arrived, she found Peyton awake, grasping the Hero, studying it. She looked up at Sydney after a moment, squinting at the light from the hallway as if only just noticing it. "What's going on? What did they want?"

"You heard." She shook her head. "It's nothing. It's gross, actually. C'mon, let's go back to sleep. I'll tell you all about it in the morning."

Peyton bopped her on the nose with the dildo, the still pussy-wet dildo, as Sydney tried to sit down. "What? Casey barf in the bathroom sink again? Nasty druggy bitch."

"You think girls are going around waking people up because Casey drank too much? No, it's just..." She glanced at the dildo. Frowned. "He has a girl over."

Peyton grinned. "Oh yeah? Me, too."

"Yeah, but, um, it's the goddess one. From downstairs."

The amused grin dissipated instantly. "Oh yeah? What happened to old whatshisname?" Peyton remembered Price's name, and Sydney knew she did, but they didn't like mentioning it when they pleased each other to fantasies of reeling in what had to be the hottest girl at Lakeview. They didn't like the reminder that she wasn't eligible for their fantasy fuckball drafts.

"I don't know but she's in there with Spencer as we speak. The girls are being... ugh."

"What's 'ugh?'"

"They're camped out in front of his room. Sammi and Casey are freaking listening at the door, whispering updates."

"And he hasn't noticed...?"

"He noticed."

"And he's allowing it...?"

"Well, if the alternative is risking blowing things with the goddess one..." Sydney shrugged. "But they're taking it way too far. Some of them are, you know..." She tapped her pussy through the robe.

Peyton's eyes narrowed. She looked down at Hero, back at Sydney, at the door. "Well now..." She hopped up, Spencer's dick in hand. "This I gotta see."

"No, love. No. Come on, it's not right. Just straight girls being way too straight. Look, if they want to mess up his date, that's on them, but let's not... Peyton!"

Peyton was in the hall, tugging on boxers and a t-shirt as she went. Sydney had no choice but to hurry after her.

"Fuck, she's *begging* him to get her tits out!" Sammi was announcing, in what was barely still a stage whisper.

Neither she nor the rest of the girls were bothering to whisper. "Tits out!" bubbled Lexi, who – surprise, surprise – had lost her shirt somewhere between her room and Spencer's, a mere three doors down.

Destiny's jaw dropped at seeing Peyton, dildo still in hand; Charlie was sitting beside her, eyes closed or at least her lids so heavy they may as well be. She was rubbing her thighs together and murmuring something Sydney couldn't make out over the din. Peyton shrugged, sliding down the wall to sit beside them, and like it was the most natural thing in the world, plunged the dildo up the leg of her boxers and started to fuck herself.

The girls on her end of the hallway were looking the other way, but down the opposite end, they saw the staunch lesbian smiling, slack-jawed, as she fucked herself with their RA's cock.

Her girlfriend, it seemed, was a trendsetter. If the "gay" chick was diving in, well... why not?

"She's *begging* for it you guys!" someone close by the door was reporting.

"I knew I liked her," said Peyton, laughing, before her pleasure response won out and she focused back on Hero, heroically plunging in and out of her cunt.

A moment later, Spencer's door flew open. Hands recoiled out of panties as if scalded. Most of them. Some, anyway. Peyton grunted as she forced that beast in as far as it would go and jerked her boxers over to hold it inside her.

Their RA herded his humiliated Hotties down into the lounge and tore them a new one. It was hard not to feel embarrassed. Sydney had only just managed to resist the impulse to sit there and close her eyes and imagine him, glorious him, in there fucking her, glorious her. Another minute and she didn't doubt she'd have given in and succumbed to that throbbing hotness of the Hotties. Instead she only felt chagrin, even though she'd only gone back to try to stop Peyton.

All the while, Peyton squirmed in her seat. Edging herself. To *him*. Her lesbian girlfriend, riding a facsimile of their RA's dick even as he chewed them out for trampling his privacy. His cock throbbed through his boxer shorts in time with the bullet points of his excoriation.

If Sydney had done what her girlfriend had done (and was still doing), any single part of it, Peyton would have screamed her through the floor. As for Sydney, she wasn't much of a screamer. At least, except when Peyton was focused on her the way she was currently preoccupied with that stupid fake dick.

"Are you mad at me or something?" Peyton asked a while later, back in their bed.

"I want to get rid of that dildo." There. She wasn't starting a fight. Just asking for a very reasonable favor. Lesbians ought not to need dicks. Nothing controversial there.

"What? No. This thing cost eighty bucks. Besides, you look so pretty on it."

She tried to slip it in between Sydney's thighs. "Stop. I don't like it."

Peyton was used to getting her way, treating Sydney's body as an extension of her own, but she wasn't so barbaric as to ignore a statement as direct as that. She pulled back. "What's wrong? You sure seemed like you were having fun with it this evening."

"*You* were having fun with it. I was using it. You think I need a fake cock to make my love come?"

"You seemed like you enjoyed it plenty too. Or was I dreaming that you literally couldn't stand up when I was blasting you with this thing in the shower."

Sydney shook her head. "You think you're some sort of cunt whisperer because you can get a girl off with a giant rubber dick? That's like somebody thinking they're a great artist because they told an AI to remake the contents of the Louvre."

Peyton sat up, still holding that thing. "I'm doing this for *you*. You're the little bi bitch. You're the one who's spent all semester so far pretending she's not drooling over the guy. 'I don't want to leave, love.' 'Be nice to him, love.' 'Smash, love.'"

"I did *not* say smash to him!"

"I'm doing my best, baby! You keep dragging your feet and dragging your feet about a threesome. Too shy to just come out and say you want him to be our third, but I know you. You forget, I know you better than you know yourself. So excuse me if I try to meet you halfway! And this is how you respond?!"

Sydney's jaw trembled. Anybody else she'd dated, this is where she would have told them to fuck off. She'd dumped a guy once in the middle of homecoming simply because he'd been looking too hard at some of her friends. She was a sub in the bedroom, but she still knew her worth.

This was Peyton, though. Her love.

So instead, Sydney stood up and tugged on some clothes. "I'm going to sleep in the lounge. You two have a nice night."

"Are we really doing this?" Sydney asked skeptically as she took off the capri pants she'd worn to the lounge.

Peyton rolled her eyes as she removed her shirt and laid it on the bed. “We’re doing this, baby. He said we could. He basically said we *should*.”

“Since when did you care what Spencer thinks we should do?”

“Broken clock, blah blah blah,” Peyton muttered, sifting through her underwear drawer. “Do you think yellow, or pink?”

“For me or for you?”

“You, of course.” Peyton flashed that entitled, one-sided grin Sydney usually loved. “Like I’m about to start letting my baby dress me.”

“Then pink.”

Peyton held up the yellow bra a moment, then a pink one. The pink was pretty much a normal bra; the yellow was sheer and, from past experience, made cleavage to rival the Grand Canyon. “Yellow,” Peyton decided. She tossed one to Sydney, then began slipping a matching one over her own shoulders.

“You’re sure you don’t want to just stay in? I know they’re calling it a lesson or whatever, but we could massage each other down here with no clothes in the way at all,” Sydney suggested, eyeing but not yet donning the provided attire.

Peyton shot her an exasperated look. “Thirty women – *thirty* – are as we speak stripping down to their underwear to rub each other down in the lounge. And not just any women. Hotties. Like us. If that’s not enough for you, remember your beloved man meat himself will be there too. Ten to one he takes his shirt off.”

Sydney could already see she was losing the argument, so she called it quits early and stuffed her tits into the skimpy bra. It was embarrassing, wearing something so sheer and so sexy, around other people, especially a guy. But it meant a lot to Peyton.

By the time she was done, Peyton was thrusting a wad of baby blue spandex into her hands. Shorts, nominally, but basically just panties it was acceptable to wear to the gym. She put them on. Her ass looked insane in these, hotness molded to perfection.

She’d won the argument about the dildo – and Peyton wasn’t letting her forget it. Oh, she hadn’t gotten rid of it or anything. It was right there in that very same underwear drawer in fact. It hadn’t seen use since that first night, though. Things *had* slowed down since their fight the other week, and Sydney missed how good things had been for a while here on Higgins 3. So she let Peyton dress her like a hot little toy, and told herself it would be fun to be seen getting played with.

“Are you going barefoot?” Sydney asked. One way in which they were usually quite similar was a tendency towards germaphobia, which dorm living had only exacerbated.

“What if we do foot massages?” Peyton took her hand and pulled her toward the door. “Come on, baby. You look tasty as fuck. I wanna show you off. Let’s go.”

Sydney dug in her feet as they rounded the corner. Ahead of them, half a dozen Hotties were traipsing back to the lounge, most of them in nothing but their bras and

panties. She tugged Peyton into the bathroom. “Are we really doing this? It feels... I don’t know. Bad.”

Peyton pushed her up against the wall roughly. Sydney whimpered. God, shit like that made her too horny to think. “Anything this hot is naughty, not bad. We’re doing this. You be my good girl, and I’ll let you have the first ride.”

“I...”

Peyton silenced her with a toe-curling kiss. Somehow, while kissing, they wound up back in the hallway. They were back in the lounge before her head cleared.

The scene in the lounge was pornographic. It wasn’t naughty; this was downright *evil*. Dozens of girls wearing practically nothing, rubbing and cuddling and grinding on one another in the cramped space of the Higgins 3 lounge. They were lumped in so closely that there was pretty much no avoiding bumping elbows and feet into one another while they performed as the lady from the health center instructed. The girls apologized for it at first, but soon it was simply part of it.

As near as Sydney could tell, Peyton was the first one to make her mouth part of things. It was unbelievably inappropriate, her girlfriend swirling her tongue around her ear lobes as she distractedly massaged her back and more or less outright humped her ass. Should she say something? Looking around, most of the straight girls weren’t far from it. Their massage techniques were less oral, but their hands were at least as bold.

Up until someone asked if they could do front massages, anyway. Peyton had always *loved* her perky titties.

“Are you a hundred per—”

Peyton shut her up with her mouth. Sydney let it happen. It was too much, too depraved, but it was so *fucking* hot. Spencer admonished them for their marginally more brazen PDA, but immediately went back to being too distracted by their guest to stop it.

It wasn’t even making waves, honestly. Nobody else had gone to the level of openly making out, quite, but it was no less sensual. Terri draped over Toni, their tits squished together. Little Dawn, sitting atop Kyu-Ri’s shoulders and massaging her lower back with that soft pale ass so close to her face that the exchange student had to be able to feel her roommate’s breath on it. Casey proclaimed herself gay somewhere in the middle of it. Girls barely laughed. They were moving around so much, their hips so involved, that half the panties in the room were basically thongs, but nobody bothered to de-wedgie themselves. Asses were hot. Touching was hot. Spencer was hot. *They* were so, so, so hot. This was getting gayer by the second.

Sydney was so lost inside this ethereal lesbian dream that she barely heard him ordering her and Peyton to dial it back. She didn’t have the will to stop it. She’d never – *never* – been this horny. She’d never thought a person could get this horny. It was an out of body experience, watching herself writhe and moan and squirm and fondle and

caress and lick and suck and squeeze and more more fucking don't stop love more please more. Except she was very much still in her body. The moment he looked away, they resumed ignoring it.

Sydney had objected to Peyton's plans on the grounds that it was too slutty, but now, their RA was standing over them, his dick trying to rip through his shorts and that massage lady's spit glistening on his neck. She'd *licked* him. Fuck. Sydney had to admit, that was pretty fucking sexy. Peyton rolled her onto her front again, which surprised her – seemed contrary to her whole plan – but then she was unclasping her bra. Her girlfriend was sucking on her neck as her hands wriggled down between carpet and girlfriend to squeeze her tits.

She didn't just look like a toy; she *was* a toy, Sydney realized. A prop for Peyton's sexual gratification, and her girlfriend harbored no shame about playing with her toy in front of all of her friends. It was so hot. *This*, she realized, was what she'd wanted, not Peyton's threesome. To be seen, Peyton's perfect sexy toy, too hot for her lover to restrain herself, too obedient for Sydney to resist being used in front of an audience. Kyu-Ri had taken a place atop her lesbian roommate, but even so their kindred cunt was leering not at the thousand tons of titty hanging in her face, but at the two of them. Her whole face slack with delirious pleasure.

Spencer was asking their guest to leave; the distraction was opening enough that Sydney rolled over to give Dawn a proper show. She and Peyton caressed one another with unabashed lust. "That's it, baby. Don't hold back. Don't you fucking dare hold back," Peyton moaned into her ear.

It was contagious. Some of the girls were swapping partners as eyes and hands wandered. Casey was openly licking Andi's breasts. There was a lot of licking, actually, like that woman had made it officially part of the experience when she'd gotten carried away with Spencer. Was it insane that the woman had done that, or would it be insane if she hadn't? Sydney was too horny to parse out what made sense any more. Peyton made sure the duo remained at the forefront of depravity; Sydney did her best to keep up.

It worked. When Spencer returned – he'd left, evidently, to escort that lady out – he finally decided to make an example of someone to rein things in. That's what an RA was supposed to do, Sydney sort of distantly remembered. He singled the lesbian couple out and sent the two of them to their room. Without dessert.

"How'd I do, love?" Sydney asked, shrugging off what was left of her bra in the hallway. Not the first time she'd been topless in the hallway, quite, but the first time she was conscious of how much it turned her on. Maybe Lex was onto something. It felt like something on the floor had fundamentally changed that night in the lounge. Was still changing in their absence. Would walking around in their underwear – or less - become the new normal? She wouldn't complain. Heaven knew Peyton wouldn't.

Peyton didn't answer, at least not in words. Back in their room, she threw Sydney down on the bed face first and dove on her. The massage continued, but with no more pretense. It was just plain making out, but a little more emphasis on groping than usual. And ten times the intensity. Tongues and nipples and wet slippery pussies were simply a part of the technique now. Sydney was helpless, her muscles turned to butter along with her brain and melting fast.

"Is... is he coming? To... to yell at us?" she asked a few minutes – oh shit, had it been an *hour*?! – into it.

"He has to. We were fucking each other in the lounge. Are you ready baby?"

"I... I'm not..."

"Shh. You'll thank me when he's done with us. With you."

Some time later, there was no longer any ignoring the constant notification sounds coming from Sydney's laptop. Discord was on fire. Girls must be returning from the program, gossiping, bragging, sharing, or just saying random slut shit, as these straight girls seemed prone to doing.

If not for Peyton, would that be her? Horny and unsatisfied, her only outlet to vent to her fellow sufferers about how hot he looked in this, how horny she was for him because of that, starting a discussion thread of whether they'd rather ride Spencer's face with or without a mustache.

"He's coming," Peyton repeated. "He'll come down to 'have a talk,' chew us out for being bad lezzies and disrupting his little program. Then all we have to do is invite him in. Your hotness will do the rest."

"The rest" was code for the two of them getting fucked all night by their RA. Sydney hadn't liked the plan from the beginning, but she'd tried and she'd tried, but after months of denials, there was simply no convincing Peyton she didn't want it. For one, she wasn't a hundred percent sure she didn't. If he'd put a hand on her in the lounge she would have let him do anything he wanted, she was sure. She'd been so horny she might have done like that sexpert lady said and fucked Boopsie the cat.

For two, Peyton was obsessed with it. Like getting double-dicked by some dude was an item on some relationship checklist. Like she needed to be sure Sydney was sufficiently gay for her.

Or... like something else. She didn't dare give the prospect voice.

They fell asleep waiting. Spencer never came, unless he'd decided to bring a Hottie back to his room, let her rub his lamp and make a single wish.

Peyton woke first, bright and early. Very much unlike her. Equally unlike her, she was scouring the Hottie Haven channels for information about last night. Sydney rose, stretched, and then joined her. Together they learned about what had happened after they left. The whole floor, swarming him while he hand-fucked – sorry, "massaged" –

Jacqui. One lick each while he played with his food, though the girls had gotten a laugh at just how garbage the guy was at counting.

“They got to taste him,” Peyton whispered. She licked her lips. Did she even realize?

“Got to?” Sydney repeated, dubiously.

“Like you’re not fucking curious,” Peyton snapped, composing herself. To the extent she could, naked, a finger at her clit and her nipples ready to cut steel.

“A little, I guess, but since when are you?”

“Why didn’t he come down?” Peyton asked no one. “We put on such a good show. He had to be thinking about me. You. Us. Why would he not come down?”

“Maybe because every third word out of your mouth around him is a reminder that you’re a lesbian? Maybe because he somehow didn’t make the assumption that the insatiably horny gay girls were looking for a cock? Maybe—”

Peyton whirled on her. “You know, I’m getting a little sick of all this judging, baby. I’m doing this for—”

“Oh for the love of *god* please don’t tell me again about how you want to get *your* pussy fucked for *me!*”

Peyton’s face darkened, thunderclouds gathering all around her mussed brown mane. “Oh right, it must be for me, that I want my sulky *BISEXUAL* girlfriend to stop obsessing over my not having a dick! You’re right! How selfish of me, to let my cock-worshipping sub slut get a little taste of what she gave up for me! But no, you’re right, it’s all me, eager to sign up for membership in the Hottie fucking harem, another drippy snatch just waiting for the thrill of getting plugged by her master!”

“Love...”

But Peyton was angry. About the failure of her plan last night; about Sydney not falling in line; about being completely, obviously, obliviously deluded about the desires of her own heart. “No, you caught me. I love dick! You hear that, world? Peyton’s a cock hound like the rest of you! Can’t wait to get her pussy pounded, ho boy! Ooooh, yeahhh, poor widdle girly me feels empty wempty without a Man inside me, can’t stop thinking about what she’s been missing out on in a lifetime of telling guys to fuck off. No, you’re right, Sydney, it’s all me!”

By the time she finally trailed off, there was a look in her eye like she was surprised not to have been interrupted. Instead, Sydney let her get it all out. When Peyton finally fell silent, hands planted on those hips she loved so well, Sydney let the reverberations of it all echo around the close confines of the walls of Higgins 313 until they too quieted.

“I mean... yeah.”

She grabbed some clothes and her purse and walked out. Fuck it. She could get dressed in the hallway. Walking around naked was less slutty than the show she’d put on

for everyone last night in the lounge. For now, she'd rather anyone but Peyton get to see her body.

She walked around campus for over an hour after her last class, then got a big old hot cocoa in the union and found a quiet nook to curl up in, and cried. It was still only early afternoon when she made herself quit stalling, but it felt like ten seconds to midnight. By the time she saw Higgins Hall at the crest of the hill, Sydney still didn't know what to say. The thought which had occupied her mind, more even than her anger and her sadness, was bitterness that people had been right. Rooming with her girlfriend, a girl she'd only known a couple months, had been a mistake. The sex was incredible, but maybe... maybe that was all it had ever been.

She shuffled up the stairs, heart in her throat. There was nothing to do but fight it out. Sydney couldn't see how it was one either of them could win. She wanted Peyton. Peyton wanted Sydney *and* Spencer *and* the Hotties *and, and, and*. There was no way to reconcile not being enough.

Peyton wasn't in. She'd penned a note, though, taped it to the window. *I had to go to class, but I want to talk. I'm sorry. I'll hurry back.*

Sydney allowed herself a glimmer of hope.

A while later, after a lot of talking and crying and hugging and soul-searching, the girls emerged from their RA's dorm room, the taste of him lingering on their tongues. They marched back to their room.

Peyton's reputation as the stereotypical man-hating dyke was well-established; she'd agreed to play to her own reputation to facilitate her girlfriend being allowed to dip her toes in the pool of bisexuality. She hadn't had to act hard. The girl wanted to fuck Spencer, and there was no more hiding it. That didn't mean she couldn't hate feeling that way, though.

Sydney hadn't wanted to lick the guy. Much. Some, sure. Well, actually kind of a lot, but she would have denied herself the experience for Peyton.

She wasn't sure Peyton felt the same way, but they were talking, and not yelling. Sydney had always broken up with any guy who came even close to making her feel like Peyton had. She didn't have much experience with adult relationships, the kind you tried to fix before assessing whether to throw them away. She wasn't sure how to fix them, though. Her mom was smart about this stuff, though it might not be fair to ambush her by coming out and asking her to help her patch things up with her girlfriend all in one phone call. For now, she supposed, she was on her own.

"Well?" Sydney asked softly.

Peyton scowled. "Thank you," she mumbled.

Sydney nodded. "You're welcome, love. But I meant—"

"I know what you meant." Peyton winced. "Sorry. Just... I don't know. Big feelings, and you know I, um, don't always deal well with big feelings."

“I know.”

She waited, and finally Peyton flopped backward on the bed with a languorous sigh. “OK, so yeah. I liked it. There. I fucking said it. You win world, Peyton Mota is bi. Fuck!”

Sydney curled up beside her. “But you still love me, right?”

Peyton looked mortified that the question needed to be asked. Her sneer upon hearing it actually made Sydney feel better than she had this whole horrible day. (Except maybe during the lick. They’d just... wanted it. Asked for it. And he’d just... let them. As a favor. She didn’t know how a domme like Peyton could have enjoyed it, but for Sydney, *fuck.*)

Peyton brushed her hair back, forcing direct eye contact. “What? Oh my god, baby, of course I do. You’re the best fucking thing in my whole stupid bi life.”

Sydney took her hand, raised it to her lips, and kissed her knuckles. She didn’t need to say it back. That had been her opening volley in their argument. She loved her. She didn’t know if that was going to be enough, but it was her foundation. It hadn’t been easy, after, watching the way Peyton’s body shuddered as she dragged her tongue up the man’s smooth, firm chest. Not just watching her do it, but feeling it, since Sydney had licked it along with her. Peyton had insisted. Nothing Sydney had said seemed to convince her girlfriend that it was possible for a girl to *not* want to fuck the guy.

“So, do you still think you need to see him fuck me? To have me help him fuck you? Or do you need, like, a hall pass...?” Sydney asked. “Talk to me, love. Be—” She caught herself. “Well, not straight, but you know. Direct. Honest. Don’t shut me out.”

Peyton shook her head. “I don’t know. I’ve only been into guys for like twenty minutes. I need to think.”

“OK.” She didn’t bother correcting that laughable timeframe. “So, um, I was thinking, I’m leaving for fall break pretty early. My only midterm that’s not online is Tuesday, and I know somebody who’d give me a ride.”

Peyton was stuck here through Friday, unfortunately. “All right...”

“So maybe we, you know, put a pin in it. Let’s take some time, process, think about what we want, and when we’re back after break... we’ll talk some more. Does that sound OK?”

“It sounds like you’re not giving me a choice,” grumbled Peyton.

Sydney wanted to point out that Peyton had had a choice about how to handle her attraction to Spencer for months now, but instead, she quietly slid down between her lover’s thighs and helped take her mind off of things. Her own, too.

It was weird how, even with Peyton’s cum splashing onto her tongue, she felt like she could still taste Spencer underneath it all.

The next few weeks were agony. Her family noticed her despondency, as did her friends. There was nothing to tell them, though. Her friends knew about Peyton, the truth of why she'd made that last minute transfer to Lakeview for her crazy hot defiantly gay girlfriend. She didn't have the strength to take the inevitable I-told-you-so's about how it seemed to be working out.

As for her family, they were blinded by a smokescreen of her own lies. She couldn't tell them she'd gone to Lakeview chasing pussy – “by the way, Mom, your adopted kid turned out to be a lesbian, would you pass the asparagus?” – and then in the next breath tell them how badly she'd failed at it. Not that they'd be cruel. They wouldn't. They loved her. It was just that if she let them commiserate with her, it would cement the fact that she was miserable. You couldn't be miserable and hopeful at the same time. So Sydney sulked, and made excuses, and rendered herself lonelier still.

She'd turned the gayest lesbian she'd ever met bi. How was that even possible? It was tempting for Sydney to lie to herself about her own story, to pretend that Peyton had been in denial over not being at that 100% lesbian end of that reductive scale Spencer's ex had talked about – like Sydney had been in denial about being 100% committed to Peyton, secretly craving her RA's touch. Except she wasn't. That wasn't the case for her, and she knew it. Peyton had never even considered letting a dick touch the same air she was breathing until she settled for Sydney.

It was a bitter pill as a sub, accepting that your most fervent effort at being the font and source of all love, joy and pleasure for someone hadn't just fizzled, but had actually driven their affection to someone else. Not even to another woman, but to a *man*. A warm, gentle, kind-spirited man Sydney adored like a brother – and not even a stepbrother like the other Hotties laughingly said, since he'd be her adopted brother and thus perfectly fair game. But still, she didn't – couldn't – love him like Peyton.

It wasn't like Sydney was made out of stone. She'd had her share of fantasies about the guy. Not that she needed to, when half of that ridiculous server of theirs was flooded with daydreams and doodles offered up by one girl or another. It was strange, the quietude on the channels over break. Sydney hadn't realized how much time she spent scrolling through it and reacting to the girls' posts until it was suddenly silent.

Not silent, quite. A few ironic posts.

DiamondJo: I haven't seen A cups in days you guys, wtf is going on

SammisAran: omfg I just heard my baby sister say she was petting her kitty and for a sec I forgot to some people that's not a metaphor (edited)

SheWhoComesWithTheDawn: @SammisAran BOOOOOOPSIE mew-mew

Jacqui44: Sooo we're on a road trip this week, and at our meet this morning (3-0 Lakeview goooooo Bears!) this dirt poor college set it up so both teams had to use the same shower. So there I was with a bunch of naked strangers soaping themselves and it made me miss you guys lol! I hope your breaks are going well.

Dana: You know what's awesome? Trying to explain to your mom why you were moaning "Spencer" in your sleep. UGH. I miss home.

TT: @Dana Beats having her catch you moaning it while you're awake, though, right?

*KandleGirl: I am so fucking BORED
I haven't seen anyone doing anything weird and skanky in DAYS
Real world suuuuuuuuuuuuucks*

Tori: Maybe that's not a bad thing...? 🤔

Sydney had nothing to say. Neither did Peyton, apparently.

She begged her mom to get back to Lakeview bright and early that Sunday when Higgins re-opened. More lies and evasions, petty ones this time about how she'd forgotten some books at school for a huge project that was due Monday. All of her books were available digitally, but her folks didn't know that. Back in Higgins 313, she immediately checked Peyton's things to see if Hero had gone home with her, which he evidently had. Peyton hadn't promised to leave it or anything, but it felt pretty tone-deaf. Not like she had a Sydney fleshlight or whatever to keep it company.

She was there when Lex shrieked for him to get out of her room; her justification soon followed, leaked online from Jo. Hero indeed. Soon after, word leaked that Casey's boyfriend had broken up with her because Spencer had thought it would be funny to cuck the poor guy.

Was that where she was headed? On her way to being the poor, pathetic loser whose girlfriend had tossed her away like garbage for a fling with Spencer? A blip on the Hottie Haven, background noise in the discussion of people wondering aloud if Peyton thought he'd been worth it, Jordyn's cute little Higgins Hotties emote certifying their solidarity as the straight girls rushed to agree that of course he was.

By the time Peyton arrived late that night, Sydney had already told Tori she had one hundred percent of her support. As their governor speechified dragged them to a meeting of her fellow concerned Higgizens, Sydney feigned support for most of the governor's talking points. Not that she disagreed. Tori was right. Spencer had abused his position, would doubtless abuse it again, should never have been given the chance to abuse it in the first place. All more or less true, in the same way it was true that seatbelts

were uncomfortable, and equally dismissive of why she liked having one. None of that was why she signed that petition. Sydney was ashamed of herself for doing it, but the simple truth was that with no Spencer, she'd have no more competition for Peyton's affection. They could go right back to where they'd started the semester, and things would be perfect again.

Peyton saw right through it, of course.

"I'm not signing that thing."

Katrina, standing just inside the door of their room, was surprised, which was itself unsurprising. She was unflappable. Every surprise was an opportunity to discover her misperceptions and incorporate new data points. "Oh. That's fine, and I respect that, but may I ask why not? Pardon my saying so, but I thought you didn't like having a male RA overseeing female spaces."

Peyton folded her arms. "I didn't. But with all you fucking straight bitches put the man through, I can't believe we're talking about ousting him for one fuck-up."

"One?" Sydney asked softly. So softly. Disagreeing with Peyton in public felt strange. She was her biggest cheerleader, always. But not about this. "You mean his sexual harassment with Lexi, or ruining Casey's life? Or hosting a massage night as a pretense to grope Jacqui?"

Peyton didn't even look at her, addressing Katrina instead. "Oh right, he's only pretending to be an affable doofus. Diabolical mastermind, that dude, invited us to a massage night where he just knew we'd all demand to strip to our underwear and grope the shit out of each other, so when Jacqui accidentally blundered in, she'd have no choice but to gladly accept what all y'all were begging him for the whole program. Fucking genius."

"Reasonable people can characterize the events of that night differently," Katrina said, diplomatic as ever. "And you're absolutely right that some members of the community have poured some gasoline on some of these fires. Do remember, though, we're not asking for him to be fired necessarily. We're—"

"The fuck you aren't."

"Ahem. We're asking that he be removed from his position on Higgins 3. It's a big campus, and there are other floors. Other coed floors, even. If they agree with you that he's not done anything unprofessional, Ramona could maybe switch him with a girl RA from one of those."

"Why don't you draft a petition to kick out all the thots around here stirring up drama? Casey cheated on her boyfriend, gladly, repeatedly, made her own slutty bed and now she has to lay in it. Boo hoo. And as for Little Miss Teflon Tits—"

"I'm sorry, what...?" Katrina shook her head uncomprehendingly.

Sydney translated. There had been a slutty girl at her high school who'd been given the nickname, and she'd (privately) introduced the term to Peyton as they'd contemplated Lex for fantasy fuckball. "Teflon – it's this chemical coating that–"

"I know what Teflon is. And thanks. Took me a second, but I get it."

Peyton rolled her eyes. "Props to you, putting the dick in valedictorian and all."

"I was salutatorian, and you should know you're not the first person to use that one. I'm also a virgin, as it so happens, so don't even."

"How about putting the sa-*lut* in salutatorian? Can I copyright that one?" Peyton shrugged. Katrina's hands slowly curled into fists. "But I swear to god, you try to get Spencer fired, I'll print off every last slutty fucking thing you cunts wrote on that porn site you call a discord server. Good luck proving sexual harassment on his part with a mountain of evidence that you loved every second of it."

Oh shit. Sydney interjected hastily, "No she won't. Thanks, Katrina." She ushered their vice governor into the hallway, ignoring Peyton's insistence that oh yes she would. In the hallway, she assured Katrina she'd talk to her, don't worry. The girl didn't look especially confident, but she moved on to the next room without threatening formal censure.

"I want you to sign," Sydney said simply once she was back in the room.

"I don't care. I meant what I said. He shouldn't be punished because we–"

"It's not about punishing him. It's about us."

Peyton stopped. "Us?"

"I want things to be like they were, love. Peyton. I know you think I'm looking for excuses to leave you, but I do. I swear to you, I fucking swear. But as long as he's around, they can't. Look, you feel the way you feel, and I get that what you're going through is confusing, and upsetting. Maybe I'm making things worse because I won't go there with you. I don't know. All I know is that when we moved here, we were perfect. His being here, whether he's a saint or Satan himself, makes things be not perfect."

"You think I'm gonna stop being bi if he goes?"

"Of course not. But..."

She took a breath. Peyton had never liked being told how she felt or being subjected to other people's judgments about her actions. She was herself, and to hell what anybody else thought. Anybody but Sydney, Sydney hoped. She didn't take her love's hands, didn't sit with her. No affectionate manipulation, no cheap tricks. No more bullshit, no more lies.

"You're obsessed with him. I don't know how it got in your head, but you're as bad as the rest of them. Worse, maybe, because at least they own it. I don't know if he's your Boopsie or what, but I have a cat, and a kitty, and I don't need or want any more of either. I know you've been chasing this magic threesome for us since the summer, but it was always really for *you*. I never wanted anyone else. It felt important to you, so I went

along. I guess I figured I'd have some fun, but deep down? I knew it would be hard. Like *hard* hard, watching you with another girl, even if I was there, too. But seeing you with a man? I can't compete with that, no matter how big of a dildo you hand me.

"I want you. I love you. You, and only you. Maybe because I'm stupid and I got over-invested, and you just like fucking me and don't mind talking to me. But if you sleep with him, we're done. And if he stays, you're going to. I think you're right about the situation, because of course you are, you're always right love." Sydney couldn't help herself, giving that silken hair a little brush. "But right or wrong doesn't matter. You're all that matters to me."

Despite how much she'd just said, there was still quite a lot of breath to push out. "So. I'm gonna head out and –"

Peyton grabbed her wrist. "No. Stay."

"Not if you–"

"I said *stay*." Peyton pulled her firmly on her butt on the edge of their bed.

She caught up with Katrina in Emma's room. Without a word, she snatched the clipboard out of the woman's hand and marched it back down to their room. Katrina followed, squawking in panic that Peyton was going to steal it or destroy it or throw it out the window. Instead, with Sydney watching, she signed, then shoved it roughly back into Katrina's hands and threw the door shut in her face.

"I... um..." Peyton's chin quivered. Sydney took her hands and set her softly down beside her on their bed. "I'm still shitty at this. Nobody ever, I dunno, loved me. Before."

"I do." Sydney rested her forehead against her girlfriend's. "I love you."

Peyton's lips followed Sydney's down to her mattress, and showed no sign of ever wanting to leave.

"Happy Halloween!" the girls cheered as Spencer entered the lounge.

Sydney had to do some convincing not to have Peyton change her into her Hottie halter. She'd always liked the way she looked in it – even more than how much Sydney loved the way Peyton looked in hers, which was saying something. Still, they'd come in costume.

Spencer got to them early on, shortly after delegating shirt distribution to Katrina and grabbing a cupcake from the snack table. "Do you know who made these? Or, duh, stupid question, I'm sure they're store bought. Cute, though."

Peyton snorted. "It's a regular cupcake with a candy corn stabbed into the middle. Somebody's out there ruining cupcakes for sport."

Sydney swatted her girlfriend's butt playfully. "They're supposed to look like boobs, Peyton. See, with the...?" She pointed.

Their RA's eyes widened in embarrassment at having the confectionary tit in his mouth in front of them, but short of spitting out, there was nothing for it. In fact, Peyton changed her mind in light of new facts and grabbed one for herself and Sydney. She put it to her baby's lips, then licked off the mess she'd made of the frosting. Spencer pointedly looked away, as if girls licking one another wasn't something he was used to on their floor.

"So, I gotta ask..." He gestured to their orange scrubs. "Inmates?"

Sydney pushed the thick black glasses up her nose as Peyton flexed the Windows logo Terri had painted there with some stuff from one of her makeup kits. She'd supplied half the floor. They probably owed her.

"Yes, but..." He shook his head.

"Have you seriously not seen *Orange is the New Black*?"

"Oh crap! Yes! Yes yes! I love that show! Piper and Alex! That's fantastic. Though I hope not a commentary on the way I'm running the floor..." He grimaced.

"Eh, you're Caputo at worst," said Peyton.

"Didn't he have to resign after it got out that he'd sexually harassed a guard? And, um, masturbated in his office, to his inmates?"

Sydney nodded, speaking around another mouthful of cupcake. "Yep."

Spencer opened his mouth, thought better of it, and closed it. "Fair enough."

He was about to head for a less condemning conversation, but Peyton caught him by his wrist. "Hey, hold up. I need you to do me a favor."

"Oh. Sure. What kind of favor?" He was nervous, clearly. Peyton had been one of the final and staunchest holdovers from the broker girls. She'd signed that petition for Sydney, then committed to it. She said she didn't ever want Sydney to think she wouldn't burn this whole building to the ground if it made her happy. The rebellion had ended last night, officially, but grudges didn't always dissipate so evenly.

"Have a seat," she said, pointing to one of the sofas. "Middle cushion."

His eyes narrowed. "Um, can I ask why...?"

"Ya scared?"

Spencer nodded with hesitation. "I mean, a little, yeah."

"Good. Tonight's the night for facing your fears, hero. C'mon. Sit."

He hesitated, but a gentle smile from Sydney swayed him, and down he went. He was leaning forward like he wanted to be able to leap out of the way of a grenade, though. Sydney didn't totally blame him. She had no idea what the heck Peyton was doing, either.

"Lean back. Relax."

Around the lounge, girls were watching. They hadn't known what to expect from this party. Half of them had been there last night in that wild, sexy healing ritual, though the other half had all heard. The event had only grown in retelling. Sydney had heard a

rumor in the bathroom that Tori and Casey and Katrina had snowballed his cum back and forth for an hour, that he ate pineapple morning, noon and night until his cum was ambrosia, that swallowing it would burn out a girl's brain and make her Spencer's love slave. Sydney snickered and steered clear of it.

Straight girls and their straight girl fantasies. Sheesh.

Peyton made a gesture to Katrina, who seemed to be anticipating it. The soundtrack, some generic spooky white noise, stopped. The lounge fell silent. Everybody was watching now.

A song started, and on the first beat, Peyton struck a pose with lightning speed, planting a foot on the cushion behind Spencer's head. Her pussy was in face, though to his credit he very much looked like he wished it wasn't.

All you ladies pop your pussy like this, began the lyrics.

Sydney's eyes shot wide as Peyton began to dance. This was *their* song. The song they'd first grinded on each other to at that party, way back in the summer! What the fuck was she doing?!

Peyton danced. She danced like, well, a slut. A really agile slut – she'd had lessons as a kid, but didn't like to talk about it for some reason – but a slut nonetheless. Spencer soon looked uncomfortable enough that he tried to wriggle out, but Peyton planted herself in his lap and grinded her ass on his cock, lengthening between her cheeks. Sydney stared, aghast, as she watched her girlfriend toss her shirt off across the room – when had she taken her bra off?! – and kept on rocking.

It was like an unbelievably sexy waking nightmare. Some of the girls were watching her for a reaction, but most were hooting and hollering, spurring Peyton on as they danced in place themselves. They chanted along with the refrain: "*My neck, my back, lick my pussy and my crack!*" Over and over.

But... that was Sydney's pussy. Sydney's crack. Did... did his not leaving mean Peyton thought she could...? But...

The song was only a few minutes long, but not short enough for Sydney. She could do nothing but watch as Peyton forced his hands onto her bare tits, as she shook her butt in his face, peeling her orange scrubs down and shaking harder. She left her thong in place, at which Sydney could only wonder why bother at that point. Spencer was spellbound. It was hard to blame him. She'd fallen for that one herself, and fallen hard.

At last it faded, with Peyton straddling his lap with her arms draped over his shoulders, bouncing her tits right in his face. The Hotties watched, enrapt, waiting to see what would happen next. Last night he'd fed a cock sandwich to sworn enemies with cum pudding for dessert. Tonight, would his coveted cock cure the community of queer cuties once and for all?

Had it already?

“Tell me to fuck you,” Peyton said softly. The room was pin-drop silent, though, so everyone heard. She meant them to. Sydney’s heart had long since stopped beating, but even dead, it still hurt.

“I, ah, heard you were spoken for,” he said, chuckling nervously.

Peyton pressed closer, his palms overflowing with Hottie titty. “Tell me anyway.”

His eyes darted to Sydney, but Peyton caught his chin, then, with her other hand, forced it between her tits and shook them back and forth, slapping him about with them. “Don’t look at her. Look at these. Listen to *me*. Tell. Me. To fuck you.”

A faint voice burred up from between Sydney’s girlfriend’s tits. “Um, maybe after the party, we could, you know, go somewhere, and—”

He’d been going to say “talk,” probably, but Peyton didn’t let him. Instead, she threw him back against the couch cushion even harder than she’d thrust him into her chest.

“Nah fam, I’m good. This pussy don’t stray.”

The crowd’s reaction was mixed, disappointed girls who’d wanted another show like last night, and others who were tickled at what was, they’d thought, uh, sort of, a display of true love, or something? The symbolism of the act was lost on them. In any case, it had been quite the spectacle. Peyton called around to see if anybody knew where her clothes had gotten off to – Dawn sheepishly returned them when Kyu-Ri called out that her roommate was sitting on them – then slipped through the crowd to Sydney.

“And what the heck, may I ask, was *that*?” asked her confused girlfriend.

“It’s Halloween, baby,” Peyton grinned, kissing her – on the cheek, when Sydney turned her head to deny her the lips. “A little trick or treat.”

“It was a mean trick,” Sydney grumbled.

Peyton tilted her chin up at her. “Like I said, Halloween’s about facing your worst fears. And now you know, even if he asks for it, I’m gonna tell him to fuck off.”

Twisted though it was, that did bring a bit of a smile back to Sydney’s face. “You could’ve warned me, at least.”

“What’s scary about warnings? Besides,” Peyton said, smirking, “Remember when you said you put us in for a room switch?”

“Um, yeah...”

“If you’re gonna be that obvious lying to my face so you can stay here with your boy, just tell me you think I’m stupid so we can fight it out and get to that sweet make-up fucking.” Peyton said, pressing herself against Sydney, her body started to move in a more subtle dance.

Sydney’s eyes flew wide open, and only some latent instinct to not call eyes to her naked girlfriend’s gyrating ass kept her voice low. “Oh my GOD, Peyton. Is *that* why you were so freaking certain I wanted to sleep with him?! Because I lied to you about putting in for a room change?!”

Her girlfriend cocked her head. “I mean... isn’t it why you lied?”

“I lied because of *them*, not *him*!” Sydney said, pointing to the girls happily dancing in and on their RA, aping Peyton, thumbs-upping her across the lounge. “I swear. If you really want me to be with him, I would, but only for you!”

“I know. Now. But you did lie to me. Can’t blame a girl for making stupid inferences when you’re such a shitty liar.” Peyton tapped her chin up and kissed her. “But I promise, no more Spencer. No more anybody but you. Even in this bulky-ass costume I still wanna... *Grrrr*. Fuck your fucking face off.”

Mmm. “You know you can always fuck me any way, any time you want, love.”

Peyton pulled her tongue out of Sydney’s mouth, but still spoke right into those lips. “And I’m gonna.” Then she pulled back and looked around. “But I’m fucking thirsty, first. Who’s got the drinks?” she called.

Sydney grinned, then burst into laughter. Somehow that stunt with the strip tease had broken the dam, and the tension drained out of her.

They were steered to the snack table. As Peyton used the dipper to pour a cup for both of them, she flashed that knowing grin again. “You remember our first night together, baby?”

Sydney nodded. “Of course. I was so scared. I was so, so turned on, but...” She took a sip. Mmm. “You were so beautiful. So perfect. Made that thing you just did for Spencer look... OK, that still looked pretty insanely hot. I didn’t want to jump you while you were passed out, though. Thank goodness you weren’t.”

Peyton chugged hers quickly. “Yeah, well, while we’re baring all our secrets... I wasn’t drunk at all. I told one of my friends to make sure you knew where to find me. You were the most amazing thing I’d ever touched. I was scared out of my mind I was gonna blow it, or you’d turn out to just be some basic bitch who’d been taking a ride on the L-train for a minute on the dance floor but wasn’t really into me.”

Sydney beamed. “I actually wasn’t drunk, either.”

“I know. Unlike you, I was paying attention to what your tongue tasted like, baby. High fructose corn syrup and a poorly matched breath mint. Which, I thought, was a classy touch. I was hot for you already, but the flavor made me keep you.”

Sydney kissed her again. “Hey, yeah, that high fructose corn syrup can get it.”

The girls quickly helped themselves to seconds, then thirds. “I don’t care what anybody says, Hawaiian Punch is good shit,” Peyton observed.

Katrina, self-appointed snack and music czar, nodded from her nearby post. “Yep. Same stuff as last night, but Ramona refrigerated it for us so it would keep. Considerate, right?”

Sydney snickered. “I don’t think Hawaiian Punch goes bad overnight.” None of them were sure whether or not Spencer’s cum, and the chemical compound it contained, went bad overnight, nor was Ramona. She’d simply thought it would be best to play it

safe. A pair of boxers she'd used to mop up an especially voluminous blast of it off her face had been left to soak in there all day. None of them knew about that, either.

Peyton and Sydney helped themselves to two more cups each before heading back to their room, where they spent the rest of the night in one another's arms. It was gay as fuck.

END, PART FOUR

Part Five: The Gamer's Tale

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

Destiny applauded along with the rest of the club. Also contributing were a few members 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. Lerwick and Hayes High, the school it shared with two other neighboring towns, were all she'd ever known.

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 club's usual meeting place. 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 daycare 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 and seldom dipped below Master I. It might wind up giving her arthritis when she was 25, but she'd done it. Finally, all those hours of grinding and training and testing strats on her alts were going to— “Michael Soo!”

She quickly slumped back down, hoping nobody had noticed her moment of anticipation. Michael Soo? He was a very solid shooter, but he was also a competitive asswipe. He tended to take charge, bark orders, and if it went well, hoard the credit. Destiny didn't like having him behind her though. The feel of his gaze on her butt aside, 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. This was why she didn't use her main for HHGC.

Michael marched up, snatched what had been cleverly been termed the Backseat Gamer trophy, and promptly resumed playing whatever that was on his phone. No, she

saw, squinting. He was 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 yammering on about Gen Z and their goddamn participation trophies, she'd never been given one of those, either. Sure, it was only some stupid plastic thing, and sure, they made sure all the seniors got one for something. Even so, the team had customized them, so everybody was recognized for something unique and personal. 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. Why were they so blurry?

Oh right, she was starting to cry at the humiliation.

She made herself think about headshots and stealth kills and the time the team had browbeat her into adopting the Black Widow Fortnite skin which had cost her an entire month's allowance and how she'd "accidentally" misclicked and lobbed a gas grenade into the vehicle instead of getting in.

The tears receded. She was almost as good at doing that as she was at gaming.

"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 of him to let her leave it 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.

Ms. Stadler continued to say nothing until the ceremony broke up, the members of the HHGC all promising to log on at 8 for the night's raid. She tried not to hear Michael saying something to the others about how he'd be "all alone" with their waifu at Lakeview next year. Like there weren't ten thousand other boys there. Like he had dibs.

The young teacher beckoned Destiny 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...? That was so fun. Why wouldn't I be?" She couldn't wait to get home and cry where no boys would see it. She always kept her bedroom door

locked whether she was in or out, so not even Stan could watch her meltdown. He always made fun of her when she got emotional.

“Team Waifu?” suggested Ms. Sadler.

“They were just teasing,” Destiny said, making herself roll her eyes. She’d seen popular girls roll their eyes at teachers before. She never raised her hands, learned how not to get called on so they didn’t talk to her, so she never needed to. But popular girls did, and didn’t seem to get in trouble. “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. “That’s true. They were just teasing. During the awards ceremony. Instead of recognizing your skill, they were 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 or creepy. A few weeks ago one of them had snapped her bra strap, and when she’d yelled at him not to touch her, Stan had laughed and delivered another of his speeches about how boys just wanted attention, and if she kept being hysterical every time they did that, they’d only do it more. But they’d done it before and she’d said nothing, and that had made them do it more, too. She didn’t really know what to do about the whole boy portion of the human race. Easier online, where you could just rocket launcher them into nothingness.

“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 shoulders, and the valve on the young woman’s waterworks spun wide open. Ms. Sadler bent down in her face, commanding her attention. “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. I’m sorry.”

“Snr frrg furrhr,” Destiny sobbed into the woman’s blouse, her glasses now unusable from the surge of tears.

“I know, honey. I know. But hey. In a couple months, you’re going to go to college. Do you know what you’re studying?”

Destiny nodded. “Urrm hrrmrhr rrn krnrnr snurrhs,” she mumbled, still weeping way harder than she knew how to control.

“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 class, though. 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. Ms. Sadler liked to end class – labs, anyway – with a question, something to make them think about the social issues around the scientific aspects, the implications of it for humankind. 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 computer surpasses their art?* She’d zoned out for the first few awards just thinking about it, and thinking about how much she didn’t know and how much she *could* know and how if she knew everything there were some things you could only have opinions on because not every question had right answers.

The main thought Destiny had dwelled on, though, was that it 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. Stan still managed to be more progressive than his wife, Destiny’s mother, who nominally supported her daughter but mostly wanted her to meet a nice man and start working on making her some grandbabies.

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 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’m actually the first in my family to ever go, so I have no idea what to expect. 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–”

“Um, it’s five letters...” Destiny said nervously. Maybe science teachers were just bad with math, and English?

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

“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 driving hard into that plastic as her teacher continued. “Going to college is going to be the best thing for you. You live in Lerwick, right?”

“Yeah. The smell give me away?” Destiny snickered. The only jobs in Lerwick other than agriculture were the meat processing plant, where Stan worked. It was an old joke, but like that Lerwick odor, it stuck. (Better than Bannock, one of the other towns feeding into Hayes High, where the slaughterhouse was. A low bar.)

“No, I just tend to remember things about my favorites,” Ms. Sadler said. “Destiny, you’re going to see so much and learn so much when you get out of here. You never have to feel ashamed of where you come from, but I hope when you leave that you never have to come back.”

Her student – for a couple weeks yet – frowned. “You came back.”

“I didn’t have a choice. My... It doesn’t matter. But trust me, this is an even smaller place than it feels now, and you have so much big in you. Find people who make you feel good about yourself. Who support your choices because they’re *your* choices. Don’t settle for someone just because they’re a decent shot and don’t breathe too loud in 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.”

They hugged again, but then 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 wrinkled her nose. “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.”

“Hey, that’s another four-letter word!”

“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." She kissed her daughter on the forehead and excused herself. Destiny followed her to the door, locked it with practiced subtlety, and sat back down at her station. She 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 as the boys logged 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, some of them, usually, and yes, it was better than dealing with random PUGs. At least these doofuses wouldn't hear a girl's voice and lose their damn 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, dinguses, prepare yourselves to get cleaned out in 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 big fat four-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 it was probably staged and probably elicit exactly that reaction but *whoof* who cared, 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, where it took three hours of fast food and 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 couldn’t win?

Maybe she could...

Hmm. Or...

Was there really a high drop rate 18% RoF boost sniper in Red Scare? Day *one*...?!

“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 heat pumped out by the fan on her CPU was like an oven. Great in winter, but come summertime, upstairs, with Stan’s insistence that sweat built character so his house didn’t need AC? (He’d conveniently decided to favor his wife with a window unit in their bedroom, though. “More than one way to work up a sweat!” he’d laughed when she complained. *Gross*.) Even that, though, wasn’t to be turned down below 80 when he wasn’t in it. It was brutal in her bedroom. Only it was even more brutal outside, six acres full of bugs, snakes, coyotes and bored stepbrothers.

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.”

“They’re called booty shorts, Mom, and these aren’t even—”

“You watch your language, young lady. You still live in a Christian house. Oh and hey, speaking of you running away from home, this ought to cheer you up. A letter came for you today.”

Destiny blinked. “A letter? Like, on paper?”

Her mother fished it out of her purse and read slowly from the envelope. She wasn’t much for reading, having dropped out of school to raise Destiny as a junior. “‘Lakeview University Office of Housing and Resident – Residence – Life.’ Guess it’s about your, oh what do they call it. Not apartment, but...”

“It’s a dorm, Mom.”

“Don’t take that tone, college girl. You still live under my roof. Anyway, I already opened it, took a gander. It’s about your roommate, the rules, stuff to bring and not to bring. 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, her stepbrother Blaine showering with the bathroom door open again... it was all forgotten as she read the letter.

And again.

And again.

Destiny hadn’t been this devastated when her level 91 hardcore druid died because Stan started banging on the door and yelling that she had to take the garbage out to the burn pile right that very minute and made her abandon her team in the middle of a boss fight. Those idiots had kited Duriel right to where she’d AFKed, and she was pretty sure they’d done it on purpose. Even that didn’t compare to this.

A coed floor.

All that yearning and dreaming of an exclusively female space, no drooling boys staring at her big stupid boobs or forcing her to talk to them when she just wanted to listen to her music and... All the four-letter words, all of them!

Destiny hadn’t signed up for a coed floor. What did that mean? Would boys be, like, next door to her? Or like downstairs or something on another floor? (Did dorms have more than one floor usually?) 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! The name listed *Charlie* Andrews. Charlie was in quotes, which she assumed meant it was a preferred nickname, but... could that be *Charles*?! They couldn’t room her with a *boy*, could they...?!

Just how big were these dorm rooms, anyway?! She better at least have some kind of privacy screen, or, or...! She made sure the door was locked, then sobbed and sobbed into her pillow. It felt like her college dreams had been murdered by the contents of that envelope. Even if it was a girl, like a Charlene or something, it would be a girl who'd probably *wanted* to live with a bunch of boys. One of those girly girls – not like Destiny, the four-letter kind of girly girls – who wore fake eyelashes and had a shoe rack who'd never played a video game more advanced than freaking *Animal Crossing!* A *casual!*

(Not to dis *Animal Crossing*, Destiny reminded herself. Cuteness had its place, and it was OK to unwind sometimes. She just preferred to relax smurfing on the bronzies.)

Her mother was no help. The woman still had a flip phone, for crying out loud, and that was the most advanced piece of technology she used. Of course she hadn't read up on Lakeview housing policies any more than Destiny had. 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 seemed excited that the pursuit of an 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. Wasn't that nice?

"Just don't let Charlie knock you up until he's got a ring on you," she cautioned.

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. She was *not* living with a boy.

The phone rang twice before someone picked up. "Well hello."

"Um, hi." Why did this woman's voice sound like she was talking to someone she knew? "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. The school must've messed it up."

"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."

Cautiously, Destiny allowed herself to laugh. At least it wasn't a boy. "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, how to be bad at math, anything."

Destiny laughed even harder, unreservedly this time. "I believe you, I believe you!"

Charlie's voice went back to normal. "Oh thank goodness. I – *I'm fine, Dad, I was only goofing around! I'm talking to Destiny! Yeah, my roommate!*" She had the grace to pull the phone away from her face while yelling. There was a pause, a faint male voice. Destiny could only somewhat make it out, something about bad influences. Was that... something about offering money to fix his poorly raised daughter? "Sorry about that. My dad says hi, by the way. And some other things that he was *DEFINITELY KIDDING ABOUT, RIGHT DAD?!*"

Meanwhile, Destiny waited awkwardly through a less audible response from Charlie's dad. While she waited, she searched *Charlie Andrews* on facebook. Both her first and last name were really common, but gender and age were excellent filters in this case. The girl had fairly robust privacy settings. The only picture Destiny could access of her was her current profile picture, a group of like forty high school students posing together in caps and gowns dated a few weeks ago. No telling which one was Charlie.

With trembling fingers, she clicked Add Friend. It was the only way she was going to get to see more, and find out if she needed to request a transfer.

"I am so sorry about that," Charlie was apologizing right around that same time. "My dad thinks he's very funny, and has very little respect for important conversations with lovely roommates. Which, by the way, did you just friend me?" Charlie asked it in a tone like Destiny had just sent her flowers and a season pass to her favorite game.

"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 slash roommates slash paranormal investigators – I'm sorry, I'm super anxious and I try too hard to be funny when I'm anxious. It's a coping mechanism. But yeah, I can't wait to meet you, and once we're *real* 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 Charlie was onto

something. “That sounds cool.” It sounded sort of terrifying, actually, going to a room in a strange building in a strange city to meet a stranger who she’d be locked in a tiny room with for most of a year. Then again, pretty much everything about college sounded terrifying to Destiny. 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 targeted. “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...?” Destiny crawled toward her nightstand to check the letter, but Charlie replied in time.

“Metaphorical tomorrow,” pronounced Charlie in the same weird tone.

“Are you, um, drunk?”

“No, just really nervous and bad at first impressions. Why, are you?”

“Uh, nope. 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?”

At least it wasn’t a boy.

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, emerging from a gorgeous green canopy that sprawled around and across a campus the size of Lerwick. Over ten times the population. She was surprised at how many trees there were. 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 the name of the lake 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.

Here she was, viewing the lake at Lakeview. That was kinda cool. This was really happening. It was the only cool thing about it, but at least it was something.

Michael, it seemed, had gotten the full tour experience. As they drew closer, he named off various buildings. Destiny was listening, but only for what he wasn’t saying. For hours now. But they were close. He would say it again soon. Oh god she wanted to get out of this car.

He still didn’t say it, though. He didn’t even go to his dorm first, like he’d said he would when they first talked about making the drive together. It had been her mom’s idea after asking Destiny if any of her little, you know, nerd friends or whatever you

want to call them – “they’re just guys I’m friends with, Mom, you don’t have to say it like that” – was going to Lakeview with her. Once the possibility of not having to make the long drive herself was on the table, she’d called Mr. and Mrs. Soo and set it all up unasked.

Michael drove straight to Higgins Hall, seeming upbeat despite the long drive in the traffic consisting of thousands of freshmen moving in, and despite the tense situation he’d created in the car back at that “scenic view.” Destiny hadn’t seen anything, only heard.

Finally they arrived at Higgins. It was pretty small, at least compared to the nearby buildings. Maybe those were where the classes happened? A school that was in multiple different buildings seemed kind of insane to her still. Michael 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. *Move, you four-letter asshole*, she thought at it. *Stop hugging your stupid kid goodbye and MOVE.*

Her own mom had given her a big hug that morning before she left, even cried a little. That had been nice. Then she’d told her to hug her father and her brothers, too, letting Destiny mentally correct them as her steps. Stan laughed and wondered aloud how many months before she realized she was wasting her time and money on a bunch of communist indoctrination and came crawling back home. That had been less nice.

Michael’s eyes strayed to a pair of girls exiting the building hand in hand, one a dark-skinned girl with the dreamiest eyes Destiny had ever seen, the other a lanky dark blonde in a cotton dress so tight she was instantly sure the girl wasn’t wearing underwear, both agonizingly gorgeous. Was that something college girls did, holding hands and wearing dresses with no underwear? Or were they...?

Oh she hoped neither of them were Charlie. She’d never met any of the gays before. If Charlie was here and already, like, doing gay stuff? Yikes.

Even with these questions in her head, 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. She hastily unlocked the car door in preparation.

“Thanks so much for the ride,” she said, scurrying out 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 quickly caught up with her, though, meeting her behind the car where she was already tugging the trunk 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, knowing it would be Michael and his waifu alone in the car for hours. But then, the rest stop.

“Same. Say, how about I help you carry your things up to your room? Dude-bro style, you know? Act like I’m one of the retro-jocks.” He laughed at what was, she supposed, a joke. He hit a button on his key fob and the trunk finally swung open. Before she could stop him, Michael hefted the big box containing her PC.

She’d gotten a job at the same Forky’s Diner, the same one her mom used to work at before Stan made her stay home and take care of the house, just to buy that PC. She’d saved her tips for a year. It had save files dating back to elementary school, files backed up nowhere else. She could still load the Borderlands 2 profile she’d made with her dad in 4th grade, when she’d still been innocent about everything, before he’d run off to Myrtle Beach with that skank. Three clicks and she was back then again. That box held her most precious possession in the world.

Now it was in the hands of Michael Soo. Her heart raced. This was no time to upset him. 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 and everything.”

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.”

Babe. Waifu. Shortstack. English didn’t have enough four-letter words, so she started thinking some in other languages.

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, though, and 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 interjected. "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...?"

What in the actual hell was an "RA?" Destiny had never heard the term but he used like he'd said he was in the FBI and everyone would obviously know what that meant.

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 and even with the open doors letting the AC out it's still way better twenty feet that way, trust me, 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, walking backwards slowly, compelling her to follow.

"Yeah, um, I guess I'll see you around." Would she? (Ranger Associate? Really... Amicable?)

"Up four flights, down the hall, and where it splits, hang a right. You got your student ID, right?"

She nodded and pulled it from her breast pocket. They'd put it in huge bold letters on that letter to bring that today, because it was also her room key and her meal card. At Hayes, the lunch lady just knew who she was and let her by. The Milligans ate on the tax-payers' dime.

“Great! Just swipe it through the slot by your door, just like a hotel except it’s your home now. 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, though it sounded like more of an accusation than a question.

“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 up the stairs in silence. There was nothing she wanted to say, and fortunately, that box really did weigh a ton so he was in a hurry to put it down. 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. For maybe the first time ever, she almost wished she might see some big pushy musclebound douchebag who’d be keen on interposing himself between her and Michael. Every door she looked in, though, was girls, with a few dads. 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. The room was tiny, barely bigger than her bedroom at home. She very much didn’t like that the furnishing taking up the most space, almost suggestively, were the beds.

“We can just set it down here and go back for the rest,” she suggested as they neared her room.

“What, and leave it out here to get stolen?” Michael asked, laughing off her suggestion, hefting the box higher with the help of a knee. Her stomach lurched at the thought of him dropping it.

“It’s just one box. I can go get it, if you wanna wait here. Yeah, that looked heavy. Take a seat, and I’ll—”

“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 without escalating things, she swiped her student ID in the little slot that guy outside (Repairman Apprentice?) had mentioned. With a little click, the door opened. There was no sign of Charlie having been in here, just two unmade mattresses on two bunk beds, empty closets, bare desks. It was pretty spacious, Destiny thought, way bigger than her room at home. Bigger than her mom and Stan’s room, even – and nobody to tell her not to crank

the AC. Except then Michael followed her in, closing the door behind him. 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 now.

“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. Stan always got pissed off when she placated him, too, but nowhere near as pissed as when she didn’t.

“I mean, what are the odds of two people from Hayes even going to school here, much less two who are already friends, right? I don’t know, just feels like it’s... I don’t know. Fate. Or hey, maybe it’s... Destiny!” He laughed at his grand joke.

“Heh. Yeah.” Destiny hated it when people made puns about her name. It was a hooker-stripper hybrid name. She hated it. Her mom had tried to get Destiny to take Stan’s last name when she remarried, but her first name was the only one she was interested in changing. Worse, unlike her roommate, there wasn’t even a convenient shorthand. But she’d smile and laugh if it got him out of there sooner.

“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, that time. It didn’t matter. He took Destiny not laughing as a sign she was listening to his pitch, just like he’d take her laughter. Pepé Le Pew, chasing no matter how hard that cat tried to escape. “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 chuckled 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. Goddamn horny skunk.

“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 second entry in their conversation after one from Charlie that morning. *Can’t wait to meet you today, roomie!!!!*, she’d written.

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 it 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.” There. A warning shot, so he’d know it was time to run before her team showed up.

Michael seemed perplexed by the unsolicited information. Of course. He always acted like every player was a team of one, only looking out for their own health and stats. “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 mom and Stan find out? The HHGC guys? Ms. Sadler?

“Well then, looks like somebody’s already pretty excited,” said Michael, standing and undoing the button on 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!” Michael yelled, irked, then softly, “Aren’t we babe?” His cock twitched 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 resistance trinkets in the Four Fiends of the Elements raid boss fight. He folded his hands in front of his crotch as she opened the door.

It was that boy from the parking lot with the inscrutable acronym. Spencer. “Hey. Sorry to bug you, but they let me take a break from the brick oven out there. I’m going around in case anybody needs anything, but mostly 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, meet your neighbors, talk about Welcome Week orientation 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.”

“I was? I’m, uh, still kind of...” Michael was frowning. Did he think they were really hooking up? Did he think Spencer was disrupting something Destiny actually *wanted* to do? Could anyone be that delusional?

“I figured you wanted to get to your dorm, right?” Destiny pressed. If she actually came out and said no, this became something very different, but surely he had to recognize what she was trying to say. Right?

And there were going to be half a floor of these things living with her? Maybe she could call her mom and tell her she made a mistake. Go back home, back to Forky’s, back to her room. Ms. Sadler would be so disappointed in her when she found out.

“Oh. Well then.” Something in Spencer’s countenance changed, then, though Destiny was too distraught to notice. He hovered a moment, seeming to gather his thoughts, “Hey, you probably want to get on with unpacking and settling in. 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 neither closed the door nor looked 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 said, 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 ID so I can–”

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.

Charlie rested her arms on the mattress, planting her cheek on them. “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. Like he’d stained it. 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, the girl changed into her pajamas, switched off the light, and went to bed on her own bunk. 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? She'd prayed it wouldn't be that one. She was like an angel, but hotter. "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. To herself, really, but the girl was pressing her and inner thoughts became outer wails. 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! You don't know anything about me!"

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 sweetest 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? Somebody said Dana – she's super nice, you'll love her, she's in the marching band – but I guess she moved in early for band stuff, and she said she was *miserable* after her mom dropped her off." Charlie's chin tapped Destiny's shoulder. "But, um, I noticed your phone has been sitting in the same place on the windowsill since I got here."

"Point being?" grumbled Destiny.

"If you were homesick, I just would've thought you'd try to call home is all. But you didn't, and you seem so sad, so, um... Did something happen?"

She stiffened. "Why would you think something happened?"

“Dana only admitted she was riding the struggle bus because a bunch of the girls here are homesick, too. Except they still 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, waiting. Spencer came around in the middle of the rambling, sobbing, barely coherent tale, 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 any more, 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, like, a lot of stuff.” Not the most insightful observation, side by side on a mattress with no sheets or blankets or pillow.

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 swiped your stuff. If this boy goes here, maybe there’s something they can do? He is an RA, after all. Maybe he can do something.”

“What the heck does that mean anyway? RA.”

“Didn’t he say last night? I thought he did. But I think it’s residential advisor? Or assistant. Something like that. But it sounded like maybe he can do something about this, or at least find you whoever can.”

“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 pillow?!” 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 mom and dad do purty good. Well, my dad does, but my mom just married smart.” Charlie giggled. “So trust me, I won’t miss it.”

“Oh my gosh, no way! I couldn’t—”

“You can. Come on, please? Puh-lease. I’ll beg if I have to. 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. On the drive to Target, Charlie filled her in on the scuttlebutt about the mostly missing boys on their nominally coed floor. He’d apparently told some people they’d be moving him to a guy’s floor and finding a girl RA for Higgins 3, but Destiny wished they wouldn’t. He’d made her feel safe, and welcome. She wished she knew who to contact at Lakeview to ask them to let him stay, but her experience navigating bureaucracy mostly consisted of filling out the leger at Forky’s after she counted out the cash drawer.

Charlie bought her new sheets, and not one, not two, but *three* pillows. This effervescent creature explained how she liked to sleep with one between her legs, and swore Destiny had to give it a try. One of the other customers overheard her; having already noticed Charlie’s legs by virtue of being a male with eyes and line of sight to them, he tripped over his own shopping cart wheel and bumped into a shelf of linens, scattering 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 again.

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.

Plus, Charlie had baked this batch of brownies, and it was really hard not to cheer up with fresh, warm brownies.

Bit by bit, Destiny began to suspect that she’d really lucked out with her roommate. Charlie was a lot to handle at times, though. Nobody had ever found Destiny so freaking *interesting* before her. It was like she was living in a slow-rolling interview that continued heedless of the day or the time.

“Lerwick, huh? That’s a weird name. Does it mean anything? What’s it like? What is there to do there?”

Destiny paused her game and spun her clunky desk chair. “I don’t know what it means. It’s small, though. Like a thousand or so people, I think. People don’t really do anything. Aside from meth, I guess.”

“Ha! Or... are you serious? You’re serious. Are you? I haven’t learned to read you yet. You’re joking. Meth!”

“Do you already have a major in mind? Are you going to minor in anything, do you think?”

Destiny waited until Charlie looked away before dropping her towel, hastily dressing her damp body and hoping the girl didn’t look. She was 90% sure this girl was gay for her. It bothered her less than she’d worried. “Computer science. I don’t really know for what, but they say you can always get a job somewhere with it. I don’t think I’ll minor. College is, um, kind of expensive.”

“Yeah, *so* expensive.”

“How about you?”

“Hm? Oh. I’m, ah, planning on majoring in actuarial science.” A pause. “And business admin. And probably finance.” A longer pause, and then the dam broke. “And I’m going to minor in Spanish and communications. And poli sci. And maybe international affairs.”

Destiny almost tripped putting on her underwear as the list kept growing. “Uh... So let’s see, you’re going to cook the books for the shell companies for a Colombian cocaine kingpin, and help him get elected to parliament?”

“Help *her* get elected to parliament.”

“Expensive, yeah, but sounds worth it.”

“Maybe this is too personal, but I *love* your hair. Is that your real color? Does your mom have red hair? What’s your mom like? Do you miss her?”

She rolled over, pillow held tight between her thighs, and addressed Charlie from the top bunk to her place on the bottom. Glancing quickly at her phone, she saw it was almost midnight. “Yep. Yours is really pretty, too.” Never before in her life had she complimented someone’s hair, that she could recall. “And yeah, my mom’s a redhead, too. She’s... fine.”

“Sorry, I know it’s late. I just miss my family a lot. I’ll shut up and let you sleep.”

Destiny took a few slow breaths, her eyes drooping. From down below, she heard a little snuffle.

“So, um, I guess you and your mom are close...? What’s she do?”

“Do you have any pets? I have a dog. I miss her so much. But you said your house was built on all this open space, so you probably had like five, right? I bet it was so gorgeous there.”

Destiny ignored the question for just a moment, making sure her book order list was correct before clicking purchase. Her loans didn’t cover them, but at least she’d budgeted accordingly. This one was going to hurt. “I had a goat when I was a kid. Then my dad left and my mom couldn’t find a job for a while, so...” She shrugged. Charlie’s smile faded by increments “I didn’t like it much anyway.”

“Oh my gosh, you had to rehome your...” Charlie trailed off as Destiny clicked the Purchase button, her stomach roiling. She’d built her computer piecemeal, making those digital books more money than she’d ever spent at one time on anything in her whole life. Her mom never let her forget how much her braces had cost, but Medicaid had covered most of that, so she didn’t think it counted.

Destiny closed the tab, removing the offending figure from her field of vision, and turned to face Charlie. She looked like she might be sick. “What?”

“Hey! Sorry to interrupt, but I was putting in a grocery order and wondered what I could get for you. Like do you like Coke, Diet Coke, Coke Zero, Cherry Coke, Cherry Coke Zero... I guess I’m just sort of doing my favs, big ol’ sweet tooth. But I can do whatever you want. Half the fridge is yours as far as I’m con– WOW was that *violent!*”

Destiny was already sprinting for fresh cover from her victim’s teammates, the smoke graphic still rising from the barrel of her sniper rifle. That smoke was her after-sex cigarette. “They let you *order* your groceries at Lakeview? No wonder this place is so expensive,” she grumbled, sliding into cover in a little cospse.

“At...? No, I mean... from the grocery store...? Yeah, you can, you know, put in an order, and they have it ready when you get there.” She said it like she was suddenly wondering if Destiny knew what grocery stores were. Her family got most of their food from Casey’s, whatever they couldn’t get from the garden or the chicken coop.

“No yeah, I know. Um, whatever you like is fine.” She couldn’t admit it (especially not to this affable angel who still seemed to be trying so hard to get into Destiny’s pants that maybe she actually wasn’t), but Destiny dreamed of having a fridge stocked with the cuttingest edgiest energy drinks. She knew they were trash nutrition and didn’t work, but they were inextricably linked to her gaming fantasies. One of those refrigerators like

she'd seen on TV with its own water thingy and ice thingy, except hers would pump out Rockstar Tangerine Mango Guava Strawberry.

“Would you mind if we switch the door so it doesn't auto-lock?”

Destiny was studying her campus map, alt+tabbing between it and google maps to try to get a feel for her walk to classes. A third tab had the street view from in front of Michael's dorm, Roland, so she could cross-reference it with routes he might be taking to his classes. Her gamers skills helped, though this was more RTS thinking than FPS, so not quite her forte.

Without pausing, she answered by reflex, honestly, “Oh yeah, definitely not.”

“Wait, did you mean yeah you, definitely don't mind, or yeah, we should definitely not do that?”

Destiny saw a couple possible entanglements, but she thought if she veered wide by Salmins Hall, it was really unlikely he'd have any reason to be that far west. “No, I mean leave it locked, obviously,” came her distracted response. Not testy, just... why would they ever want the door unlocked?

“Oh. Yeah, sure. You know,” Charlie said, looking over her shoulder, “I know we missed the tour, but I bet we could get someone to give us one. Would you be down for that? I'd kind of like to see the campus.”

Destiny minimized the window. Her roommate obviously wouldn't understand what she was trying to do, but it still felt shameful. “Are they just... doing tours?”

“I dunno, probably.” Charlie grinned, took her hand and dragged her into the hallway. She had to let go so Destiny could turn back for her shoes, but out they went.

Charlie walked up to a guy on the sidewalk leaving the food court. Without preamble, she said the two of them were new here and asked if he wouldn't mind showing them around. The guy stared, hastily chucked his food in the trash, took a hard slurp from his drink and tossed it, too, and devoted the next two hours of his life to satisfying every itch of Charlie and Destiny's curiosity.

“So how did you know that guy?” Destiny asked, hours later, as they left him at the Higgins circle drive.

“Hm? No, he just looked like he knew where he was going. I thought he might be able to help.”

“But... the way you talked to him, you sounded like you were friends.”

Charlie shrugged, grinned, eyes sparkling. “And now we are.”

Destiny had seldom had close female friends. In elementary school, sure. That's what her mom had felt was "appropriate." As she'd gotten 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 attempting to create and sustain cleavage, their budding breasts little more than two freakishly large nipples with a dream. Destiny got excited about climbing the ladder rankings and 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. The ability to boast cleavage yet somehow not opting to had not endeared her to her kind.

The policy had softened, some, over the years. Not that she had any particular desire to advertise her excess, and in fact rather preferred not to, but factors coincided to give the world its taste of Destiny and her waifu award-winning boobs. Lack of AC, insufficient budget to replace old clothing, a desire for tips to upgrade her processor, and once – just once – giving in to bad advice that she could persuade the HHGC to play the games and missions she preferred if she joined the team video chat in a sports bra.

("Sorry guys, I didn't have time to change after taking a run – just be glad you're not here to smell how sweaty I am." Such cringe. She did not run, ever. It had only been a phase for a couple months junior year, but she doubted those horny dorks had forgotten it to this day. Little turds probably screenshotted it and stashed it away for a lonely day. That four-letter bitch Michael didn't need his any more, she supposed. The prick was probably jerking himself off sniffing the palm sweat residue on her PS5 controller.)

Not one for fashion, most of Destiny's wardrobe choices were habit. She'd learned to wear whatever was on top of her drawers as long as it didn't clash too hideously. If it was hot, maybe a hasty ponytail. She had one fall jacket (temperatures 45-65 degrees) and one winter coat (44 and below). A pair of dress shoes, for the rare fancy occasion, and a pair of sturdy sneakers she could slip on and off without slowing to bother with laces.

"I don't think you need to bother with the turtleneck in August," laughed Charlie as she inspected her own outfit in the mirror hanging on one of her closets. (Destiny's meager wardrobe fit fine on her shelves, folded in piles, so she'd donated hers to Charlie, whose side had been ready to burst.) The mirror confirmed that although Charlie looked every bit as casual as Destiny, there had been a lot of calculation that had gone into it. Mussing her hair just so. No, not *those* sneakers, *these*. Whatever that had been she'd done to her eyelashes, Destiny had to hand it to her, the gleam in her eyes was probably visible from Neptune.

Destiny looked at her hoodie. It was much thinner than it looked, having been that way when she'd ordered it and then seeing years of intense usage since. Putting it

on when she left her room was another habit, one she'd not even realized. "Oh. No, I know. I just... I dunno."

Charlie craned her neck to make eye contact in the mirror. "So... why did you put it on? It's like ninety out there. In case the salon is chilly or something?" She'd put together an outing, makeovers and massages in advance of tomorrow's first day of classes with some of the other girls on their floor. Destiny had wished her well, but Charlie had begged her roommate to come with. It was important to her for some reason that she start meeting their neighbors.

"I don't know. Just... always what I put on when I leave my room." Destiny shrugged. "Didn't even think about it. See?" Her muscle memory unzipped and rolled it off her shoulders in an instant, and then back on.

"Even in the summer? Is Lerwick really cold or something? Oh my god, have I been melting you in here with the temperature?"

Destiny shook her head. She'd felt *hot* for the past few days since moving here, but... not like that. Certainly not because of anything Charlie had been doing. Ew. She'd actually been thinking a lot about their RA, how he'd stepped in with Michael. That shower video thing had been, like, porn hot, but Destiny would take a protector over a porn star any day.

"No, no, you're good. I dunno, just something I always wear – wore – around the house. You know, like in case Stan – my stepdad – or my stepbrothers are hanging around, ya know?"

She was contemplating whether or not she wanted to leave it behind – it *was* hot out today – and didn't notice the way her roommate slowly stiffened. "In case... what?"

Destiny glanced back. "You know, dudes in the house."

"I... don't think I follow." Charlie turned, halting her preparations. Her eyes looked bigger than ever. She must know what she was doing with that makeup.

"Where did I lose you?" What had she said to make her new sorta friend look at her like that? "I guess it's more for my mom than them, honestly. She's always freaking out I'm gonna like ooh la la her husband." She made herself laugh.

"Oh." Charlie didn't, at all. There was strain evident in her voice, oozing out from behind an attempted veneer of casualness. "You, um... You probably don't want all that on around us girls though, right?"

Destiny examined herself for a moment. She supposed there really wasn't a need. She hung it by the hood back on her bedpost, so it would be handy. It felt a little odd leaving her room, walking around her new home with bare shoulders and the sun shining on her boobs, but nothing bad came of it. They bumped into Spencer on his way back from the gym on their way out to the parking lot, and was glad she'd ditched it. Not that she was going to do anything about him, but her fledgling crush was a welcome distraction from where her boy-related thoughts had wanted to go this whole past week.

She went out and did girly things, with girls, and tried not to feel too put off by it. They all seemed so at home over it. Maybe they all came from rich families like Charlie's, and having people fawn and fuss over them was something they were used to. The results weren't altogether horrible, she conceded. By the time they strayed back home in time for the big floor meeting, she felt... attractive. She knew she was pretty. She actually sort of wished she wasn't sometimes but there was no sense pretending. Still, attractive was rare, especially when it wasn't just for a special occasion like a cousin's wedding or a school dance or opening night at the county fair.

She didn't think she'd made any friends, but it *was* fun to be "hot" for a day, watching boys try not to look like they were rushing to sit by her in her classes, gauging how close they could get before it was creepy, seeing how long they'd keep trying to chat her up when she paid them no heed. Her mom would be furious, seeing her skip all this homework for her MRS. That made her smile even more than these boys. And she'd thought the guys at Hayes were horndogs! She got invited to *three* parties her first day of classes. Figuring it never hurt to have some future study buddies filed away, she doubled her social media friend count on social media by Monday afternoon, and tripled it by breakfast Wednesday.

At home, it seemed like everybody had added everybody on everything, though Destiny didn't think she fit in there very well. It was like the whole floor was the hot clique at Hayes, legs and hair and skin and boobs all cultivated as personality traits. Her roommate seemed nice enough, but...

No, credit where it was due. Charlie was nice. She was very nice. Like, eerily, almost fatiguingly nice. As Destiny listened to her gushing on with the others about how dreamy their RA was – astute – she began to accept that it was no gay ruse to trick her out of her underwear. She was just nice.

That said, the girl was also so at home around the rest of the Higgins lot that Destiny maintained her vigil. Charlie seemed to have become overnight friends with the whole floor, 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. Only two doors down there was a girl who actually styled herself as an Instagram model! Jean, who looked to her like she might have killed someone in real life, espoused no interest in joining Destiny in killing them online. 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. Kyu-Ri's roommate,

Dawn was the only one who responded to her open invite for a quickmatch or two, but she said she just wanted to sit there and watch Destiny, not actually play. Lurking over her shoulder, leaning on her, brushing Destiny's hair aside "so she could see" but really as near as she could tell just to breathe on her neck... Destiny laughed at herself when the door locked behind her exit at the thought that maybe somebody on

the floor really *was* gay. There were those two exercise freaks next door always grunting and moaning in there who everybody *said* were gay, though Destiny thought it was rude to say it in front of them. Peyton and Sydney didn't seem to mind, though.

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 four freaking lettered about every little thing. Plus, after the way he'd sussed out Michael and forced him out, he just made her feel safe. He had a gentle way about him in a way she'd never known a boy to have.

She didn't know the first thing about flirting with a boy, but every time she passed him in the hall she found herself grinning ear to ear like she really was waifu of the year.

By the time her first week of classes was over, she was in a much better place. Higgins 3 already felt like home. She might not fit in like Charlie, the right-sized peg for every hole, but that meant she often had the room to herself to study and game in peace. 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. (11 ms ping? Thank you, daddy.) All those doubts and anxieties she'd harbored were melting away.

All except one, anyway.

Charlie had gone out and brought a brand new ultra-widescreen that barely fit in the room; Destiny helped her assemble the IKEA entertainment center and configure the sound bar and surround speakers and adjust the picture setting just right. Charlie shamelessly crooned down the hall about how lucky she was to have the smartest nerdiest awesomest roommate on the floor. Destiny tried and failed not to blush. Charlie had something kind to say about everybody, it seemed, but it sure hadn't gotten old yet.

“And hey, now you finally have somewhere to hook up your consoles!” Charlie said as they nestled in together on the futon. She'd forced a confession out of Destiny of her favorite movie; they were going to give the TV a test run with the blonde's first ever viewing of *Rocky*. “I've never seen someone so hardcore about gaming before. I bet for you not having your Xbox is like having a phantom limb or something.”

“Yeah. I mean, sometime, maybe. I'm really more into my PC. But hey, let's...” Destiny turned up the volume as the movie began, trying not to think about the box. Michael had driven away from Higgins with a lot that day. An Xbox Series X she'd won in a Halo tourney; an ancient N-64 that somehow still worked, which her dad had left her when he'd skipped town; a PS5 she'd waited over a year to play after preordering; thousands of hours of waitressing worth of games.

And her safety. And her dignity.

But nothing to be done about that. She watched Spider Rico and Rocky artlessly slug all four letters out of each other, imagining they were both Michael, and that they were both her.

Unfortunately, girls were still girls. After her failure to get some serious gaming, in which all she netted was an awkward encounter with Dawn, Destiny 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

DamnDanielle: u gotta red shell that bitch

Minutes later, Destiny received a DM. It was hard respecting someone who couldn't even come up with a decent handle, but at least in a place where she was still learning everybody's real names, it made it easy to tell who it was.

Tori: Somebody on this floor?

Mittlefinger: no, just 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 your homework. This is a thief. Just because you had an argument doesn't mean this dick can rob you.

Mittlefinger: seriously don't tell him. It was more than a fight and it was horrible and I just want to drop it, ok?

Tori: No, it's not OK. What happened??? I will help you, but you have to open up to me.

Mittelfinger: psl, Tori. I know you mean well but I really really REALLY don't want to talk or think about what happened ok? It sucked. Please

Thirty seconds later, there was a click and a thud as someone tried to open the door to her room. Tori demanded entry, and since she'd already disregarded Destiny's first request to let it drop, there seemed to be little to do but humor her. She opened the door to find Tori standing there, 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*. Destiny had a folding lawn chair at her desk at home.)

Charlie waved. "Oh, 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. I meant it."

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

"Yes, not that it's your business. God, I'm sorry I even brought it up."

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 eyed Destiny a moment before grudgingly acknowledging the question.

"Sure. Yes, that is. Destiny, I just want you to get what's yours, OK? Like Spencer said – we're not just a floor; we're a community. If you won't tell him, then try me. Who is he?"

Charlie nodded softly, encouragingly.

"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 don't."

"No! Oh god, no. That would only make it worse. I just want to forget about it, OK? He went to my high school and he drove me here and he got the wrong idea about us and... I just want to forget it ever happened."

There was no missing that Tori didn't like that answer, neither what it implied or how Destiny was reacting to it. Nevertheless she again nodded her obedience to Destiny's wishes and Charlie's command. "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 put a soft hand on her roommate’s arm. “Would you feel better if I went, too? You’re such a hardcore badass gamer chick I bet you got so much gaming stuff we’ll need both of us to carry it home to you 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? What had she even been thinking, leaving the house without her hoodie?

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. She’d never had a friend who wasn’t white before! Stan would hate it. Destiny didn’t care. “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 Roland. That’s all boys. Wouldn’t they realize you don’t live there?”

Tori glanced at Charlie just as Charlie looked over Tori. Both looked quite pleased with themselves. Charlie didn’t quite roll her eyes. “Um, ya. He let us in. 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 the creep let us walk right in there. It was just him – he has a roommate, looked like, 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 booties, *ladies*.’ Ew.”

Destiny had never made such an observation. Guys harassing women online were hardly ever that subtle. She nodded in complete agreement anyway. “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, like the toad was gonna kick *us* out. But Tori, she just folds her arms...” She looked at Tori. “Fold your arms. Go on, show her.”

With a dryly amused look, Tori obliged. Destiny was impressed. The chick had guns on her. “And she’s like, ‘you have a box of our friend’s 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 immediately that 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 if you want.’”

“He did *not* say that!” Destiny scowled, though she could hear him say it. That was why she’d dropped out of HHTTRPGC freshman year, because Michael – and really, half the guys there – were always spouting sexist sludge like that. She just wanted to rage and let her greatclub oof many bonks on the gobby noggins, but no, they wanted to pretend to get drunk and harass bar maids for no XP or loot.

So Tori, she just opens up the closet, and then the other side, and there it is right on top. He’s squawking and telling her she can’t go through his stuff, but she just grabs it and when he gets close, plants a hand on him and *shoves*, like *back off*, 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...”

Tori looked conflicted. Charlie finished the thought. “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 two girls. Just being a jerk is all.”

“What did he call me.”

Charlie looked to Tori, who nodded permission to repeat it. In a small voice, she did. “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 so much as looking your direction again, she’d test how strong the *glass* was! It was *insane*. He looked like he was gonna pee himself. Maybe he did.”

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. He seemed pretty scared, but put a few beers in a guy and watch that temporary courage shine.”

Charlie squatted in front of her and squeezed both of Destiny’s hands. “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. The boy on the other side 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 ignored him, though, hopping to her feet and pulled both of her new friends into a hug. “You guys are the best,” she murmured into the huddle. “Thank you. Thank you thank you thank you!”

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.” (What a ridiculous term to apply to her. She didn’t even own makeup or hairspray or have her ears pierced or anything like that!)

Then Spencer was all smiles. “Yeah? Tori, that’s awesome. Great work. I hope it doesn’t sound patronizing or anything, but I’m proud of you.”

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."

"And hey, I don't know what you're up to tonight, but half the floor is down in the lounge playing Mario Kart. You should check it out. I'm heading there once I finish rounds. I don't wanna brag, but I'm pretty decent at video games."

Destiny destroyed him repeatedly, for hours. He kept trying so *hard*. So hot, the way he mashed those buttons, clenched his chiseled jaw. When he started getting salty, she let him win a few – which he noticed, and thanked her for showing mercy. That was hotter yet.

That night, the memory of those pats sat heavy in Destiny's gut. Or, well, not her gut, but... deeper.

Maybe it was weird, but she'd never really 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 with a particular eye toward his internet-addicted stepdaughter. That never stopped his sons, but Destiny would be mortified if he caught her. Sure, she could have input a work-around 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.

Her imagination had stepped in to fill the gap. Fantasies ran the gamut from the mundane, making out with her favorite streamers or a few of the hot boys she saw at school, to the perverse, meeting total strangers in a VR environment to fuck each other's avatars. Weird hentai type encounters sometimes. One of her favorites was the one where the Cockatronic Pentadicktator forced himself inside her and tried to pleasure her as a means to break her will and induct her into his loyal army of cybersluts. Sometimes it succeeded, usually if she was so worked up she needed a second round.

Her dreams that night were a nonsensical but nevertheless extremely intense combination of her mainstay masturbatory fantasies and the day's events. Spencer co-opted a lot of the tropes, and things got weird and confusing and hot. His face was in place of Hayes High quarterback Max Lightner's when he turned around to ask for help with the homework, which was somehow Mario Kart, and she tutored him in his lap and showed him how to aim green shells, and he told her how smart she was and told her he'd gladly pay for more tutoring with his cock. He was Kratos from *God of War*, joining her in slaughtering waves of enemies in his sweaty loincloth on their way back to his cabin, and if he called her "boy" instead of "girl," he did it in that insanely hot Kratos voice and then had ultra-violent cabin-smashing sex with her while they sometimes also killed more minions.

Then their cabin was the Higgins 3 shower, or sometimes her shower back home in Lerwick, and he was standing between Destiny and Charlie. Only this Charlie was frantically aggressive, desperate to get at her. Except unlike that girl in the video, Charlie didn't want to hurt her, but to get gay with her. But Spencer was always between them, sandwiched between their wet bodies as they slipped and slithered on him and around him until it was basically just an excuse to grind their bodies on him.

Then he was in her room to award butt pats to all the good girls, but he kept patting Charlie's, and sometimes Tori's, and Destiny tried to get him to notice her too but he was so focused on Charlie's he couldn't hear her. At times she was dying with envy, flashing her boobs and inviting him to pat those because surely the others couldn't compete with her there, except of course they did, which was somehow hotter when he made them fight for attention. Others she watched him maul her new friends' bodies with satisfaction, her heart swelling with pride for helping bestow this honor on them. Sometimes she joined in the patting, which she didn't even know how to feel about, but Spencer patted her for helping him pat, so dream Destiny decided it must be OK.

Then she saw Charlie was watching her get some pats in kind with jealousy of her own, and Tori sometimes too though that didn't seem to go anywhere, and she saw the lust in her roommate's eyes, and suddenly Spencer was the Cockatronic Pentadicktator and he was already so close to breaking her will, and he promised he would relent, spare her cyberfuckslavement if she would become his recruiter instead, except in the dream it was still Spencer enough that she wanted to be nice to him, and it was still Charlie

enough that Destiny knew she'd be glad for it, so she stealthed up behind Charlie and put the nanofuckstasy rod inside her and joined Spencer in evil laughing as the trembling blonde fell to her knees in instant and total submission, and then...

Then things got really weird – weirder – and Destiny wanted a reward, and the Spencer Pentadictator loved her and wanted to reward her, and the new cyberCharlieslut wanted to service him, and to thank Destiny, and there was some really messed up stuff where they were like fighting – but sexy fighting, like with their tongues and stuff – to be the first one to make the Pentadictator cumsplode, because that was the surest way to get him to reward his cyberslut minions with cumsplosions of their own, but pretty soon it was just Destiny and Charlie on their knees competing to see who could provide the most pleasure to Spencer in a tandem blowjob, and she was sort of kissing another girl around a cock, and then suddenly her stupid asshole brain flashed over to Michael Soo and she woke up choking down vomit, but nevertheless moist and sweaty and panting.

She beat down the stray thought in a flash, then took stock of herself in the dark room. Destiny was certain, instantly, that she'd never been this horny before. Could she...? With her roommate right down...?

The constant whirl of the fans in her PC assisted the soft hum of the air conditioning. She could be quiet.

How slowly she had to move to ease her panties down past her hips without giving the bed springs an excuse to groan only exacerbated the delirium of this decidedly naughty activity. Was the door locked? No, right, of course it was. It always was here. It was unnerving that she didn't have to lock it herself. Even more so that there was another person locked in here with her. That was naughtier still, way naughtier.

She grinned in the dark as her hand tip-fingered down her bare stomach to the space between her legs. It was a real life stealth run, sneaking into the dungeon to liberate Princess Leigha Orgasma from her cell. Mmm, yes your majesty, I *am* a little short for a stormtrooper. She split her attention between ghost-light teasing at her clit and trying to keep her breathing slow and even. If the guard circled by for an inspection, she'd be no more than a horny shadow.

The HHGC guys talked about jerking off or raiding the boss or 5 v 1 all-ins all the time, a dozen different gross and frankly baffling metaphors. So did her stepbrothers. So did Stan sometimes (albeit to the indignant squawks of Destiny's mother). She was pretty sure guys masturbated twice a day and three times Sunday. Destiny, she didn't really understand the anatomy of it all especially well; sex ed at Hayes High was STDs and abstinence, full stop. Still, some things felt good, and if it was a rather messy affair, once in a while a girl needed to solo the boss.

Destiny's eyes slid closed. Her ears filled with even breathing and air circulation, but her mind was back at those dream fantasies. No more chaos to them now. She

brought Spencer back in. Shower fight Spencer – off went his clothes, and on went a sheen of heroic water and manly sweat. “I’ve come to pat your butt, Destiny,” he said in a deep, sexy voice.

“You can pat anything you like,” she promised him, raising her real and imaginary shirts over real and imaginary tits. Spencer couldn’t help himself. Destiny could feel the conflict in him, how much he wanted her ass but was overwhelmed by the generous offer of big soft freckled boobs. Dream her switched into a pair of Charlie’s skimpy little shorts to reward him for seeing her as more than just her big rack.

“Well? See anything you want to pat?” she asked, twisting this way and that for him, her clit swelling against her finger needfully.

Oh shit. She was panting. If she wasn’t careful... She sighed happily, hoping this added level of challenge could stretch this out all night. No classes until 10:15, all night to explore this fantasy. She removed her shirt entirely and gave her nipples a few little pinches. Destiny wasn’t sure how much she liked the feeling of it, but it was sort of hot, a teensy bit painful, a little transgressive.

Now, where was I...

“Pat me, Spencer.”

She froze. That hadn’t been her. Not dream her, and not her her. That had come from the bottom bunk.

“Pat me... mmm... thank you...” muttered Charlie.

There were the softest sounds of movement. Sheets rustling, friction against fabric. No way. Charlie couldn’t be...! While Destiny was in the room...! While Destiny was also...!!!

“No... go ‘head... use hands, if you want...” she murmured after a minute.

Was she awake? Surely she wouldn’t just narrate her fantasies aloud if she were. As Destiny held back, only barely, so very barely diddling her pussy, she deduced that her roommate was masturbating in her sleep. One little bump on the behind with a clipboard, and she was so turned on she was playing with herself in her sleep.

Destiny should stop. This was... weird. Charlie would be mortified if she woke up and found her roommate taking a scenic drive down the roundabout with her. Destiny would be, too, but she was much more concerned about Charlie. All that this girl had done for her, all the kindness she’d shown...

She *deserved* Spencer.

Destiny’s eyes slid closed, and there her fantasy was waiting.

“Squeeze harder...” whimpered Charlie down on the bottom bunk.

Like that, her roommate sauntered into the fantasy, bending down with her hands on her mattress, showcasing that ridonkulous butt of hers. Spencer forgot Destiny was there. Destiny forgot Destiny was there. He peeled Charlie’s shorts down, then took her panties off with his teeth.

“Pat me,” pleaded Charlie – real, imagined, who knew. Spencer obliged, seizing one cheek in each hand.

He hesitated. “I shouldn’t. I came for Destiny...” But he sounded like he regretted it. Charlie shivered at the implication, that he wanted to fuck her so much that he was actually considering passing up on the the golden opportunity Destiny had offered.

Charlie whined. “Please? Please. Please. Please.”

(That was out loud. Holy shit. This was nuts.)

Spencer continued to balk, caught between Destiny’s desire to have him touch her, and her desire to see Charlie collect her earned reward. But Destiny wanted to come, too. Her horny, sleepy, gamery mind sought, and soon discovered, a solution. Was this... weird? Like, gay weird? Could she really...? Would it even be hot if she...

Destiny stepped into the piloting station and activated the mech overrides, and became... Mechsterny.

The controls were so intuitive. Moving his limbs was pretty much the same way she moved her own. As Charlie squirmed down below, Destiny maneuvered his limbs, touched his lean muscles, gave a playful stroke of the cock. (She was careful not to trigger its special psionic attack, searing its image into the minds of any woman looking at it for weeks at a time.)

“Pat me...”

Mechsterny pivoted itself to face the only other occupant of the room. As her mind supplied an Iron-Man-esque feat of zooming in on tight blonde booty while displaying an array of gibberish in her HUD, Destiny fought down a giggle in her fantasy control pod. (Because whatever this was would end fast and horrible if she woke up Charlie.) She maneuvered up behind her, and, after less of a pause than she would have anticipated needing, commanded the man-mech to give that thing a pat. The ass was soft, the way asses were, but there was firm muscle only barely beneath the surface. For the first time in her life, Destiny wondered what another girl’s butt would feel like. Not that she wanted to – she really didn’t – but

“Deeper...” whispered Charlie. Was that her? Or... Whatever.

Her mech body was a man’s body, so Destiny ordered it to do what men did. She slapped Spencer’s cock down in the cleft of Charlie’s ass. Fuck yes. Spencer was so fucking hard. Charlie was so fucking wet. So was Destiny. She mouse-wheeled to zoom, honing in on that waiting, aching hole. Charlie would be so tight, she just knew. A body that tight had a pussy that tight. Destiny didn’t even really know what tight pussies felt like, or if hers was, or what, but surely Charlie. Spencer deserved it. Charlie deserved it.

She lined up her primary weapon, and pressed the attack.

Her laugh was out loud this time. She froze, but Charlie was simply whimpering, muttering something into a pillow now that Destiny could no longer understand. Damn

right she was. Establishing a rhythm was so easy. Forward, back. Forward, back. W, S. W, S. Every now and then she gave it a little A or D, just to keep Charlie moaning.

Pats. This woman shouldn't be settling for pats. She should be fucking whoever she wanted whenever she wanted however she wanted. And she wanted Spencer, same as Destiny wanted Spencer. She did to Charlie with Spencer what she knew Charlie – perfect, generous, loving Charlie – would do to her if she were piloting him. What he would do to both of them if life were fair.

Charlie was a giver, though, not a taker. She spun the blonde around and compelled her to her knees. His mechomight made it effortless, or maybe that was just how ready Charlie was to service him. “Suck it,” she ordered into her mic, Spencer’s voice commanding it in her ear.

“Yeah, yeah, I’ll suck it,” mewled Charlie. “Give it to me. I’ll be so good at it.”

“I know you will,” answered Destiny. They were talking, she sort of realized. Charlie didn’t seem to care, though, so why should she? “Nobody sucks cock like you do.” *Sucks cock*. What a gross phrase. But hearing it from Spencer, it was fucking *hot*. He wasn’t that kind of guy, but he could be when Destiny made him. For Charlie. Because Charlie was Charlie, and if she wanted to be a cocksucking little pleasure girl, then the Pentatdictator had done its–

No. Stay focused on this one. This is good. Ride it out.

“More,” cried Charlie. She wasn’t quiet now. If Destiny had been asleep, it would have woken her up. “More. Don’t stop. Don’t stop. I can do it. I can take it. Let me...”

“You’re unbelievable. You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to my cock.”

“I want to be. Fuck, fuck, fuck, I want to be, Spencer *please*...”

“You’re perfect. Fucking perfect. I’m yours. I’m yours, whenever you need me.”

“I need you! I need you. Please, let me. Please, so close, so close...”

“You can come. Come for me. I’ll pat you, pat that hot little ass, fucking pat, fucking, fucking, fuckiiiiing...!”

“Pat me!”

The roommates came in thunderous unison, for Spencer, for each other.

“So, were you roleplaying Spencer, or...? I was sort of, um, not totally there. Like half-asleep and half...” Charlie adjusted her jacket. Even in August it was chilly at three in the morning.

“Me too. Half... yeah, I mean.” Destiny was glad the darkness covered her blushing. People were generally unable to say the same three stupid cliché things when they saw a redhead blush, and she didn’t want Charlie to annoy her the way most people did.

They walked to Charlie's car in silence. Higgins looked different at night, light shining in only one window, and that light so dim it was probably a candle, or maybe some freak who was using a device in light mode at this hour. Not their floor, so it could be anybody.

A lot of emotions were swirling around in her right then, but thanks to Charlie, none of them were too bad. An apology had spilled out before she even considered other options, but Charlie quickly beat that back. *I'm not sorry*, she'd said when Destiny had finally summoned the courage to peer down to her bunk. *But we should probably talk about it, don't you think?* Waffle House had been Destiny's idea. Talking about in their room, Ground Zero of where she'd just collaboratively jilled off with her roommate, had been too daunting. Distance might help.

As Charlie pulled out of her parking space, though, the one feeling that seemed to keep rising to the top was gratitude, somehow. She could have been put anywhere at Lakeview, but she'd been put on Higgins 3. Somebody had put her with Charlie. Somebody had put her with Spencer. If Charlie wasn't mad or creeped out, then neither was she. It had felt good. Beyond good. Like taking down a hacker toe to toe good.

She'd heard, not from anyone specifically but just from being a person alive in her culture, that college was a place where weird horny sex stuff happened. Gay stuff, one-night-only stuff, group stuff, random incidents of nudity stuff. So in an intellectual sense, tonight had been what she'd been warned about. Or promised? Yeah, "promised" was more like it. Destiny had known that before she graduated, something strange and sexual would happen, and had spent the past couple weeks worrying it would be that horrible thing with Michael. Instead, she'd coaxed what had sounded like an S Tier orgasm out of her roommate, who she was pretty sure by now was every bit as straight as Destiny herself.

Stranger still, she wasn't sorry, and from the little smile Charlie directed her way every time she caught her passenger looking at her, she was pretty sure Charlie wasn't either.

Destiny turned on the radio. They didn't have to talk yet. They could just be happy. This was a gust of wind away from a dream anyway, so why not just sit back and listen to Delilah narrate their way into this saccharine love song or that. Charlie grinned at an arched eyebrow at her default station, but reached out a hand and received a little squeeze.

Waffle House was pretty dead at that hour, one grandmotherly waitress inviting them to take any table they wanted, and one grad student rubbing her eyes awake as she tapped away at her laptop. Charlie ordered a stack of chocolate chip pancakes for the two of them, and a Coke Zero for herself. Destiny got a coffee. If their waitress had anything to say about the oxymoronic request, she'd gotten it out of her system years ago, and left the girls to their little station by the window.

"I'm not gay," Destiny said when the silence got too heavy.

"Yeah, me either," said Charlie.

"But I'm not mad or anything. I, um... Well I guess you already said you're not either, so..."

"Yeah." Charlie dumped out the jelly tray. Destiny watched, and finally had to ask. It felt hilariously beside the point of their visit here, but what in the actual hell.

"I like to reorganize them. So apple goes here, top left partition, then blackberry, then grape, then the marmalade over here, then strawberry." She grinned without a shred of self-consciousness. "Strawberry is my favorite, though, so sometimes, I'll do it by best to worst flavor so that it gets its due."

"Sure, wouldn't want to hurt the jelly packets' feelings." Destiny laughed. "You know, I worked in a diner back home, Forky's, off and on since I was thirteen, and I—"

"I didn't think it was legal to have a job at thirteen."

"It's probably not, but I wanted to. Built one hell of a Steam library off of it."

Charlie smiled fondly. "I have absolutely no idea what that means but it sounds like it made you happy."

"And yeah, I never once saw anybody arrange the jellies by which ones need a pick-me-up. A few, um, particular sorts who did the alphabet thing."

"Aw, you called me particular instead of freakin' goofy."

"Oh I think we're both pretty goofy, considering..." She made a face. Mechsterny? What in the four-letter world had she been thinking?

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you I talk in my sleep sometimes."

"It's OK. Just talk, right? You're not going to, like, climb up next to me and..."

"No way. You want all this in your bed, you gotta pay up front." Charlie laughed, dipping a finger in her drink and flicking it at her roommate playfully. "But tonight was... so weird, but... sort of... good?"

"Yeah. Weird, but... good weird."

Under the table, Charlie tapped Destiny's ankle with a foot. "Good. So then... we're good."

"We're good." Destiny nodded. "Actually, you're maybe, um, the nicest person I've ever met."

There was no dismissal, no attempt at humility. Only that smile. "Thank you."

"So... are you for real into Spencer? Or just sort of, like, attracted to him? You know, like how everybody's always being on discord. Like flirty, but just joking around."

"I don't think they're joking around," said Charlie.

"Me either."

After a moment's hesitation, she answered the question. "And I mean, I guess I like him? I know he's told some girls he can't date girls on his floor, so it's not like anything *can* happen. But I just... like him." She shrugged.

Destiny sipped her coffee. “He is very pretty. Did not dump-stat his Cha, can confirm.”

Her roommate laughed. “Again, lost. But I love that you’re so hardcore about what you’re hardcore about. Most of the girls on the floor, they’re... I dunno. Like me, I guess. I can see how they’d fit in with my friends from high school, where the cliques would fall within the clique. But you’re your own thing, and it’s just... awesome. It’s hard to be different sometimes. Nobody who met you would think you were just another random hot popular chick at the cool kids table, even if you let me make you sit with us.”

“I always thought being different was easier than being the same. To be the same, you have to know what everybody else is doing so you can do it, too. To be different, you just have to do whatever you feel like doing.”

“And not care that you’re doing it alone.” The waitress returned, slapped down a hot plate of chocolatey-chippy pancakes, and left without a word. “I’m bad at alone.”

Destiny felt quietly relieved to hear this paragon reveal something she was bad at, but squelched the ugly little thought. Only hours ago, this girl had confronted a sexual assaulter and retrieved her stolen property. The girl was a superhero, as far as she was concerned. Tori, too, but Tori struck her as someone who liked to pick fights because she liked to win them. She and Destiny were alike in that way, though for Destiny it was purely by proxy via her video game avatar.

“I think you’re really good at being exactly who you are,” said Destiny, smirking as she stole one of the bites Charlie cut off for herself. “And you’re not alone. Like it or not, you’re stuck with me.”

Charlie booped Destiny’s nose with her fork, then squeaked an apology and wiped off the dab of chocolate she’d deposited there with a freshly licked thumb. “I like it.”

The two went to work on those pancakes. There was a brief debate about whether or not chocolate chip pancakes merited the addition of syrup, which Charlie won by simply stating “in for a penny, in for a pound,” and flooding the plate. Destiny had to admit, it was an improvement.

“So have you always talked in your sleep like that?” Destiny asked. Then the unintended implication of those final two words struck her, and she rushed to amend. “Not like *that*, I didn’t mean about, um...”

Charlie raised her fork, threatening another boop. “I know what you meant. My dad says when I was a baby, I started talking in my sleep more than I did when I was awake. I think he might be kidding, but it’s hard to tell with him sometimes. But yeah, since forever I guess. What, um, was I saying, before...?”

“‘Pat me.’ It was pretty innocent.”

“Oh god. I’d say it’s the most embarrassing moment of my life, but then...”
Destiny agreed – right up until Charlie swallowed her bite and finished. “Then it actually

turned out... I dunno. Not. I guess. Like, weird, but not bad weird. Unless you thought it was bad.”

“No,” said Destiny after allowing herself a moment to consider. “Weird, but not bad weird.”

“I have this mouthpiece. I almost didn’t bring it. But I can put it in at night, and it doesn’t stop the sleep talking, but it sort of garbles it so it’s hard to understand, just like...” Charlie put a finger between her teeth sideways and tried to say something, utterly unintelligible. “My mom got it for me for sleepovers because I was really self-conscious about it. It, um, sort of makes me drool a lot, but—”

“You’re fine,” said Destiny firmly. “Really. I was already awake when you started. I don’t think it would wake me up, and if it does, I can just sleep with my earbuds in. I’m used to it.”

“Isn’t that bad for your ears?”

It was better than listening to her mom and Stan going at it through the shared wall, she thought. “If it gets to be too much, I can just pretend to be him again and talk you down.”

Charlie’s sharp laugh earned a glare from the waitress, hunched over her phone at a table by the entrance, for disrupting the quiet environs of the Waffle House. “I’m not sure you understand what direction ‘down’ is.”

“Wait, so you’re saying my attempted deescalation didn’t work?”

A few more bites were taken before Charlie responded. “I was so nervous to meet you, you know? I’ve never had a roommate. No brother, no sister, nothing. I started thinking about living here with some random person, and psyching myself up and freaking myself out. 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 – and 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 was good at math, but not at this hour or without preamble. She scrunched her nose. “Really? I’m sure you and your best friends spent tons of time together.”

“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 taking a weekend trip together or... well.” She knew Destiny well enough by then to appreciate that her spontaneous vacation budget was a solid \$0. “But you spend maybe twenty hours a week together? Thirty tops if you’re inseparable.”

Destiny grinned, seizing one of the final few bites with relish. “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? I’ve definitely never had a night like this with any of my high school friends.”

Charlie tapped her nearly empty Coke Zero glass with her fork and raised it. “To many more nights like this with my new friend!”

Destiny blushed, but took it as a call for more pancakes rather than that other part of the evening’s activities. She raised her mug and clinked it to Charlie’s glass. “To new friends.”

By dribs and drabs, the norms eroded. One day Charlie simply walked back from the shower, swiped the lock open, and dropped her towel without fanfare, taking her time picking out the day’s outfit and chatting up her roommate as if it were all perfectly natural. Destiny followed suit. It was weirdly not all that weird. Less weird than it had felt being creeped out by her own nudity in her own home, for sure.

Another afternoon it was especially hot, well into the 90’s, the sun using their windows as a magnifying glass, and Destiny had decided to simply strip down to her underwear to keep cool. Charlie came home from class, studied her for a moment, the sheen of sweat dripping down into her bra, then nodded and did the same.

On a Saturday they were doing laundry together. Charlie had never done hers; her parents used a service. She considered it might be a skill worth learning and requested a lesson. In the process, Destiny grumped about her pet peeve of always having the clothes she was wearing left dirty, so the hamper was already refilling before she’d even finished folding. With a flourish, Charlie removed her shirt and jeans and did the rest of her laundry in boxers and a sports bra. They binged the rest of their show in

their underwear together, and from then on, comfy undies were fair game for attire in the room.

Charlie turned out to be quite a prolific dreamer, or else maybe Spencer turned out to be quite the inspiration for lurid dreams. It became fairly typical to wake up to the sound of her babbling incoherent fantasies. College life had awakened Destiny's sex drive to the extent that she was as horny awake as Charlie was asleep, and so it also became fairly typical for her to close her eyes and join in. There was no need to be bashful about it. Charlie was a sound sleeper. And when she wasn't, she didn't care. It was their weird little secret thing, blowing off steam indulging in intertwining mutual sex fantasies about their RA.

Neither of them could agree which one of them started the post-masturbatory high-five between bunks. Not technically a high five, just touching one dripping index finger to the other's. It signaled they were done, and they could stop spurring each other on. *That* was probably a bit much, but the nonverbal queue was easier than having to say, "Done coming my brains out, how about you?" every time they finished.

Getting herself off went from something she'd done once a month at home to almost every day at Lakeview. (OK, every day.) (OK, sometimes more than once.) How had she wasted so many years neglecting herself? Though the things Destiny conjured to get herself off were novel, too. Spencer, always. Always always. As often as not, though, Charlie was in them too.

Charlie wasn't the point. Destiny hadn't turned gay or anything. It was just that for some reason, seeing Charlie get what Charlie wanted, even just inside her own head, felt so good. Destiny would take hers, whatever hot little scenario she dreamed up, and then she'd make sure Spencer took care of her roommate, too. Sometimes he did Charlie only and Destiny just watched and waited her turn. Sometimes he never got to Destiny, and that too somehow felt very, very good. She couldn't say why. It just did.

One day Destiny was sitting at her desk doing homework in her panties – she was hornier than usual, and a bra would only excite her damnably excitable nipples – and she simply closed her eyes, spread her legs, and commenced. The fantasy du jour was nothing special, just one of the ones where she was masturbating at her desk and Spencer heard her moaning his name and couldn't help but be curious, knocking on the door and watching her, mesmerized by her big tits, by her wet pussy, by how badly she wanted him. So he did like he did and generously removed his pants, put his shaft in front of her and let him suck it until it was good and wet, then bent her over her desk and fucked her within an inch of her life while Charlie caressed him from behind.

She'd completely forgotten Charlie was in the room, reading some schoolwork on the futon. Her roommate kept quiet, let her finish, and finally cleared her throat right as Destiny was standing up to retrieve fresh panties. (She went through panties so fast these days.)

“Dang, Destiny, you just *go* for it.”

“Oh! Oh my god. Oh my god, I’m so sorry, I didn’t...” Only then she saw Charlie’s hand sinking into her own shorts. (Charlie seldom wore panties any more.) “You don’t even care. God, how messed up is this?”

“We can hear Peyton and Sydney going at it ten times a day next door. I don’t think we’re the biggest freaks on the floor by a long shot. Besides,” she said, wriggling her shorts down over her hips, “it’s kind of nice to know I’m not the only one losing her mind over that guy. Like, it’s not just in my head, you know? He really is... so... mmm...”

For the first time, Destiny watched Charlie pleasure herself. Somewhere in the midst of it she shrugged and sat back down and joined in.

“His eyes...”

“His lips...”

“His chest...”

“His ass...”

“His *cock*...”

“Oh, god, his cock...”

“The size of it...”

“The feel...”

“The *taste*...”

“You can go first.”

“You’re sure?”

“So sure. Go on. Suck that big dick.”

“Oh fuck. Oh god. Oh fucking god.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Thank you.”

Destiny fell to her knees as she came to increasingly detailed descriptions of exactly how they would pleasure their RA, and exactly how badly they wished to be permitted to try. Or maybe she’d been on her knees for a while, her mouth open and tongue out, panting, lost in thoughts of taking turns between sucking his shaft and his balls, then swapping places and tasting each other’s mouths on him. (Kind of a skanky fantasy, but she’d been playing a ton of adult games lately – pretty much anything with one guy and a bunch of girls, which was most of them – and such scenes were featured prominently.)

Then Charlie was hugging her, also on her knees, and if she cared that her breasts were pressed against Destiny’s, she didn’t show it. “How lucky are we to have found each other?” she asked, brushing aside Destiny’s hair.

It was perfect. Perfect, perfect love and sisterhood. As gay as it all sounded, it wasn’t. It really wasn’t. Eighteen years of hardcore solo, and she’d finally found her

perfect co-op teammate, everything she wasn't and everything she needed and somehow room in her heart to love Destiny back.

She couldn't exactly say that, though, or it would definitely get super gay in a big damn hurry. "Not as lucky as Spencer will be if he ever actually comes down here," she said instead. The girls giggled, still catching their breath, still embracing.

"Promise me, though, you won't let him come between us? Like say he gives you a shot, like with Andi. I promise I'll only be supportive and happy for you. No matter what."

Destiny caught herself before she made a crass pun about "coming between them," and nodded. She knew she had about as much of a shot with Spencer as she did with Pewdiepie the way these gorgeous women were competing for his attention, but even as she promised to do the same, she knew it was a lie.

She would make sure Charlie got her Spencer. Someday she would find him lonely, or horny, or looking for some perfect love of his own, and she would put Charlie in his arms.

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

"I can't," he said, his eyes unable to resist the impulse to feast on the glistening femininity of my insatiable cunt. "If I put this where I want to, Scarlotte, I'm not sure I'll ever have the strength to leave."

"Would that be so bad?" I asked. "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."

My legs were too weak from the way he'd split me in half like Paul Bunyan's axe through a flimsy pine tree, so I couldn't follow in time as he grabbed his clothes and fled. The door to my upscale and very fashionable yet not too ostentatious penthouse apartment swung shut behind him before I could even explain that the children were staying with their grandparents for the weekend and they could have had all the sex they wanted for days and days and days.

But I knew I would never forget him, and the fervor for lust and pleasure he had awakened inside me.

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 anything but code and couldn’t possibly have come up with anything this hot.”

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

Destiny stood up, and without fanfare or hesitation, shimmied her shorts and panties down past her hips. “I’m not just saying it. Read it again. And use that voice you were using for Scarlotte to narrate. I swear, if purging the third world of land mines doesn’t work out, you can still make it huge in erotica ebook narration.”

“That’s a thing?”

Destiny shot her underwear at her roommate, using the elastic the same way she would have to fire a rubber band at a substitute teacher when she was eight. “Read!”

Charlie flushed, but not in embarrassment. With pleasure. Destiny had had to practically beat it out of her what she kept grunting and groaning and giggling and moaning over at her laptop. She’d been genuinely delighted. Not only because the story was so much fun, but because she was happy to hear Charlie had finally found an outlet for that raging volcano of lust bubbling just beneath her oh-so-bubbly surface.

It was cathartic, too. Fall break was only a few weeks away. Between then and now were midterms, and for all Charlie swore Destiny was some kind of genius who could never be challenged by mere academia, she’d always had test anxiety. She’d been doing pretty well, though, thanks in no small part to the tutoring program Tori and Katrina had helped organize, and wasn’t *too* worried.

After that, though, she had to go back home to Lerwick. She didn’t have a ride this time. Nobody on the floor lived anywhere close enough to bum a ride with, and after what happened with Michael, she wasn’t in a mood to play the lottery with the campus’s rideshare connection program. She’d called her mom for only the third time since coming to Lakeview – and there had been no incoming calls – to ask if she could get Stan to come pick her up. She’d laughed and said Stan had to work that day. Destiny asked which day, because he could come pick her up any time between Thursday and Saturday morning. Her mom said she’d let her know what he said, and that had been the end of it. She’d found a girl in her comp class who lived in the same general direction who’d said she could drop off Destiny at a gas station by the interstate that was only like forty-five minutes from home. The request had clearly weirded the girl out, but she said she’d do it. Destiny could probably bug somebody to give her a lift the rest of the way from there, if she pleaded. Or walk.

Then a week back home. With her mom and her stepfamily. For over a week.

Charlie finished scrolling back to the top of the document, cleared her throat, and brought Destiny's mind back home. "I had no way of knowing when I woke up that morning to prepare a nutritious and tasty breakfast for my three adoring children, my whole world, that it would be the day that rocked my body, my soul, and my pussy to their foundations. For that day would be the day I would meet the one who would set my heart on fire..."

Destiny stumbled back into the room. She'd forgotten her key card, but Charlie was in. She'd already locked herself out twice this semester, and though it had been inconvenient, it had made for an excuse to go talk to Spencer. Some of the girls took advantage of his open door policy, but Destiny was garbage at small talk.

"Hey. You know, we could always set the lock so you have to manually..." Charlie frowned. "You look... different."

Destiny nodded, shuffling into the room and dropping onto the futon like a sack of bricks. Standing was hard. "Yeah."

Her roommate decided to ignore it for the moment and shifted to lighter fare. Gesturing to Destiny's monitor, she arched an amused eyebrow. "So, can I ask why you have a picture of Colonel Sanders flipping you off...?"

Destiny gasped. She'd forgotten to alt+tab or shut her monitor off when she'd fled the room. "Don't look at it!" she shrieked.

Stupefied, Charlie first squinted, pondering what on earth Destiny was so freaked out about, then caught herself and looked away. "What? Oh god, I'm sorry, what? What!"

Destiny was sprinting for her desk, though, except she was high as a kite – a kite that had also been doing bong hits on and off for the past three hours with Casey and Sammi. She tripped over Charlie's foot and skidded to a stop on her knees, banging her hand into a drawer handle and adding pain to the emotions behind her cries of anguish.

Charlie calmed her down. Charlie always calmed her down. Finally, when she could see and thin straight, Destiny showed her what was wrong.

It had come in an email from a throwaway account that could only be Michael Soo's. *By and from the HHGC Alumni*, read the subject. There was an attachment. A big one. She'd scanned it before opening, just to be sure, but it was only evil, not viral.

She didn't know how he'd done it – AI, probably, or maybe he was taking another section of the same graphic design class she was and had access to the same photoshop software, along with a lot of patience for this kind of thing. As Charlie now saw after Destiny zoomed back out, it was a pixelated picture of Colonel Sanders with one hand in

a bucket of chicken and the other flipping her the bird. *Mittlefinger lickin' good!* read the caption.

“Creepy...” Charlie shook her head, frowning disgustedly.

Then Destiny zoomed in. The image quality looked like shit, unless you scrolled in enough to see it was actually a mosaic of tinier pictures, each of which features a likeness of Destiny – each, or at least most, distinct – sucking someone’s dick. In some it was slapping her in the cheek, others she was lunging for it and seemingly being denied, but they were all around the same theme. Many of the cocks were rather unimpressive, which had made her wonder, aghast, if these weren’t just random porn cocks but rather actual images of the guys from HHGC. As she’d studied it, trembling in shame and rage and impotence, she’d thought there were an appreciable overabundance of the same familiar poorly manscaped Asian penis.

Charlie zoomed out for her, the cocks shrinking away as evil little cocks should. Then held her. Held her and murmured all the right things, even though nothing made it right. When Destiny finally, grudgingly extricated herself, she brought up the email. *Can't wait to see you over break mf!* That was the whole body message.

“I... I can get Tori,” Charlie offered quietly. They both knew Destiny wouldn’t want her to, but it was her way of reminding Destiny that she’d kill for her if asked. Destiny said nothing, just let her roommate guide her back to the futon and do a little fussing.

“I wish the people waiting for you back home didn’t suck so much,” Charlie said a while later, thrusting a bowl of soup into her lap and settling in beside her. She’d never seen Destiny drink before, much less run off and get stoned with the bad kids. Not that it was something Destiny did often, but if she drew hard lines against such behaviors, she wouldn’t have even had what friends she’d had back at Hayes.

Destiny didn’t touch the spoon, even though it smelled really good and she was really hungry. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“What? No, just... Those boys are horrible. Beyond horrible. I just hate that you have to go back to that.”

“You said ‘the people waiting for me.’ You mean my family?”

“No! Well, sort of?” Charlie frowned, and there was something Destiny didn’t like in it. Not empathy, the mainstay of the usual Charlie frown. Condemnation. Disgust.

“Yeah, well, not everybody got to grow up in Orange County, fuckin’, paradise, or whatever! Not everybody’s dad stuck around, and takes them paragliding for their birthday, and buys them a car and jewelry and, and, fuckin’, sixty dollar skin cream, and prescription shoes, and–”

“Not everybody had scoliosis when they were a kid either,” Charlie snapped. “And at least I don’t have to worry about whether I’m going to give my dad a boner! And nobody in my house is trying to trick me into seeing their penis! And my mom wouldn’t

just sit back and let them treat me like that! Take *their* side, even! Until I was so goddamn miserable I had nowhere to run but into some stupid video game!”

Destiny meant to throw the soup bowl at Charlie, but her thumb got caught on her sweatpants and she wound up just dumping it all over her lap, and a bit on the futon. With an animalistic growl, she stormed out of the room, doubling back for a change of clothes. She ignored Charlie’s instantly offered apology as she fled, pausing in the bathroom to change before continuing on out of the building. It was worse that she knew Charlie was right, that Destiny’s home sucked and her family didn’t love her, not even her mom, not the way moms were supposed to. And she knew her outburst was pure, ugly jealousy and nothing more. She didn’t resent Charlie’s upbringing. Growing up like that was the only fantasy Destiny had that she never told her about.

She wasn’t sure what to do. Going back to Higgins, no way. Every time she thought back to what she’d said to Charlie, and how much Charlie must be hurting to have said those things back, she wanted to throw up. She’d have to go back at some point, but not now. With no firm ideas, she wandered around campus until she blundered into the student union from a direction she’d never approached before. Destiny shook her head. She’d been nuts trying to keep up with Casey, out here getting snuck up on by a five-story building.

She was still in the computer lab, trying to find anything worth playing, when suddenly there was Charlie. Destiny gaped as the slender girl approached, a firmness in her face. It was the face Scarlotte Andersen’s three healthy, well-adjusted children would see when they explored the boundaries of their mother’s lovingly enforced rules.

“How the heck did you find me?”

“Your Snapchat privacy settings are crap. It led me right to you.”

Shit. She’d only installed it to be nice to Toni and Terri. Sexy pictures were definitely not her scene, but they’d pleaded and pleaded until she’d agreed to join them for a few pics. From a distance, and the right angle, she and Toni looked enough alike that they could do this sort of mirror thing. It hadn’t turned out great, but Terri said being able to produce authentic pics of back-to-back redhead shortstacks was like printing their own money. They *had* gotten a lot of views, she supposed, and one of the likes was Spencer, so it had been worth the afternoon.

“I’m sorry,” she said immediately. “I’m so, so sorry.”

“*I’m* sorry,” Charlie countered.

This precipitated a debate over who had the right to be sorriest, culminating in Destiny making a lengthy confession about that seed of envy she’d let fester. At last Charlie relented and agreed that Destiny had won at being the worst. Her victory prize was another hug and a softly whispered utterance of forgiveness.

“Are you sure you won’t let me go talk to that guy?” Charlie asked once the hugging and blubbering had subsided. “Maybe I could, I don’t know, help him see what he’s doing to you. Or just slap the little jerk upside the head.”

“And risk you succumbing to the lure of the Dark Side? Never.” Destiny raised Charlie’s knuckle to her lips and planted a little kiss, in a very not-gay way. “But actually, I’ve been thinking, and... maybe I could let you talk to him.”

“Seriously?”

“C’mon. I’ll let you buy me a cinnamon roll at Scents of Humor, and while you eat two thirds of it, I’ll tell you what I want you to say to him...”

“Hey everybody! Is my voicey thingy working OK?”

“Hi, Carebear!”

“Dude. You didn’t say she was a she, Updawg.”

“Mic sounds great, by the way. What mic are you using? I might have to get one.”

“Welcome aboard, Carebear.”

Destiny had to fight not to laugh as the squad fell all over themselves to greet their newest team member and her dulcet voice. Once upon a time when she’d first joined the HHGC that had been her, the cute freshmen with her junior level boobs, the boys lining up to kiss her ass and flirt with the grace and poise of a toddler trying on his dad’s shoes. Charlie didn’t bother restraining herself, tapping the push to talk key on Destiny’s backup keyboard and giggling for all to hear. The PC wasn’t loving having two keyboards installed, but most of the hiccups didn’t seem to affect the game.

“Yeah, great. Are we done freaking out over the new chick? Congrats on being a chick, new chick. Let’s lock and load. I want me some chicken dinner tonight.”

“That’s him,” said Destiny, sans mic. “And you look way too adorable in my headset, by the way. Do I look that adorable?”

“You wish.”

“I was actually trying to be ironic with those, but maybe you’re onto something.”

The team hit their ready buttons at Michael’s command, and the game began seeking a match. The HHGC was officially a club for Hayes High students, but there was an alumni group that had been created some years back and was open to former members. Over time, it had blended with the high-school-only group, a backup roster of teammates for when the core HHGC group didn’t have enough members. The older members were a notoriously bad influence, but naturally that only made it cooler to be invited to hang with them.

“So Carebear, you a newb or are you here to teach us a few things?”

Charlie whispered to Destiny. “What’s a noove?” The whispering wasn’t necessary, but they’d agreed that once the game started and Destiny was focusing on the match, it would help make it clearer whether Charlie was speaking to her or to the team.

“New-*buh*. A new player. Someone who sucks.”

“Aw, they don’t suck. They’re just learning,” whispered Charlie, who was of course instinctively defending people who weren’t there to be offended. With push-to-talk pressed, she answered, “Oh, I’m OK. I’m not great. I learned a lot from playing with Updawg. That’s a *really* funny name, by the way. I totally fell for it!”

“That’s the oldest freaking joke. How could you not have heard that?”

“What joke? I want to hear it.”

“You’ve heard me do it, dumbfuck. I just go, ‘Hey, is it just me or does it smell like updawg in here?’ and they go ‘what’s updawg?’ Works better IRL where there’s smell.”

“Smells like your mom’s pussy to me, but I guess I forgot to open the window after I kicked her out earlier.”

“DUDE. There’s a new girl. Have some fuckin’ class, shitdick.”

“Oh I don’t mind. I like guys who are like regular guys, you know? You guys definitely don’t need to watch your mouths around me,” said Charlie, rolling her eyes in time with Destiny.

Aaron “Updawg” Dodgeson had been their in. The sophomore HHGC member played pretty much every waking hour. His freshman year his nickname amongst the upperclassmen in the club had been “Diaper” Dodgeson, because he’d play for six hours and never even pause to go to the bathroom. Apparently he’d been permitted to rebrand this year. He was friends with Destiny on discord still, even if they didn’t talk, so all she had to do was wait for his discord status to show he was logged in and LFG and time it right, then suicide when he died. Finally they wound up in the same lobby and she’d DMed him the setup to his nickname’s dumb joke and tried to type as girly as possible when asking if she could join his team.

Spellbinding him with Charlie’s voice had taken less than a minute; getting him to let her join some of his buddies for a match only a few more.

Michael retorted, “You shouldn’t encourage them. Fuckin’ sailors, these jagoffs.”

“I heard you like fucking sailors, Slabrock.” Beef_Slabrock, Michael’s gaming handle. He weighed four pounds less than Destiny. God forbid strangers on the internet suspect this about him, though.

“Ahoy, matey, be there sailors afoot? Slabrock be thirsty for ye!”

“Oh my god, would you two fuckwits shut the fuck up. C’mon, it’s loading. Let’s drop at the old folks home, gear up and push east.” Destiny grinned to herself. She’d known he’d go for it. He was one of the most predictable guys she’d ever gamed with.

“Wait, do you like sailors or grandmas, dude?”

“Or grandpas, let’s not be homophobic.”

“Oh my gosh, you guys are *so* funny!” Charlie giggled. It was the girliest sound Destiny had ever heard her roommate make, and she’d heard the girl ride her Spencetronic dildo to orgasm once already today.

The group jumped from the plane and glided down towards the target zone. Destiny kept it simple, no fancy tricks, no taking point. The banter continued as they geared up – rare sniper rifle, nice – splitting between chatting up Charlie and trying to impress her with dimwitted jocularity. Destiny hadn’t realized how much they’d mellowed out around her over the years until she heard how awful they were with a fresh female audience.

“Stay behind us, Carebear. Are you a decent shot with that?”

“Um, I think so,” answered Charlie. “Should I use a different gun, do you think?”

“Just try not to suck,” chided Michael as he peered over the half wall, shotgun in hand. “Come on, storm zone’s closing soon. Stay behind us and try not to get yourself killed because I’m not dying to rescue you.”

Destiny kept in the back, which she’d been planning on doing anyway. She kept her eye on the tower up the hill where she’d seen somebody with an offensively red skin cross a window moments before. As the guys debated whether it was worth taking the truck parked out front, she alt+tabbed and DMed STEMFemme, her newest discord friend. *It begins.*

gl hf, answered Ms. Sadler.

“Is there somebody up in that building,” whispered Destiny. Her whispering was their signal for Charlie to repeat it to the team, which she promptly did. She was so goddamn good with that vapid tone, you could *hear* the blonde in her voice.

The guys dove for cover. Michael with his short range setup rushed ahead, hiding behind a tree a ways up the slope. He always liked to be up close and personal, Destiny knew, so he could blame the team when they didn’t back him up. Soon enough they saw their quarry, who didn’t look to have seen them yet. “Time to find out if new chick can shoot,” said Michael, voice thick with skepticism.

“You got this, Carebear.”

“Just lead the target, keep your scope ahead of where he’s going. At this range you probably wanna–”

Destiny aimed, and fired, and blasted Michael’s head off. Charlie squeaked in alarm despite the lack of gory results, then pushed-to-talk to repeat Destiny’s message. “I got him! You guys, I got him!”

“That was me, asswipe!” yelled Michael.

“Yeah, shit, that was one of our guys, Carebear.”

“No, no, that was definitely me. I watched the little bullet thingy go PLOOF and everything. Don’t go trying to take credit for my kills, you guys!”

“No, we meant he was on our team, not...”

“You can team up with other teams? Oh man, that’s so cool!”

“What? No, I meant, that’s Slabrock, he’s one of—”

“Would one of you goddamn idiots get up here and revive me already?”

“Dude, they definitely heard that shot, we can’t just walk up there in the open.”

Charlie grinned at her playmate as she feigned ignorance even more profound than her actual ignorance. “So that’s *not* a friendly team? You guys, he’s still crawling around. I think I can...” Destiny took another shot. “I got him! I got him, I got him! This is so much fun, you guys!”

Michael raged. The other guys tried to console him, promising they’d reboot him. Meanwhile Destiny was using the half wall as cover to flank the hilltop; as the other team surged down to respond to the sounds of her betrayal of Michael, she picked them off one by one, waiting until they were just close enough to cover to make a tempting target for revivals. In less than a minute, she downed the entire squad.

“Jesus fuck, Carebear, that was some shooting.”

“Was it? Aw, thanks!” Not *thanks*, but *thinks*, the way hot girls said it when they were acknowledging a familiar compliment. Planned and rehearsed. They’d taken inspiration from this hot chick at the Penderdast food court the other day who’d been deflecting praises for her eyes, which was indubitably code for her big tits.

With Michael still fuming, the team made for a reboot van. Destiny acted like she was following the boys, staying so far behind that she’d stay out of frame when they were spotted, using them to draw out attackers. She had nine kills and had revived their fourth party member, Barney, twice by the time they found one, and picked up three more defending Aaron while he activated it.

Charlie wrinkled her nose, studying the keyboard like it was a foreign instrument. In Destiny’s hands, it pretty much was. Charlie had taken piano lessons growing up, but there was being able to reliably strike a chord and there was watching Rachmaninoff strike nine in a second.

“About fucking time. Somebody give me a weapon so I can actually finally play the damn game.”

Destiny nodded, and Charlie said her line. “I feel so bad. Here, take one of mine.” Destiny aimed and hit G. The grenade rolled right up to Michael’s feet and blasted him straight back to hell.

“*WHAT THE FUCK IS WRONG WITH YOU, YOU STUPID FUCKING CUNT!*” roared Michael, blasting everybody’s ear drums. Charlie looked horribly offended by his language, though Destiny conceded it was about what she might have said if someone had pulled that shit on her.

“I tried to give you my gun! I just hit G, that’s it!”

“Yeah dude, it was an accident.”

“She obviously didn’t mean to—”

“G is for GRENADE! That’s literally why they keybound it to G, you cum-drunk mother fuckers!”

“What? No, I figured it was G for Give. Like Give you my Gun.” Charlie barely cut the mic off before she joined Destiny in peals of laughter.

“Get the fuck off of my fucking team, you fucking bimbo fucking parasite!” raged Michael. “Come on guys, let’s find a *competent* fourth and play a real match.”

“I’m so sorry!”

“She didn’t mean it, dude. Don’t be a dick.”

“And we’re actually still doing kinda good. Top 50.”

Destiny no-scoped the leading member of the team responding to the grenade blast, and with Aaron and Barney quickly mopped up the other three as the morons funneled themselves through a choke point. Another revive on Barney, too. Those were icing on the cake, Destiny thought as she switched to DMs. Never a smart idea to be typing when you could be attacked at any minute, but she couldn’t just keep rebooting and murdering Michael. Once was an accident. Twice was incompetence. Three times was a conspiracy.

C.A.Rebear → Updawg: Oh my gosh he’s so mad. I feel SOOOOOO bad!!!!

C.A.Rebear → 420StonedCold: Should I quit? I don’t want you boys to fight because of me. I swear I didn’t mean to. Is he gonna stay mad???

The boys responded. She heard a jeep in the distance, vaulted up the broken stairwell and spotted them cresting a hill in the distance. The hang-time as their buggy caught air was as ever their undoing. Not an easy shot unless you practiced it, but if you practiced it, the driver had no chance at dodging. Destiny had practiced. A lot. She got two more members as the vehicle drifted down the near side of the hill, players crawling out of the derelict jeep defenseless and with no cover but their vehicle, already drifting ahead of them.

Updawg → C.A.Rebear: He’s just a hothead. I know you didn’t mean it.

420StonedCold → C.A.Rebear: ya he’a always sa duck

420StonedCold → C.A.Rebear: ya hes always a duck

420StonedCold → C.A.Rebear: dick lol

Destiny was already combing for upgrades as Charlie took over the keyboard, Michael still insisting they quit and form a new team without the newcomer. The boys were splitting attention between typing to them and trying to placate Michael so they could keep hearing the girl with the hot voice talk to them. They had no idea where she even was, so no worries they’d wonder how she could type and plunder simultaneously.

C.A.Rebear → 420StonedCold: duck duck dick? I thought it was duck duck goose but your game sounds totes more fun lol

“You are so gross, I swear,” said Destiny.

“But you love me.”

She bashed through a wall and whooped as she scored a legendary in the chest. “I worship you.”

The boys stuck with her, and even convinced Michael to hang around for their next match. Once he’d agreed, Destiny dragged it out as long as she could, stealthing and fortifying and taking only the most shrewdly calculated risks. Charlie flirted with the boys – but not Michael, never Michael – and asked Destiny questions off-mic to try to get a handle on pretty much anything that was going on.

Victory Royale. Destiny hadn’t figured she’d actually be able to win like this, and to be fair it was more luck than skill (but plenty of that, too). She barked a yawp of victory so intense it brought her to her feet, fist raised in triumph; the sudden display startled Charlie, bringing only a minor delay to her asking the team, “Oh wow, so like, did we win, or...?”

Their second match, Michael was being every bit the dickhead she’d provoked him into being, to increasingly protective results from Aaron and Barney. They were smitten. They couldn’t have been more enamored of Charlie if they actually knew how hot she was. This time he went down “by accident” during a firefight; Destiny made sure she didn’t get the killshot so it wasn’t credited to her in the feed, then denied having ever targeted him to the rest of the team. Michael rage quit.

“Why is he so mad at me? I just wanted to find some nice boys to help me figure out how to get better at the game...”

Charlie sighed at her own heavy-handedness. The boys didn’t notice. By the end of their next match they’d invited her into their clan and the HHGC Alumni discord. From there, she could watch Michael’s status at her leisure. He betrayed his activities in realtime. Whatever game he played, she played. Whenever he queued up, she queued up. After four years of gaming with him, she knew his tactics and tricks like she knew the proper ways to play.

Destiny hunted him relentlessly, meandering between smurf accounts to keep him perpetually ignorant that his misfortune was at one woman’s hands. Charlie started sleeping wearing a mask to keep Destiny’s monitor from keeping her up. If he was awake and gaming, she was doing everything in her power to ruin him. His favorite starting points became killing fields. She spawn-camped him. Every little sniper roost he frequented, every corner he thought he’d set a trap around, every one of his favorite vehicles became a fresh graveyard.

He did manage to defeat her, sometimes, but that played into her hands, too. She’d read about intermittent reinforcement in her Intro to Psychology class, and boy howdy those occasional victories kept him at the keyboard. When he got too demoralized, he switched games, only to find his streak of bad luck had followed him there, too. Watching him frothing at the mouth venting about it on discord made her laugh until she nearly peed herself. (Her obsession had pushed her into being a bit of a

Diaper Destiny herself, but Charlie made sure she still occasionally slept, and groomed herself, and ate something at least a little bit nutritious and always a lot comforting, and studied for midterms, and took good care of her beloved roommate when she had needs.) More and more the rest of the members got tired of Michael's crap, alternately either ignoring, mocking, or outright blocking him.

The salty little bitch didn't last two weeks.

One morning, Destiny woke up and was surprised to find it was early evening. She'd really lost track of any semblance of day and night, making sure Michael didn't sneak in any cathartic matches while she rested. The HHGC Alumni server was abuzz with the recent departure of Michael Soo. He'd posted a manifesto about the state of modern gaming – how low the skill ceiling was, that even great players could be bullied by random scrubs; how gaming clans were unsupportive jokes; how there was no honor any more, just a bunch of teabagging and taunt dances; and of course how women were largely to blame for existing in what were clearly advertised male spaces. The remaining members had a good old laugh about it all, but none as hard as Destiny. She closed her eyes and imagined him throwing his mouse around and rampaging around his dorm room raising hell until his roommate had to go get their RA to chew him out and write him up.

There was no way to tell him it was her, but that was all right. That dish was best left as cold as the liquid cooling system on Michael's powered down PC.

"Hey, Destiny? You ready?"

Her eyes opened and turned toward the door. There was Charlie. Tori and Ellie walked past her, waving as they passed. "Ready?"

"Yeah. It's massage night. Remember? I told you this morning before you fell asleep. Everybody's going. Or do you need to..." She nodded to the PC, trying not to frown. Destiny had not been very accessible of late.

Destiny shut it down and darted over, grabbing Charlie in the tightest hug her little arms could manage. "Of course I didn't forget."

When Spencer green lit the Hotties to do it in their bras and panties, she picked out the hottest, sluttiest underwear she owned – so Charlie wouldn't feel too skanky in hers. Whenever she felt his eyes on them, Destiny made sure he got a show his cock wouldn't soon forget. At some point it wasn't even a show any more. It was just drinking in and doling out the only pleasure that could compete with the joy in her heart.

She felt bad when she made Charlie come. It had embarrassed her pretty bad, she saw, but when she saw the way Spencer's jaw slowly dropped as he stared at the blooming wet spot in Charlie's panties, she resolved to do it as often as she needed to until he saw how fucking stupid he was for not making a move.

When it came time for licks, Destiny gave Charlie (in her fresh panties) her turn; when the girls started sneaking seconds, she made sure Charlie got thirds. When Charlie

apologized for accepting Destiny's generosity back outside the door to their room, Destiny kissed her.

"Yeah. I guess he does taste pretty good."

Charlie gasped, but there was a smile. Peyton and Sydney's room was already spilling lesbian noises into the hall, and from what she'd just seen, Destiny would bet her motherboard there was about to be a lot more of it. "Destiny...! You kissed me!"

"And I'm gonna do a lot more in a minute. Better be ready to change those panties again."

Charlie's eyes widened as her smile shrank. Then it broadened. Then it took over the entirety of her face. "Promises, promises."

Destiny took Charlie's hips in her hands as she fumbled with fishing her key card out of her panties and tried to swipe it through the slot, her perfect ass warm and sleek against Destiny's bare tummy. Charlie's hand was shaking so hard she was struggling to get it open.

"This is why I keep telling you we really need to set the door to manual locking," Destiny murmured into Charlie's bra strap. Her hands found their way around to the front, teasing at the waistband her roommate's panties, soft blonde pubic hair peeking out to greet her.

"You did *not* just...!" But she was laughing, and trying to maneuver her hips to urge Destiny's fingers into her underwear, and still sort of trying to get the door open before the whole floor got a chance to see her come a second time that evening.

The door finally opened, and she tackled Charlie to the bed. Underwear flew off in every direction. It wasn't gay. She was just doing Spencer's job for him until he wised up and did it himself.

Her tongue was his tongue, exploring Charlie's mouth, what she thought might be the lingering taste of his skin. Fitting. Charlie was a giver. When she fucked Spencer, Destiny knew she would insist on seeing to his pleasure first. He would taste himself on her tongue after Charlie finished giving him the blowjob of his life.

Her lips were his lips. Those puds Aaron and Barney had no idea what they'd really been flirting with, a lithe blonde angel, every inch of her pure radiance. And they had no right. These perky little tits were Spencer's to suck on. Those soft strawberry lips were Spencer's to kiss. That glistening wet clit was Spencer's to pleasure. His, and no one else.

Her hands were Spencer's hands, appreciating every supple inch of Charlie's flawless body. Her fingers were his cock, exploring the tightness and wetness of a pussy that was always, always wet and ready for his arrival. Her pleasure was Spencer's pleasure, eyes blown wide open as Charlie reciprocated with equal or better vigor, the lust with which he'd filled this woman's entire being gushing over the top and splashing all the fuck over everywhere.

The point, Destiny thought as she draped herself over Charlie's naked, sweaty, sleeping body, their tits fitting around each other like lock and key, was that she wasn't gay. She just had a really, really good roommate.

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. Her help bringing down Michael had been the sole exception to her otherwise total lack of interest. "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 a 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. It didn't look *good*, but it looked OK.

HEARTS – the word blossomed on the screen, and then fading in a moment later, *Of FIRE*. A fiery sound effect fwooshed from her speakers.

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 Holbrook*.

"I can take your name off if you want, but I wanted you to get top credit."

"What is this?" Charlie asked, staring.

Destiny took Charlie's hand and put it on the mouse, fingers aligned. She clicked on Charlie's index finger, triggering 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.

"Um, 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 huge tits. And that way, it's both of us. It's not a burn or anything, just appealing to the mass market. 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 NOW*, 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 blossomed, the two adjoining dots first and then the big one with a thought of three adorable children. (One of them only had six fingers and there was a random foot that didn't belong to any of them, 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. I was only messing around, like maybe... I don't know. 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" with some extremely graphic sex, when it was clear it was really a case of Scarlett being simply too horny 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. Destiny could feel that jungle humidity emanating from the lap on her lap.

“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, vanquishing 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 Lawrence Svenster is the ‘hard part.’” The girls fell to hysterical 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 replay. She’d already gotten invested enough to start making suggestions for how they could make it even better, from little stuff like more font styles to distinguish narration from dialogue from thoughts, to longer term considerations like whether they would release it to the floor or even try to sell it out in the world. (Charlie acknowledged that they’d best remove her and Spencer’s digital likenesses from it before doing so, though it saddened her.) Then it was discussion of which *Hearts of Fire* scenes to include, and how to improve them for the visual medium, which segued into the girls collapsing in sweaty heaps in their respective bunks masturbating themselves silly as they blurted out pieces of freshly inspired fantasies back and forth between them.

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 wakes us up with his cock buried all the way inside his Scarlotte.”

“Mm, god yes. Svenster 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?”

Destiny didn’t answer. Her name was the only one Charlie said in her sleep anywhere close to how often she said Spencer’s.

“Destiny? Are you still awake?”

Ah, so it was for real. “Yeah.”

“Did Stan ever... do anything? To you?”

Destiny’s entire body tensed. “Why?”

“Because I care about you. Because it’s three days until fall break.”

Destiny frowned into the darkness. “No. I mean, not like, sexual stuff. Just little things.”

“Things like what.”

“I dunno. Like, he’d make me sit on his lap sometimes. Like when I was little, like middle school or whatever. Or like he’d say stuff about how ‘big’ I was getting and look at my chest. Lots of looking. But he never actually tried anything.”

“But you still lock the door.”

“That’s more for my stepbrothers. Mostly. Like there was this one time I woke up and I heard someone in the room, like breathing. I didn’t open my eyes or anything. I asked at dinner the next night if anybody had been in there, but nobody copped to it. Then like days later my mom said Blaine told her he’d been looking for mice? Like he’d found one in his room and was checking mine.”

“In the dark. Unmasked.”

Destiny nodded. “But whatever. I dealt with it for years. What’s another week, right?”

“Is there anything you’re excited for over fall break? People you missed, friends? Your teacher who helped us with Michael?”

“Eh, not really.”

“Do you want to come home with me?” Charlie shook her head, apparently dissatisfied with the way she’d asked it. “No. I mean, I want you to come home with me. I want you to meet my family, and my friends.”

Destiny frowned. “Uh, why?”

Charlie was quiet a moment. “Because, um, I know your family’s house isn’t very happy for you. And because you’re my best friend.”

Destiny still didn’t have a way home. 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 Stan and his brood.”

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. “Why, 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.” Charlie had eventually given up trying to make Destiny bestest buds with all the Hotties. She was happy being bestest buds with just the one.

Charlie knew how to sway her, though, crooning, “We have really good internet...!”

Destiny frowned. “It’s my home. I can’t just... not go back.”

Charlie leaned forward, but stopped short of responding. Deciding that leaning wasn’t enough, she climbed up into Destiny’s bunk and maneuvered to share the pillow. One of these days if Destiny wasn’t careful, this girl really was going to gay the shit out of her.

Charlie kissed her forehead. A lingering, adoring kiss. “It’s your mom’s home. To you, it’s just a house. A house where you have to lock yourself in to feel safe. Your home is here. With me. Or wherever you decide you want it to be.”

Destiny’s eyes slowly closed. She tried to think of any single thing she’d miss if she didn’t go back. If she never went back. Her things were here, her life was here. Ms. Sadler, maybe, but she’d already told Destiny she hoped she made it out. Now, even better than before, she got why. That home was just another four-letter word.

Destiny opened her eyes to find Charlie’s soft brown orbs waiting for her. She leaned in and kissed her roommate’s forehead in her best imitation of how Charlie had done for her. “OK. I’ll go.”

Charlie beamed, and without a word, rolled over 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 handsome and funny and she didn’t have to worry what she wore around him. He made bad jokes that Charlie apologized for, and he asked earnest questions about her and listened to her answers. He’d brought a cold Mountain Dew for her, stating that he knew it was a gamer staple, and went on about how he was a bit of a gamer himself back in the day, an OG Dhalsim main in SNES *Street Fighter II*.

“Oh my gosh, Dad, she has no idea what that even is. Destiny, tell him you have no idea what that is.”

“No, I know. My dad, um, gave me his SNES back when.” Meaning he’d left in such a hurry he’d forgotten to pack it. This was a nice man, though, a man who’d done right by his kid. She focused on the present and didn’t sour the mood. “My stepbrothers always tried to make me play Chun Li, but Blanka ride or die for me.”

“Blanka! Charlie, you know we don’t let animals in the car.”

“You two are such nerds. Let me out. I’m hitch hiking.”

“Sweet! More Dew for us gamers, eh Destiny?”

“Dad!”

Destiny adored him. And his eyes never strayed.

Destiny’s mom had never called to ask why she hadn’t come back for break. Would she be upset if Destiny didn’t come for Thanksgiving either? Would she notice? No matter. It wasn’t home any more. Destiny would spend Thanksgiving with someone she was thankful for.

In fact, on their ride back to school a week later, Mr. Andrews told her unprompted he hoped she’d consider coming back to stay with them for winter break.

“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 Charlie. 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 foot the bill and not to worry about it. Destiny had learned to accept it. It was uncomfortable sometimes being a charity case, but Charlie always insisted, and was always happier when she was allowed to do some pampering. That was what families did for each other.

Besides, now that the *Hearts of Fire* game was getting into a better place and she had free time for normal games again, Destiny had hopes her new clan of dippy undateable boys would at least be useful to get her back into some tournament winnings. Vengeance had been satisfying, but she wasn’t a bully by temperament. She just didn’t like to lose.

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 shape 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 Hottie 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. They’d decided 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 psychos. He was notoriously chill about the Hotties’ flirtations, so maybe someday. She and Charlie liked to roleplay the blowjob scene in chapter five on their Spencetronic dildos, masturbating (themselves or each other, depending on how horny they were that afternoon) while they jointly fellated the RA-inspired cock. Huge, menacing almost, but cast in a very friendly seeming orange-yellow plastic. It suited him, which suited them.

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 Hottie 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 her eyes drifted past them to Spencer, then back to them. Then Spencer again, and back.

For a moment Destiny wondered if she was trying to make some nonverbal point about the girls' decision not to take a side during the coup. Destiny wholeheartedly opposed any measure that would take Spencer from them. More than that, though, she'd figured it could be Charlie's big shot. Spencer had been vulnerable and in desperate need of an ally. She'd pushed Charlie hard to make her move. Charlie being Charlie, though, she'd balked at taking advantage; only when Destiny had convinced her that it wasn't taking advantage to be the friend he needed.

Charlie had spared no details about what had happened in the formal lounge between them. They'd fucked each other ragged the rest of the night, not giving a single solitary shit whether they were into girls or not. They were horny, and Spencer, and mmm.

Destiny realized after second consideration that Tori was simply as preoccupied by the guy as they were. 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 anyway. 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. (They believed it enough to buy that same pussy-destroying Spencetronic 3000 dildo the rest of them had, at least.)

If he was whipping it out as a community development tool, then there was hope for any of them. Very exciting times. Charlie could round those last couple bases any day now, maybe.

"We only made the two," Charlie said to Tori's rhetorical question.

"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 her 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 it’s like 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 her pussy through her skimpy costume. “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 slowly 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 yet another girl was entering the lounge in some kind of sheer harem slave costume.

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 with it. Cum-drunk, as Michael might have put it, if he were here instead of off filling the hole she’d shot through his social life. The asshole was probably seeing if his existing skillset would stretch to allowing him to ruin board games for the dudes on his floor.

As Tori helped herself to a slack-jawed stroke of Spencer’s crotch, Destiny wondered if Charlie had acted like she was mad at him, would he have fucked her until her brains dribbled out her cunt, too.

Nah, not Charlie. 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. Dawn meandered by to help her clean herself off, and nobody even batted an eye. Just Hotties sucking each other’s tits. This floor was insane. It was home.

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 little 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, what were a few (dozen) kisses?)

"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?" Then she went right back to sucking. Trying her best to get him ready for Charlie.

He lifted his chin, granting them better access. Her hand found his cock, where Charlie's hand 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. Or better yet in Charlie's.

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

"I have no idea what you mean," laughed Destiny. It was pure sarcasm. Only a few hours earlier he'd staged having sex with her to mess with her new clan. Charlie had joined in when she walked in on them. 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. "And, um, 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. If he tried, though, she'd redirect that

hand straight to her roommate's pretty titties. The girl deserved it. She deserved nothing short of her wildest fantasies.

Destiny freed that pulsing beast from his boxers. God, the Spencetronic didn't do him justice. "I know. But like I said..."

Charlie looked up from the cock pulsing in Destiny's hand. "What? What did you say?"

Spencer fuzzed Charlie's head. "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 with their fingertips. "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 fondled 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.”

END, PART FIVE

Part Six: The Triplets' Tale

The sisters planted their feet, hip to hip to hip.

"I don't want to go! You can't make us go."

"I want to go home!"

"Yeah, let's go home, Daddy."

Dad knelt down and put his hands on the shoulders of Allison and Maddison, little – exactly equally little – Addison cushioned in between. "It's going to be fun, girls. I promise. Remember when you were afraid to go on that roller coaster, Addy? You cried and cried the whole way through the line, but once you got on it... What happened?"

Addison frowned. "But they were there. We were together!"

Dad pulled the girls in for a hug. People were staring. There were other campers struggling with the impending separation, too, but none of them doing it in triplicate. The sisters were used to that. People always stared at twins. Triplets, however, were exceedingly rare, and they stared exceedingly harder. "I promise. OK? I know you're scared, but you'll only be apart for a few weeks, and really you'll all still be here at the same camp, so when you're together again you can compare stories. When was the last time you got to tell each other stories about something you saw that they didn't, huh?"

"I don't want stories!"

"I'm *scared*, Daddy!"

"I want to stay together!"

But Dad didn't back down. He hadn't when they'd pressed the issue earlier in the week, nor on the drive to the camp. It felt like Mom had been more sympathetic, but that was probably why she'd said her goodbyes in the car. *No gaps, Lydia*, their father always said whenever he and Mom disagreed. A unified front, they called it.

"Come on now, no tears, girls. You're braver than that, right? My girls can do anything."

"Yeah, *together!*"

He released the hug. The girls were shedding identical tears. "It's *camp*, girls. You'll have fun. You'll ride horses and tell campfire stories and go swimming and make tons of friends. You're always bugging your mom and I to take you to the beach, right? Well here you'll be on the beach every single day."

"We want to go to the *ocean*, not some scummy lake!"

"And we want to go together, not by ourselves!"

"We won't know anybody!"

"You'll make friends," Dad said. He sounded sure of it. They were popular at school, but only because of what they were. The other kids thought they were an interesting novelty, and besides that they were pretty, which even at 9 years old they

understood was an advantage. Pretty enough that they'd been in a commercial and modeled outfits for clothes on the internet, both of which made them unbelievably cooler. Here at camp, though, they would be three pretty individuals, all on their own, in separate stupid tribes in separate stupid cabins in separate stupid bunks.

They agreed about most things, but one thing that they never disagreed about was that they wanted to agree or disagree *together*. Like Mom and Dad taught them – a united front.

Their dad delivered them to a stranger, a perky barely-20-something woman who smiled that slowly blooming enchanted stare people always smiled on first contact. Dad had taken them to the county fair earlier that summer, and they'd stolen a line from one of the carnies at the Hall of Wonders and made it their own. *It costs six tickets if you wanna stand there and stare*. They'd taken to saying it to people who got a little too excited over the sight of them. They were afraid now, though, and the jibe was forgotten.

Dad waved goodbye as they were ushered to their separate camp counselors. They screamed and desperately tried to cling to each other. They had to pry them apart. It was clear to them the counselors didn't like being the wedge separating them, but their paying customer was still watching from his car, and so they made the sobbing, sniveling girls split up.

Twenty-two days later, the girls reunited. They held each other and held each other and wept with relief as their fractured soul rejoined. Mom and Dad tried to get in on it, too, which they permitted, but only because they didn't have arms to spare to push them away. On the long drive back home Dad grilled them about the fun he'd presumed they'd had. Had they made any fun art projects, learned any fun skills, met any fun kids? If they wanted to visit one of their new camp friends, he said, he'd be happy to arrange a play date so they could introduce their sisters.

Allison told them about how on her first day this huge fat beast of a girl had stolen her favorite scrunchy. She'd told a counselor, but the girl had lied and said it was hers, and so it had been confiscated. Then the girl had made fun of her about it all week, rallying a bunch of other girls who found great sport in tormenting the visibly, miserably lonely young blonde. Her counselor had tried to sit the two down that morning right before departure to relitigate the alleged theft, but Allison had let the other girl keep it. Arguing would have only delayed the reunion.

Addison explained about how she'd told everybody at the sharing circle around the campfire the second night that she had two identical sisters. Nobody had believed her, not even her counselor, who had not been present at their traumatic separation. She'd been gently rebuked for making up stories, and from then on it became a running joke. *Here's an apple, Addison – oh and here's two more imaginary ones for your imaginary sisters!* Some girls had tried to be nice to her, but her guard was up. She'd tried to run away on the fifth night to try to get to where Allison or Maddison were being

held, but their cabins were more than a mile away and she had gotten lost. Addison spent most of a night alone in the woods before the sun came up and she was able to find her way back. Oh, and she'd gotten a rash.

Maddison? Maddison had had fun. The other kids had been nice to her and she'd made friends. She'd met a boy from one of the boy's cabins and she'd had her first kiss. On one another's cheeks, but they agreed it counted and they should save lip kissing for their future spouses. He'd tried to make her a necklace out of wildflowers and for a couple weeks she'd thought she'd been in love and wondered what that would mean. If she got married, could her sisters still live with them? They talked about it and laughed about it and shared more mostly-innocent smooches about it. (Future spouses be darned!) But now that she was with her sisters again and saw their misery and heartache, she resented it all because she hadn't been able to share it with them and it made her different from the two people she'd always been completely the same as, and now she was just as sad as they were.

The odds of their existence were a million to one. Less than that. Far less. They were a miracle. Their parents were atheists, but the girls considered themselves agnostic. They couldn't be what they were without some kind of divine intervention, could they?

So Maddison told her parents that it had been fine, and said no more.

"I'm sorry you had some hard times at camp, girls," said their Dad from the front seat. "But sometimes that's how you grow. Someday, you'll be all grown up and you'll go your separate ways. You'll always have each other, but it'll be phone calls and holiday visits. I wanted to make sure you girls knew you were each strong enough and brave enough to make it on your own, and you did. You all learned something about yourselves. I'm very proud of you."

When he put it that way, they did feel proud. They'd endured it, and they *had* learned something. Namely, they'd learned that they never wanted to endure it again.

No gaps.

It didn't happen overnight. They were people, after all, and people were different. Most people were, anyway. The sisters, however, were 100% genetically identical. Dad joked that she was 90% sure they'd made it through the baby years without mixing up the girls' identities. The girls hadn't liked that joke. It was existentially terrifying, the idea that Allison could be Maddison could be Addison and literally nothing could prove otherwise. Dad apologized and told them he promised their next triplets would benefit from all the learning he'd done from his mistakes with the first batch, little Hoozy and Idano and Wutsername. They hadn't laughed at that one either. Not much.

By the time they were old enough to understand anything – and after extracting an ironclad oath on grandma’s soul that he was a thousand percent certain there had been no mixups – they understood Sameness. It would take a retinal scan to distinguish them. Their birth had been front page news. A clipping of the birth announcement hung in their nursery, and never left their bedroom as they grew up and redecorated.

Maddison hit puberty early, though, the winter after that wretched camp. It made the hard years of middle school even harder, her sisters left to browse clothes in the juniors section while she was in the dressing room trying on bras under Mom’s supervision. They’d done some modeling as children – had basically been begged to. They’d loved it. It was attention and affirmation and getting to try on cool clothes and having one more thing for the kids at school to revere them for. Maddison’s changes put that on hold. Suddenly they were... different. Regular people could tell them apart.

Addison and Allison both caught up by high school, and while they were once more the Same, by then they were no longer utterly indistinguishable. Identical servings of identical nutrition had always served to keep them the same. (They’d insisted on it, having been encouraged quietly by their modeling agent, who was fired the moment Dad found out about the encouragement.) Suddenly though, one of them had 10 pounds and 4 inches of height on the others, fat going to strange new places, new hair follicles springing up in weird places that siphoned resources from other projects. Identical calories were split in distinct proportions, and traits in one had more or less time to develop than in others.

When the pubescent dust settled, despite their best efforts, there were distinctions. A quarter inch of height here, eyebrows that wanted to come in slightly thicker there, a tiny round scar on a heel from a bad step on a hike. Their periods didn’t sync up like they’d been told they would. They did their best to restore balance, to mortar over those gaps, but some things couldn’t be lased or exercised or starved into submission. It fooled the world, but never each other, and never Mom and Dad. Dad, anyway. Mom respected their desire for homogeneity by acceding to it.

Of course, life experiences tried to drag them apart as well. Allison struggled in math for reasons they couldn’t explain. They had the same teachers through elementary school, after all, and identical brains. Between Dad and his resolution to “help” them distinguish themselves and a principal who cared not a fig for their pleading not to be separated, they found themselves in different classrooms for most of the day, so the math problem festered. Her sisters offered to simply swap places on quiz and test days, but Allison was offended. The problem was not her grade, it was that they knew something she didn’t. It was an existential threat. So they tutored her and tutored her, getting even better at the subject matter through the tutoring, which only made her work harder.

She went from a C- to an A-. The next semester, an A. Dad offered to take her out to celebrate, just the two of them, to show some focused appreciation for all her studying. He was an engineer himself, after all, and couldn't be prouder. She refused unless her sisters were also permitted to attend.

By their sweet sixteen, they were honor roll students, two-sport varsity athletes, and, as Dad put it, "a couple of heartbreakers plus one." If they were arrogant, it was unavoidable. What had started as a jokey insistence on expressing themselves identically, a game really, evolved into a platform of self- and mutual respect. They didn't permit one another self-criticism, because self-criticism was sister criticism, and they loved their sisters as they loved themselves.

When they succeeded, they could admire each other as one; if they failed, they were their own reinforcements. If there was a problem, they solved it together or avoided it together or destroyed it together. If one of them was having a moment and wanted some space, the other two smothered her until she remembered that they were together, always. When one of them wondered aloud in the middle of the night what would happen someday if one of them wanted to move somewhere far away, the others were there to swear they would follow them anywhere. They'd be the first triplets to colonize Mars, if that's what it took.

"What if one of us wants to get married someday?"

"I don't."

"I don't."

"Yeah, I know. I don't either. We're six-freaking-teen. But I'm saying what if, and someday?"

"Maybe we'll find three brothers and marry them together."

They laughed. Together. But they also worried as individuals.

The solution, they decided when those worries didn't subside, was to go back to modeling, like when they were little. But bigger. It was exciting. It was glamorous. If it wasn't a lot of money – yet – it was enough to have something to throw in Dad's face when he was trying to be funny grumbling about the cost of having three more daughters than he'd hoped for.

They were a novelty, and novelty meant opportunities. Plus, while it wasn't the greatest statement on civilized life on earth, they were 16, which gave the world about 20 months to salivate over their Watsonesque dreams of adult content. The sisters had no such intentions. At least, that was the decision after they had a series of lengthy discussions. It took some firm insistence that two of them were not comfortable doing sexual content with their sisters, and that was that. Instead, the occasional "lol you never know! ;)" reply on their socials would keep the fish on the line. Followers and subscribers hadn't meant anything to them except as a little extra clout in the social battlefield of high school, but it was something agencies looked for. Girls people wanted

to look at, who looked good and had a proven track record of waving no red flags. They didn't smoke, didn't drink, didn't do drugs, didn't have opinions of any kind about anything except for how excited they were to partner with Dolce and Gabbana for their gorgeous new fall teen lineup!

Dad said no. Actually, he said "absolutely not," which in Dad-speak meant he not only rejected their request but wouldn't even let them triple-pitch a persuasive argument at him. They'd gotten good at that, and secretly delighted in it. It was harder to resist a request if your points were lobbed in a barrage.

It worked just fine on Mom, though.

They signed a contract with a new agency, one that represented some of the hottest and most successful young names out there. Mom co-signed the paperwork as their legal guardian while Dad was taking a weekend hunting trip with Uncle Steve and two 24-cases of beer. When he got back and found out, he was furious and threatened to tear the whole thing up. The only way to placate him had been to make him the conservator of their financials – that way, he said, it would go towards their educations and not purses and makeovers. They gritted their teeth and grunted their thanks.

Their new agent, Lorna, was incredible. She promised them the world same as the other prospective agents had, but she promised it in front of people, which meant a little more. She made no bones about being a hired gun, but made a convincing argument that there was no better money to be had than representing an authentic genetic miracle. "There's only two Hadids, after all. You're going to have the most eyes on you per sister than any modeling family since the Kardashians." At sixteen, they were still a bit naïve and deeply aspirational, and Lorna's pitch landed.

The sisters were introduced to photographers they'd actually heard of, other modest- and mid-tier models they'd been waiting to follow until they got a follow back. Which they now got. They spent the summer before their senior year being flown to cities across Europe, to Australia, to West Africa, racking up stamps on their passports and giggling to each other about what would happen if the transit authorities found out they'd been posing as each other. Mom came with as chaperone, though they didn't see much of her. Dad stayed home and took care of the cats and worked.

"Somebody has to pay the mortgage," he grumbled time and again.

The sisters didn't hear it. They were too busy maintaining their diet and exercise routines, managing correspondences with their followers and designers and Lorna, posting daily, micromanaging their hair and skincare routines, making straight A's, and taking self-defense classes so if anybody ever tried anything on one of their sisters, they wouldn't have to stop at merely hurting the sonofabitch.

Dad put a moratorium on such travels during the school year – even after they were accepted at Lakeview University, where they were eager to attend its well-respected business school. They looked forward to college immensely. A clean start.

Independence. Somewhere nobody knew them but each other, where not a single soul ever had or ever would see them as Allison, and Addison, and Maddison. There, they would be Allison, or Addison, or Maddison, or Allison and Addison and Maddison.

They rehearsed it, trained their minds to stop seeing distinctions where none should exist. They were distinct by virtue of their minutes on the earth, the eldest having an extra seven, the middle three, and the youngest forming the baseline at which point they became what they were. Triplets. Three. Whole. There was no connotation to the age distinction, and thus it became their private term of address, even in thought. Mom and Dad had given them names that made them similar, but they were different.

No gaps.

Well, there was still one. But not after tonight.

They were poised in front of their bedroom mirror, getting themselves ready. It was mounted on a dresser covered in glittery stickers and doodles scribbled in Crayola marker. A child's dresser, which could fit only a child-sized mirror. It was ideal for one child, young. It was impractical to do all their hair and makeup in front of it. Hence, like any other night out, the eldest used this station in their shared bedroom. The second used the minimally larger space in their shared bathroom. The youngest, as always, used the one in the master bedroom. They then returned to their lair and, by twos, stood side by side, scrutinizing along the axes of symmetry for any sign of betrayal.

Centered, the mirror reflected the self. Well and good for the eldest in the foreground, but they would be watched from all angles and therefore needed to be inspected from all angles. The process – ritual, by then – was for them to oversee the others, not the self.

The middle took her place behind her. The youngest, at her side, digested every inch of the eldest, reporting her shortcomings for correction. Too much curl at the bottom of the left side of her part. The wrong pair of red silk panties, an easy fix. A tiny blemish on the center left of her chin that needed another dab of concealer. Horrifyingly, a solitary black hair almost two millimeters long beneath her belly button.

(Not a pube. They'd been waxing those since signing with Lorna, another of those suggestions they made sure their parents never learned about. It was a must for swimsuit shoots. Besides, when it came to being identical, it was far easier to match nothingness to somethingness.)

Their inspections were uncomfortable, no flaw spared the magnifying glass. The sisters took the urgency to get things perfect on the first time out as a sacred duty. The youngest had joked once about how much time they would save shaving their heads, too,

a joke for which she had been thoroughly chastised for even jesting about. Still, pube or no, it was an ugly stray hair. If the middle could develop such a thing, they might as well.

The youngest next, the eldest falling in behind and taking her erstwhile inspector's place. Better – no more repulsive non-pubes – but nonetheless, in the dresses they were wearing, their exposed hips meant she had to cover up that little pink-brown mole on her left side. Her sisters didn't have moles there; they simply used prosthetic moles of their own if it would be revealed in a shoot. The asymmetry was reassuring when one regarded it in the context of that hair, but still. Someday, they'd have the money to have it removed, but for now, back to the concealer. Addison dotted, smeared and smoothed until Allison assented that it was adequate.

The middle's turn, the youngest taking the inspection stand and squinting for any signs of Otherness. She'd done herself up outstandingly, a perfect template for the others. She said as much, permitting her sister a moment to preen before they each compared themselves to her at length.

Purple, blue, and navy fabric. To the casual observer – even the leering-at-length observer – there was no further difference between the three. To the colorblind observer, there wasn't even that. They seldom had trouble telling one another apart, and when they did, they at least knew their own identity, reducing it to a coin toss rather than one in three. While it was gauche to point it out, the tragic fact of the matter was that one of them needed shoes a full size bigger than the others. The signs were all there, if you knew where to look. It was only that no one but them did.

“Time to shine.”

“We look amazing. Seriously.”

“Once more into the breach, dear sisters.”

They departed. One last trite high school party, a farewell before Lorna dispatched them to their summer tour. Their flight left the following afternoon for the Czech Republic. Their suitcases had been packed and reviewed and ready for over a week, final exams be damned.

“All right, girls. You look very pretty, but you know darn well I can't send you out into the world like that.” Their father was waiting by the door, arms folded stalwartly. Uncle Steve was in the living room, trying to look like he wasn't trying not to look. They liked Uncle Steve. He was a proper uncle, doting and blandly supportive, any opinions directed to the relevant authority figures.

As for their father, he was learning, too. His post at the door was a clear indicator that he'd upped his game from last month. Then he'd been on the living room couch, where he could see them go but not stop them from announcing their ride was there and see you soon Daddy we love you we'll be careful we promise.

“What's wrong with our outfits, Daddy?”

“Yeah, I think they look really nice.”

“And hardly any cleavage, too, see? We listen.”

“We know you’re only trying to take care of us, Daddy.”

“We picked these out just to make you happy.”

Their father wasn’t having it, though. “Oh, I bet they’re going to make somebody happy,” he observed dryly. That they would. There were practically no sides to them, just a few strings trying fronts to backs, and the knitted style showed lots of skin between the stitches. Their father had no way of knowing it yet, but it was even shorter in the back than the front, six identical ass cheeks peeking out to draw the eye. The dresses were slutty, a description that had less than no impact on the sisters’ feelings about them. Slutty knit dresses were in this summer. It was their job to make sure everyone knew. “But I have to draw the line somewhere, and it’s way before *those*.”

“That’s not fair!”

“If we have to re-coordinate, we’re going to be late!”

“It’s the last party before we leave.”

“Hi, Uncle Steve!”

“Yeah, we won’t be able to say goodbye to our friends.”

“Oliver’s already there.”

“Mom said they were fine, Daddy.”

This was only barely true, but it was a defensible hill. Their mother, weary of melting the plastic in her wallet on fresh clothing for her child and her two unintended siblings, had told them months and months ago that if they wanted to set or otherwise keep up with the fashions of the day, they could pay for it themselves. They’d talked to Lorna about it, who’d talked to the designers, who’d been happy to pay the girls in clothes. It neatly evaded the conservatorship blockade around their income, too. Mom had already been goaded into conceding (with borderline sarcasm) that anything she and Dad didn’t have to pay for, they could wear to their hearts’ content. They tried not to abuse it where their parents could see, but tonight was a special night.

Going on two years into their agent/client relationship, they all agreed that Lorna knew her shit. She tracked their metadata carefully. As the market decided that perfectly identical beautiful blonde triplets were a sound investment for something as paltry as a few outfits, soon the clothes were coming with checks. Nowadays they were getting payments for nothing more than posting photos of them having fun wearing the clothes, so even if the checks for the shoots were lower, their instagram was a printing press for money. That swimsuit shoot over winter break had been horrible, low 40’s and posing against a monstrous ocean wind, but that only meant their identical nipples jutted out authentic and alluring. They’d looked sexy as hell, with likes and comments and DMs with new offers dripping from what they’d been permitted to post. It would have paid for their spring break, if they’d had the free time to take one.

Tonight's dresses had come with a check, though. The triplets were wearing for \$833.33 apiece, the penny remainder deposited in their shared rainy day expense account. (They'd opened it when they'd gotten their first bank accounts when they were thirteen; the middle hadn't liked that their account balances would be distinct on account of fractions, every check split neatly into exact thirds. Its balance was over two hundred dollars now, gaining a penny every time an individual balance varied.)

The outfits that so scandalized Dad's sensibilities were better suited to a nightclub, or perhaps a garden party with young women and men of all ages, but the designer wanted the pics at an informal occasion. That seemed to be where things were headed this season, excess and flash to shame those who aspired only to be drab. The fabric colors were bold, the laces determined, and the skin underneath lotioned until it shined.

Still, they were high fashion, and savvy eyes would recognize them as such. "You look like call girls trying to drum up business," Dad snarked. He didn't hold back with his opinions about the trio. He was the only man they knew who didn't.

"We look attractive."

"Yeah, we look like models, Daddy."

"Which we are."

"Are you worried we're going to give up modeling...?"

"To start turning tricks...?"

"You know Oliver wouldn't let anybody get handsy with us."

"Not that I'd let them either."

"Yeah, me either."

"It's a party, Daddy! We're just going to have fun, dance, and come home."

"You're so sweet to worry about us, though."

"We'll be careful."

"Like always."

"Wanna back me up here, Steve?" Dad pleaded.

"Leave me out of it, bro." Uncle Steve leaned around the lamp he'd been using to hide his face. "You look great, girls."

The middle brushed her knuckles against each sister, finding the youngest's hand and the eldest's hip. "Thanks, Uncle Steve!" The touch made sure they crowed it together, the initial echo coming a fraction of a second behind at first, but quickly closing to true unison as the phrase became obvious. They'd gotten that skill down way back in third grade, and it had paid dividends. They were fucking cute in unison.

As far as they were concerned, Uncle Steve's endorsement put the vote 5-1, and they squeezed past Dad with kisses on alternating cheeks. (As far as they were concerned out loud, anyway; privately, they'd never intended to let him stop them regardless. They knew he meant well, but that didn't give him the right.)

They attended the party, fashionably late. Fashionably everything. Allison found Oliver, who greeted his girlfriend with a delighted kiss. Then he handed each of them a cup of shitty high school beer they barely sipped, and then helped them get the shoot done. The party was a great backdrop, full of people having fun but clearly all meaningless white noise to their presence in the foreground. A fine metaphor for closing out high school, the youngest pointed out. Oliver knew his job and snapped away, helping them finish the pics early. Lorna texted back her approval in under 60 takes, which meant they could spend the rest of the night enjoying themselves.

“You want to get out of here?” Oliver shouted into Allison’s ear. It was 11:18.

“Sure! I just need to go to the bathroom, but then, yeah, we should go somewhere.”

Her eyes met with her sisters’ across the dance floor. The boyfriend. It was time.

They rendezvoused in the upstairs bathroom, cutting in line in front of a quartet of indignantly squawking but ultimately impotent former classmates. These girls needed to pee; the sisters needed to start their new lives in a new world.

The new world had no room for +1’s.

“Are you ready?”

“We can do this. We know you’re ready.”

Allison frowned. “He’s going to be crushed.”

“We’ve been nothing but fair to him. You told him, you’re leaving the day after graduation for the whole summer.”

“Yeah, he probably would have cheated on us anyway, being gone all summer.”

“Cheated on *me*, you mean.”

“Cheated on you.”

“But your pain is our pain.”

“So also us.”

The girls paused for a hug. They were right. Allison’s last boyfriend hadn’t been able to handle her closeness with them, and it had sewn discord. They’d been so much happier single. Oliver was very pretty, perhaps not the hottest guy in school but the hottest who wasn’t also a total dick. He’d never *tried* to come between them. He was an excellent kisser, if not the most discerning when it came to whose lips he was kissing.

They hadn’t liked that Allison wanted to date, like they were individual girls who kept some parts of their lives separate, but they supported it. That was the rule. Whatever their sisters did, support one hundred percent. It came with the acute pressure to not make decisions that would hurt their sisters.

Oliver, so far, had slipped through the cracks. Until tonight.

“Are you sure you’re up for it?”

“If it’s too painful, you know we’ll do it for you.”

“Anything. You don’t have to do this alone.”

Allison squeezed her sisters tighter, tears trickling out. "I love you."

"We love you too."

Oliver perked up as he saw his gorgeous girlfriend descending the stairs. He'd been nervous when she'd darted off with her sisters. Those two thought they had a right to butt into every single damn thing Allison said and did. It was frankly obnoxious. Still, he loved her, he thought. She was brilliant and witty and fucking gorgeous. Tall leggy natural blonde? She was a freaking *model*, for crying out loud, and it sure sounded like their career was trending upward. His big brother told him everybody broke up with their high school sweethearts in college, unless they went together. He'd transferred to Lakeview for her. No clue what he wanted to study there, but she was worth it. He'd be the only freshman in Rowland Hall whose girlfriend was a model, that was for damn sure.

"Hey, Ally. Ready to blow this joint?"

She nodded and placed a hand on his forearm, letting him escort her out the front door. "Have a good time? Get to say some goodbyes?" he asked. He'd given her some space tonight. They were leaving the next day and might well not be back home until August. He was trying to be respectful of her need for closure.

"Actually..."

She stopped. So did his heart. *Fuck*.

He listened patiently as she dumped him. It was all in that cold, reasonable tone she had – all three of them had – explaining how it made sense this way, how her career was taking off and how it didn't leave enough room for a boyfriend she could treat the way he deserved to be treated. It wasn't unkind, apart from the heartbreak.

"I fucking transferred to Lakeview for you!"

"I didn't tell you to do that."

"You sure as shit didn't tell me not to!"

"It's a good school, Oliver. You could do worse."

"I could do better. With you. Come on, Ally, don't do this. We were good together. Weren't we? Haven't I been supportive? What the actual fuck, you know?" Oliver didn't curse at women, but he was a little drunk, and a lot in pain.

She leaned in close. So close. Too close. "How sure are you of who you're talking to right now?"

His stomach lurched. "What...? Ally, you're... What?" But he looked her over and shook her head. "No. I know my girl. You don't think I know how to tell you three apart? I pay attention. You came here in the blue. That's your dress."

"And you don't think we could have exchanged dresses in the bathroom?" His jaw dropped. She shook her head. "It's not your fault, Oliver. For what it's worth."

He gaped after her as she made her way to their car, where her sisters were waiting. Allison cried, and they cried with her. By the time they returned home, there

was no more Allison. Allison was a legal entity only, a name on paper, something one of them would sign. They'd practiced. Their signatures of one another's names were as indistinguishable as they were.

They arrived home single, single, and single. By chance, Lorna texted them as they were walking onto the porch. *Hey, hope you're not having too much fun. Great pics – I flagged the best few, take your pic pick. Though remember, there's three of you, so try to make sure you show off every angle. Get some sleep, see you at the airport tomorrow.*

They read in unison, but it delayed them just enough that they caught the sound of voices penetrating the living room window.

"... don't know what to do with them any more, Steve. They're like eels – little blonde identical eels. Every time I think I've got a hand on things, they slip free again."

The girls froze on the porch, shoulder to shoulder to shoulder in the darkness, listening to Dad and his brother in the living room inside. "I'm not jealous, man. Still, can't be all bad, right? Your girls are as close as sisters can be. Kristy and Zoe, I can barely get them to keep civil through dinner some nights."

The attempted redirection failed. Their father was six years, two months and a day older than Uncle Steve. That was a big gap, the difference between experiencing 9/11 and having it be a weird day of middle school with extra-long recess. Gaps meant differentiated experiences. Gaps invited disharmony.

They listened, hands and breath held, no chance of a stray sound betraying their presence.

"You don't understand. They're... weird. It gets worse every year, and their modeling whatever only makes it worse. Sometimes it's less like they're sisters and more like they're a very exclusive cult."

"Well they seem to be doing a good job recruiting," joked Uncle Steve. "They've permitted only the best members."

"You only ask that because you're not following them online. Do you know what it's like, seeing my babies posing half naked, seeing hundreds – thousands! – of random assholes saying creepy shit in a dozen languages? I guarantee you most of these pervs are our age or more. And they just giggle it off like the cost of doing business."

Uncle Steve's reply was soft, hard to make out. "You know, um, I'm as human as the next guy. I fall for the occasional, what do they call it, 'thirst trap.' I didn't tell you, but I had to actually cancel my instagram. You don't know what it's like sitting on the john, scrolling through girlies, and suddenly out of nowhere there's my nieces. Hell of a cure for a quality boner."

"Fuck, man, don't tell me that shit!"

"At least you didn't have to live it." There was a pause; probably taking a drink. "But you always say you're proud of them."

“Sure, I *say* that. What else do I say? ‘Girls, would you mind covering up a little so there’s not a million lonely jerks beating off to your every post?’ They don’t even realize. They’re just having fun playing dress-up. Like all that money just *poofs* out of thin air because they’re so stinking cute or something.”

The sisters shared a dry smile, just visible to one another in the faint light. Their father was simultaneously too innocent and too cynical. Of course they knew. The money didn’t come from the men beating off to them, though. The money came from the companies sponsoring their apparel, who in turn made their money selling less attractive girls (and more attractive girls cursed with a lack of replicas) the notion that if they bought these clothes, guys would beat off to them, too.

Besides, not like guys wouldn’t beat off to them if they didn’t have social media. It would just be the dudes who saw them day to day, as had been the case for hot girls since the invention of the cum rag. Dad was either uneasy because of the quantity or because they got something in return.

“You’re only looking at the downsides. They’re raking in the cash, you said, right? Let Lydia retire in her forties. Think about that, paying their tuition just by batting their eyelashes. That’s not nothing.”

“‘Batting their eyelashes’ is one way to put it,” their father grumbled. They could sense, though not see or hear, him grinding out his cigarette in his ashtray. They’d begged him to quit time and time again over the years, but to no avail. A rare miss. “And they’re not just paying their tuition. And Lydia ‘retired’ because otherwise we’d be sending our sixteen-year-old kids across the damn planet with nobody but that bloodsucking bitch Lorna. You know they’re on track to out-earn where Lydia left off this year? Each, I mean. I know she wasn’t exactly raking it in, but still, they’re *kids*. If they don’t, it’ll be close, and they’ll get there next year for sure. Shit, they might out-earn *me*. I’ve been on the forums, read the stories. If they decide to, you know, ‘cash in’ or whatever you want to call it, they could graduate as millionaires. And I don’t mean the three of them would have a million dollars. I mean they would each, individually, be a millionaire.”

The eldest shared a perplexed look at her sisters. Dad was saying “millionaire” like it was a bad thing.

“That sounds like good news,” said Uncle Steve guardedly. Duh. “And what do you mean, ‘cash in?’ Like, sign a contract with GapKids or something?”

The middle almost let a giggle slip out. Thankfully, each sister felt it coming and silenced it with an elbow and a withering glare respectively. She mouthed her apology.

“GapKids...? Fuck, Stevie, I’m scared they’re gonna sign with goddamn Pornhub. I ran the numbers. If 1% of their little ‘followers’ sprung for ten bucks a month, they’d be making more than yours and my salary combined by the end of goddamn February.”

If Lorna were to be believed, they'd outpace him by late January, actually. Sooner, if they didn't just pose but actually touched each other. Lorna presented the option without passion or prejudice, yet another communication they made sure to keep off the books. They didn't have any particular disdain for women who made money taking clothes off instead of putting them on, but it was a shared body. They agreed none of them had the right to bare her sister's form to the world.

"Oh come on, don't be gross. They wouldn't do that. They're good girls. You raised them right. Every daughter's dad begins to panic when they're about to leave the nest. You just have three times the panic."

"Yeah, well, every dad's daughters don't have a goddamn agent spending night and day, fucking... *monetizing* them. This lady, she doesn't even have the grace to come in and talk with me and Lydia face to face. No, she 'Zooms' us – while she's at, I don't know, some outdoor cafe or something, goddamn palm trees – to tell us how excited she is to be 'promoting' our girls. Like they were a fucking sale at Walmart, not... *people!* Before you know it, they're dressing different, acting different, talking different. For three little girls who are so fucking same, they got awful different awful fast when that woman got her claws sunk into them."

The girls shared a look. These were ideas they had been confronted by previously, but never so bluntly. Of course Lorna was promoting them. Her agency made 12%, and most of that went to her. Why would they want an agent who had no stake in their success?

"I feel you," said Uncle Steve after a pause. Taking a smoke of his own, the girls' nostrils confirmed as they took in the scent of his cigarette wafted out the cracked window. Their mother disapproved of this, but she'd had no more luck with her brother-in-law than the girls had with their father. "But look at it this way. They'll be secure, you know?"

"Secure? They'll be professional sluts is what they'll be."

"I mean... Maybe? Not how I'd phrase it, but nothing wrong with getting rich being pretty. People get rich doing a lot worse shit, man. But don't let them hear you talking like that if you want 'em to use those riches to take care of your ass when you're old and broke."

"I'm supposed to take care of *them*," their father snapped.

The eldest opened the door. "We're home, Daddy!"

Their arrival heralded the usual commotion of cigarettes being extinguished, smoke being fanned out the window through which they'd just been eavesdropping.

"Good party?" he asked.

"It was OK."

Dad frowned. "That's not a yes."

"We broke up with Oliver."

His frown intensified. Dad had liked Oliver. One of his daughters had actually been doing something normal, on her own. Going on dates and asking for curfew extensions and trying to conceal hickeys with makeup. Not sitting in their room rehearsing weird triplet mind games. Inwardly, he hoped they'd each find a nice somebody at college. His girls would need some strong boys to straighten them out.

For now though, he addressed the problem in front of him. "I'm sorry to hear it. Are you OK, sweetheart?" He looked right at Allison. The colors of their dresses were irrelevant to him. Dad always knew.

"I'll be OK. Thanks, Dad." He offered, and she accepted, a hug. It felt a little wrong after what she'd just overheard, but it still felt pretty good.

Upstairs, they changed into their pajamas, popped an Ambien apiece, and closed their eyes, side by side by side.

"He can still tell."

"Even Mom can't always tell."

"It could have been a lucky guess."

"You know it wasn't."

"How can he tell?"

Nobody could answer that.

"Part of me is glad he can. But I guess we'll see how we feel when we get back home, huh."

"I don't think Dad is on the team any more."

"He's still our dad."

"You heard what we heard."

"But he's still our dad."

"He can be our dad and still not be on the team."

Mom and Dad dropped them off at the airport the next day. Lorna was already waiting; she nodded curtly to her clients' parents and kept her distance. Mom hugged the three of them, tearfully wishing them a magical summer. Dad hugged them one by one and told them by name, accurately, that he loved them.

"Don't go getting too rich and famous too fast, eh girls?"

They giggled, waved, and joined their agent, strutting through the airport in designer heels. Lorna distributed their boarding passes. "So. Who's ready to get rich and famous?" They giggled at that, too.

"It's them," said Elena, nodding sincerely to Kenna. "You can go in. Leave your clothes. Enter with your heart, mind and body in perfect openness."

They nodded and complied, trying not to look too hard at the many small rooms off the corridor. It was dark, but the mattresses were bright enough to be seen.

Naked and holding nothing but their candles, the two present sisters entered the Hall of Roses, a grandiose name for a shitty concrete bunker. It had been built by paranoid sisters – not true sisters, merely the sorority kind – back during the Cold War era, in case the Soviets aimed a missile at Lakeview University or some such idiocy. It was deep down, though. The sisters had been in the Sigma Chi Epsilon house basement before during their pledgship. They'd known of, though had never been to, the sub-basement. To find there was all this buried way down here had been surprising, especially this room. The "Hall of Roses," Elena had called it. Its round walls were cloaked in waves of black velvet, ΣXE stitched into it by hundreds of hands in hundreds of styles. All of them in conspicuously dark red thread that only barely didn't match the sheer black of the cloth. The room was lit only by candles, the letters only noticeable because of how very many there were. It was a room that suggested something sacred. And secret.

It was nice to finally be surprised.

She squinted at that thread. Was it blood, tinting white thread? Probably. It seemed like the kind of creepy culty bullshit these sorority chicks got off to.

Pledging a sorority had mostly been exactly what they'd expected: pushy alpha bitches getting their rocks off bullying and controlling freshman girls, with just enough of a veneer of hashtag grrl power to keep their fellow pledges coming back for more. Having triplets, successful models, girls so unusual and unique and alluring that their mere existence had merited an article in *The Lakeview Legend*, that was fuel on the fire. They were a commodity. The sororities weren't supposed to recruit, just host meet-and-greets and let the freshmen decide where they wanted to pledge. Nevertheless the sisters had been recruited relentlessly, offered cherry-picked accommodations, discounted lodging, clothes. Someone from Delta Alpha Theta had slipped them an honest-to-god envelope of cash with a note to buy themselves something cute to wear to their first pledge party.

Laughable, of course. (Seriously, "DAT House?" Delta Alpha Theta was DATH House.)

The sisters were the last two pledges to enter this budget sanctum. There was space in the circle for them still, and they took their places facing the ΣXE sisters in their ring just inside the chamber's perimeter. Each clutched their candle in two hands at their stomach, as they had been instructed. It was the only thing obstructing the view of their nakedness.

"Sistren," intoned sister Jocelyn in a voice almost comically deep. Jocelyn was bulimic, and positively gorgeous for it. Sad, but they had enough stress managing their own diet and fitness without reserving pity for others. Better to focus on the positive.

“We are gathered in the sight of sisterhood to hear the petitions of those who would petition us to deem them worthy of membership.

“We have gathered you here in the Hall of Roses, at the base of our chapter house, in the sight of God but away from the eyes of man. First let each petitioner among you declare your pledge to Sigma Chi Epsilon, from this day until your last, or cast herself from this place the same.”

The ritual of the thing really sold it. The pledges had been taught what to say, drilled and lectured on the significance, but they had not been told what would be said to them. The anxiety over trying to straight-face shall's and lo's dwindled rapidly in the presence of the religiosity of it all. It sounded old, churchy (synagoguey for their pledge sister Dina), and somber. Roleplay so committed that it was easy to reciprocate, even as they filtered the swollen prose for the underlying meaning. (e.g. The book might say they'd gathered “in the sight of God,” but as far as everyone in this room was concerned, there was no god who was to be more feared and loved than Michelle, the president of the Lakeview chapter of ΣXE.)

It was painstaking, as it was meant to be. Recitations of oaths, self-deprecating supplications, confessions, saccharine praises, and of course the ΣXE anthem. To the two genuine sisters participating, it seemed as if they were attempting a parody of sisterhood. The triplets never needed to say stuff like this to each other. They were barely even consciously felt. They were one another and each other was themselves. No amount of what essentially amounted to vows of eternal hotness – lest, yea, our sistren whom we trust and love as, lo, sisters of the flesh, not get invited to the good frat parties, Amen – was required.

To love oneself was to love one's sister. No gaps.

Six months now they'd been living on their own terms, and it had brought them closer than ever, found micro-gaps they hadn't known existed. It demanded discipline, and constant communication, and sacrifice, and choking down wants and desires that went against the greater good. But yeah, worth it. It was such a relief most of the time, living outside of parental support and intervention – what Lorna politely called “well-intentioned bungling.”

(Their agent hated the conservatorship almost as much as they did, and for about the same reason. Girls earning and spending a lot of money wanted to earn more money. Girls amassing a lot of money they couldn't touch? She distrusted it. It meant providing a lot of extra attention and oversight to appeal to their egos since their purses were out of their reach. It drained her time and energy and patience. But it also paid for her BMW, so.)

Really though, the sisters did an excellent job taking care of one another. When the middle had gotten drunk and started making out with another model in Melbourne,

it was on her sisters to hastily research whether or not he was a big enough deal to fear upsetting before dragging her away. (He wasn't.)

When the eldest got the flu two days before their shoot in Rio de Janeiro, her sisters purged and starved alongside her. Identical sunken ribcages, identical haunted complexions, identical misery.

When Lorna told them she'd lined up a secondary shoot that only needed one of them, their pick, they declined. \$1800 was a small sacrifice to prevent anyone having a distinction in their portfolio, making contacts denied their siblings. When Lorna testily informed them that their contract didn't permit them to decline, they went together and swapped in and out of the merchandise until the photos contained all three.

When the youngest got crippling homesick during their second week of college, her sisters canceled everything and took her home for a weekend of hot dogs Dad burned on the grill and some truly intense games of euchre at the kitchen table. Then back to Lakeview, where she choked down her loneliness and plastered a smile on her face as she accompanied her sisters to the college party scene. It was loud and close and the frat guys were all sorts of handsy, but her sisters wanted popularity, so she wanted it for them.

This was something the sisters of ΣXE had failed to understand about sisterhood when they tried to pit them against one another. The house had a reputation as the sort of viper nest that one usually only saw in fictional sororities, right down to their letters.

For the first couple weeks of rushing, the sisters had generously interpreted the torrent of competitive winner-takes-all games and challenges and flat-out hazings as par for the course. If the sisters could win together, they did. In the dance-off before the feasting eyes of their sibling fraternity Omega Beta, each sister's "audition" incorporated both of her sisters; the brothers voted them first place unanimously, Michelle's insistence only one could win be damned. If they couldn't win, then they lost together. The three-legged bikini race in the ΣXE front yard was a fine example. It turned out a six-legged configuration was indeed substantially more challenging, and turned them into a full-on spectacle. As the last place finishers, they had to work the OB party in those bikinis, flitting around serving drinks and taking all dance requests. Michelle glowered as the dance floor became the stage for the line of inebriated OB boys waiting their turn to be triplet-teamed.

The breaking point, presumably, had been when Michelle instructed them to arrange themselves from most to least attractive. Naked. The ΣXE sisters roamed around, measuring body fat with calipers, generally pointing out any flaw they could find. Pledge Gemma had 26% body fat, "a lardass." Pledge Minnie had the gait and the tits of a penguin, "fucking mutant." Pledge Nadia dressed like she was poor. "Poor."

They took particular malicious glee on the sisters, though they failed to find any failings that weren't common to all three.

Then it was up to the pledges to take that feedback and sort themselves into the proper order, hottest to nottest. Every time the pledges got it wrong, meaning their ranking was different from the sisters', the whole group had to get down on the dirty floor, still naked, and do crunches through a singing of the ΣXE anthem. Over and over, until they got it right.

The triplets had refused to differentiate. Even with their pledge sisters demanding it – gently, at first, but ΣXE President Michelle's wolfish grin up in her roost spurred their enmity on. Three girls, including the youngest, threw up before they were finally physically forced into a lineup. The sunrise had just been kissing the horizon.

That had been two days ago. It had been the final straw. *You won't get in line? Fine. Two can stay*, Michelle had told them. *You choose*. A test to see if they really meant the oaths, if they could choose ΣXE sisterhood over each other. Really, she just wanted all three of them to quit, but she'd settle for permanently fracturing something beautiful.

They chose. Here they were. Two of them. Of course, Michelle didn't realize exactly what they'd chosen just yet.

Oaths now out of the way, it was finally time for the real test. If there had ever been an age where one's honor was sufficient validation for entry into privileged society, it had clearly lost out long ago to the conventions of those who had none. Everyone having dirt on everyone, that was the real intimacy.

The door to the Hall of Roses opened, and in walked a line of men in togas, their faces hidden behind golden masks. Even so the women all knew who they were, broadly. Brothers from Omega Beta, their brother fraternity.

Jocelyn intoned solemnly, "Now, my new sisters-to-be, we call on you to join your ΣXE—" [always "sexy" when an adjective] "—sisters in a display of hospitality and fellowship. As you have sworn to represent ΣXE—" [always Sigma Chi Epsilon when a noun] "—with perfect grace and perfect love, we invite you to demonstrate your grace and love to these, our honored guests."

What atrocious word salad. What repulsive contempt for civility and decency. What a complete moron Michelle was to think they'd ever select this base depravity over one another.

The ΣXE pledges each smiled graciously. They'd each been warned privately by one of the sisters about this moment. The pledges had each been led to believe their warning was unique, pure favoritism from an upperclassman who'd been backing them, and were forbidden to share. As the youngest had once put it, though, their only gaps were thigh gaps. They warned everyone, because the girl had to be ready to blow when they were "invited" to blow. (But not to fuck them. Both of them were very explicitly told they weren't required to actually let the brothers fuck them, which meant that they'd definitely try, and probably on a couple of the more impressionable pledges, succeed).

It was no big deal, the ΣXE sisters said, just a little gluck gluck. ΣXE drank for free at any party they attended, and that good will had a price. In exchange they got to be hot and popular and go to parties for the rest of their college years, and then they'd have access to the house's network of alumni connections to vault them to success after graduation.

ΣXE House had connections? Yeah? Did they?

Well, the sisters reminded each other, being a one in a billion genetic anomaly, they could make their own fucking connections.

Michelle approached each pledge one at a time, masterfully interweaving a tapestry of euphemisms to demand them to go suck some dicks to cement her hedonistic alliance. One at a time, the pledge selected one of the OB brothers and led him down the hall to one of the small rooms they'd seen open to them on their way in.

Gluck gluck, presumably; no big deal, supposedly.

She'd saved her most hated for last. Soon, it was down to Michelle and the ΣXE officers, two masked and toga-clad Omega Betas, and the two of the three.

"And then we have you two." Suddenly, there was no ceremony to her tone. No euphemism. "Our sisters before you were sisters."

"I choose him."

"And I choose him."

Michelle smirked. "Hold that thought, ya little dick divas. Did you really think you could get away with this?"

The two froze. Shit. Everything had been going to plan all night so far. They'd really thought they would. Until this moment, they had. But they had one another to cover for. Neither had the right to concede on behalf of the others. They would lie and dissemble until the bitter end for each other.

"With what?"

"Get away with...?"

Michelle rolled her eyes. "You idiots thought your test was which bitch to ditch. Nope. It wasn't picking a weakest link – though by the way, you sure folded easy on that one. Honestly thought you triple twats would throw in the towel together. Would've at least been some dignity in that. I guess. No, cuntards, the test was to see if you'd understand you need to wipe those smug, cunt looks off your smug, cunt faces and recognize that you're not doing *us* favors pledging ΣXE. *We're* the ones doing *you* a favor letting you."

She didn't know. Suppressing smug, cunt grins, they feigned indignation, like Michelle would expect. Give her another excuse to try out one of those stupid over-wrought insults she liked to workshop.

"I don't–"

"That's not–"

Michelle snapped her fingers, right between the narrow space between their faces. “So fine. You wanna be blood sisters first, ΣXE sisters second? Then tuck your tails up your cunts and follow after the third member of your litter. Have fun spending the rest of your college years blacklisted to every party, every tailgate, every everything.”

Michelle crouched down, her smirk reaching both ears. “Or stay, and prove you meant your pledge. You follow her, with him. Together.” She stuck the index finger of both hands in her mouth and bobbed her neck crudely. “And then you go with her, with him.”

The sisters ventured affronted looks. “Wait, we have to suck them both off at the same time? Together? Both of them?” They spoke up. It was important to make their question explicit.

Michelle booped their upturned noses one by one, and shrugged. “You don’t *have* to do anything. But if you want to be one of us, then you gotta be one of us all the way. Choose, but choose fast because I am about as bored as I can fucking get with you and your bullshit triplet drama.”

Michelle stood and returned to her place between the masked OB boys. While her back was turned, the sisters shared a look. They were definitely getting away with this.

“We do want to join you. And we will.” With that, the sisters flanked one of the two remaining brothers, the one with the muscles. Backs stiffened by pride, they led him through the black curtains, down the corridor, past the moans and promised *glucks* of their pledge sisters and their partners, and finally entered one of the tiny sex closet. The chamber was plainly stocked for this ritual and not much else. It was barely big enough to fit a shitty twin bed while permitting the door to open and close.

The boy plopped down on the bed, thick thighs spread wide enough to accommodate the two of them. “Fuck, I can’t believe this is happening. This is insane. You two are so... I mean, just... Wow. Like one of you is wow, but two, like, I don’t even, you know?”

The sisters knelt at his feet. They could see right up the bottom of his brief toga where his cock was trying to burst through his boxers.

“We know.”

“Now just imagine there was a third.”

His eyes widened by half. “You don’t, like, have to, you know. But if you don’t I gotta tell ‘em, so. Fuck. Goddamn, are you two like actual twins?” Evidently he’d been too distracted by four perfect, identical breasts to understand what all Michelle had said right in front of him in the ritual chamber, or even their appearances at OB parties over their months of pledgship. Dimwit.

“No,” they answered in perfect unison.

The boy lifted his ass just enough to jerk his toga over his head, dumping it on the bare, lumpy mattress beside him. Masked though he was, he had a hell of a body on him,

hot enough that either his face or his personality must be unfathomably damaged that he had to stoop to this kind of thing to get his dick wet.

The sisters' eyes met, and they spoke in whispers – hastily, so this beautiful turd couldn't interrupt. The absence of a third voice made it challenging. Usually they had a buffer between responses to help them keep pace.

“We could do it.”

“We don't have to.”

“But we could.”

“We already got what we came for.”

“But I'm *horny*.”

“I know.”

“And you know he'd let us, if we offered.”

“I know.”

“We haven't been with anyone since Oliver, and Baptiste in Melbourne, and those were forever ago.”

“I know.”

“Maybe it would sweeten the story? If we just...”

“I don't think *she* would think it was sweet. Her sisters doubling up on some random guy's cock?”

“Please? Just... come on, *please*. For one night, we can just be two insanely hot perfectly identical unbelievably horny college girls. Just for one night.”

The boy licked his lips. He probably wouldn't be able to follow all this if he were sober, but “horny college girls” was more than enough to keep him interested.

“He would never know she wasn't with us.”

“So?”

“So, would you want some guy out there looking at you, thinking you'd put out for him when it was actually us?”

“We don't have to tell her.”

That halted their discussion. She heard what she'd said instantly, and shook with self-loathing. “I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. I would never.”

Her sister's smile bloomed immediately. She kissed her – their – forehead sweetly. “I know. And I love you.”

They looked up at the OB boy. He grinned down at them. “So, we doing this thing? 'Cause it sounds like somebody wants more than a little oral, and let me just say I am so—”

“We don't intend to suck your cock.”

“I know you were expecting it, but we're not.”

“Sorry.”

“Kind of.”

“Kind of sorry.”

The boy blinked. “Wait, what? But you have to. I mean, not like *have to*, but—”

“So we’re going to make you an offer.”

“One time only.”

“Now or never.”

“You can apologize for trying to do what you tried to do.”

“For being part of this disgusting, slimy so-called ritual.”

“For trying to mouth-rape some freshman girl.”

His head shook apoplectically at the r-word. “What?! No fucking way! I wasn’t going to force anybody to—”

“Stop interrupting before we change our minds.”

“And apologize.”

“Or... not.”

“But trust us when we tell you, you’ll feel a *lot* better if you do.”

The boy looked between them, hands still grasping the hem of his boxers. “But... you were supposed to...?”

“Apologize.”

“Please.”

In unison, “Please apologize.”

The boy looked down at them, their stern expressions carrying the weight of three sisters’ worth of dignity, never mind that they were naked on their knees in that fucking bitch Michelle’s little fuck dungeon. He didn’t understand the full measure of the clemency they were offering, but he suddenly remembered himself, and shook his head repentantly.

“OK. Um, yeah. I’m really sorry.” And like that, he really was. Tears welled up, and he blubbered through an explanation of his choices and knowingly embraced misperceptions of the nature of manhood, and the girls listened, mildly consoled, and occasionally bipped his chin to keep him looking them in the eyes. It was harder now that they were standing over him, but he responded to it well.

“We need you to tell Michelle we actually blew you. As a show of good faith...” The speaking sister paused for the silent sister to give her palm a thorough lick, followed by a plunge into the boxers for a few lavish strokes. It wouldn’t mollify her appetites, but it was the best she could do for her under the circumstances. “Now if anyone looks, it’s nice and wet. You’re welcome. And we’ll make sure everyone understands you were a gentleman.”

“Thanks, you guys. You guys are... I’m so sorry, you guys. ΣXE is gonna be lucky to have you.”

They escorted him back to the chamber where Michelle and most of their pledge sisters, all but the least skilled or motivated cocksuckers, were waiting. Their second OB brother was still waiting.

This one was less of a gentleman about it. Nevertheless, he relented haranging them for being cockteasing cunts when they explained that they'd be going to the press with the details of this whole repulsive hazing incident. When they did, they could either explain that he'd tried to bully and extort them into performing sex acts against their will in a soundproofed underground bunker, or they could tell a different story. In either case, they'd be sticking to the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

"But like... you don't even know my name?" he ventured hopefully.

In unison, "Krunchy Kyle."

He had a fucking six-inch tattoo of a some stupid skull with a dagger buried in it on his forearm, for crying out loud. They'd been over at OB a lot lately. Not exactly incognito.

"Fuck. Fine. Fuck. Michelle's gonna... fuck! Fine. Fine. Fuckin' bitches. You're not even that hot, you know? You're a fuckin' gimmick." But he kept his word.

The ritual concluded. The new ΣXE sisters were each given pure white thread and a needle. Sure enough, in one another's blood, they stitched their ΣXE's into the fabric ensconcing the supposedly sacred chamber. ("Join us in humble and adoring consanguinity, as you weave yourselves into the tapestry of our legacy," Jocelyn somehow managed straight-faced.)

When it was done, they were invited ("invited") to stay the night at ΣXE, which they of course accepted. Which they of course rescinded at the first opportunity to flee unseen.

The sun wasn't quite up yet, but even so the sisters sprinted down the path between Beta Theta and Delta Alpha Tau, sprinted until they met the rest of themselves on the footbridge over Grizzly Creek. She'd been waiting there, alone, all night. They held each other, sobbing with relief – two to have escaped, and one to have seen them escape unscathed.

"So could you hear everything OK?"

"Not as well as in the tests."

"We were pretty far down, probably trash reception."

"And that fabric muffled sound, I bet. No joke, that was the creepiest fucking room I've ever seen."

"Not as creepy as the fuck dungeons."

"I wish I'd been with you."

"I wish we'd been with you."

Another round of relieved hugs, then returned to the question of whether or not their ruse had succeeded.

“The sound is good enough. I checked the recording while you were getting your pajamas on. If you up the volume you can hear just about everything. More than enough, certainly.”

One by one, the ousted sister plumbed up into her sisters’ hair until she recovered the bugs, gently removing the tape and the device. That overconfident fool Michelle and the rest hadn’t even frisked them. “Now who’s a cuntard.” They could have gone with their initial plan and used a couple burner phones instead of the creepy spy tech shit they’d ultimately gone with. Lorna had a whole stockpile of the stuff, recovered from hotels where unscrupulous staff had thought to eavesdrop on her clients.

“I hated that you two had to go through that. You promise you’re all right?”

“I promise.”

“I promise.”

“Do you *swear*?”

“We swear!”

“We *swear*.”

“I wish I could see Michelle’s ΣXE fucking face when someone forwards her the article.”

“She’ll know before it comes out. They’ll have to contact the house for comment.”

“I still think it’s not crazy to get a hotel for a while. Those bitches are fucking crazy. I know mass shooters are always boys, but do you seriously think there’s zero chance Kelly won’t go full clocktower psycho when we tell the world she’s a pimp for Omega Beta just to save money on booze?”

“She’d kill Michelle first.”

“Or herself.”

“Or better yet both.”

She spat. Her sisters spat. They *never* spat.

“You’re being dramatic. Relax. This isn’t about them, remember?”

“Sorry.”

“Sorry. You’re right.”

“Photogenic Blonde Coed Triplets at Lakeview U Expose ΣXE Sisters of Coercing Pledges to Give Blowjob for Party Invites,” she said, drawing the perimeter of the headline as it expanded. Lorna’s headline. A headline that, without even reading the article, would encapsulate their tale of hotness, fetish embodiment, and victimization by the sort of mean hot girl people are allowed to hate unreservedly.

They would be heroes. Beautiful, tragic, brave (and incredibly tantalizing) heroes.

“We’re going to be so fucking famous.”

“So famous.”

“We’re gonna own Ibiza by twenty.”

Their father made a little show of ducking under the door frame like he was spelunking through ancient ruins. “Hard to believe my millionaire babies are roughing it in a place like this.”

“Daddy, we told you, we’re not millionaires.”

“Not yet.”

“We just hit a million *followers*, which isn’t even all that hard.”

It had been incredibly hard, in fact. The punishing lifestyle necessary to achieve these bodies and maintain their perfect symmetry; the endless hours of courting followers, enduring countless lewd comments and suggestions; paid promotions to trick the algorithm into showing dudes jerking it in their bathrooms *their* bodies; weekends with 40 hours of travel time for 3 hours of photographs. All that while not only maintaining straight A’s but also actually learning a lot. But they had done it.

Their mother shook her head. “It’s a million followers, dear. You should be proud.” Once upon a time, they had had time to scrutinize their followers. It had been creepy, seeing neighbors, teachers, relatives and strangers old enough to be their grandfather. Now, the floodgates were open. Their numbers changed by thousands, sometimes tens of thousands, every day. If their fifth grade teacher Mr. Mulkey was now heart-reacting their bikini photos, well, the creeps were a trivial fraction of the mob.

“Yeah, aren’t you proud of us?”

“Do you want a beer, Daddy?”

“We got your favorite.”

“The mini-fridge actually does a good job.”

“Yeah, it gets stuff *really* cold.”

He looked at them askance, shoulder still slumped like the ceiling of their dorm room might close in on him. The campus had very few triple rooms, one in Higgins and theirs here in Wendell (not counting the one on a guy’s floor in Penderdast). It was admittedly small and a bit dingy, but Lakeview freshmen were required to live on campus. Supposedly the building was getting new furniture and a fresh paint job next year, fat lot of good that did them.

“I’m sorry, but at my old age my ears must be failing me. Did you just offer me a beer? Pretty sure none of you are twenty-one. Not even you.”

He nodded, correctly as ever, at the eldest. The sisters might be growing up, becoming more independent, but there was still some comfort that at least one man out there could usually tell them apart.

“Nobody cards us, Daddy.”

“Yeah, it’s *us*.”

“Ever since that article went viral, we can pretty much go wherever we want.”

They could go pretty much wherever they wanted before that, but it hadn't hurt.
"The lawsuit helped."

"That too."

The lawsuit had also helped. Lorna's idea had been counterintuitive, but once again she'd proven their doubts wrong. Going ahead and branding themselves as the ΣXE Triplets was a bit on the nose, and had almost immediately culminated in a lawsuit by the sorority. They fully expected to lose, but in the meantime it capitalized handsomely on the notoriety of the lawsuit, clicks driven in by folks fed a link in their browsers for the first go-round and wanting to see if the spicy story had any updates. Or more likely to simply ogle the identical girls in their near-identical bikinis again while simultaneously developing a protective inclination toward them. Poor dears.

Every time there was an update in the suit, the internet did what it did so very well and churned out a new article, new link, new pics, new clicks. Lorna made sure, somehow, that their best and latest posts graced those banners. The way that their patronage was assessed under state law meant that the fines from the suit would only be able to target their comparably laughable payments issued directly from their socials but miss the more lucrative modeling gigs, endorsements, and collab appearance fees.

Not two weeks earlier, a wave of articles about the judge denying a request for yet another delaying tactic – accompanied by a shot of the girls splashing about in the surf at Bora Bora in a set of metallic string bikinis – drove in almost twenty thousand reactions.

Lorna's masterful editing mostly extended to checking their filters, but she'd begun making a few micro-alterations on every fifth post or so. Conspiracy-minded followers grew certain that an odd smudge or replicated mole was proof they were twins pretending to be triplets, which lit the comments on fire with debate. Sometimes the girls even riffed off it, rotating in and out of frame one by one, laughing coyly at the idea that anyone could think there were only two of them.

It was fun, so long as they took care not to have too much of it. Several of their friends in the industry had endured the hassle of having accounts frozen or banned. None of them could stomach the prospect of hampering their sisters' dreams with an off-brand post or slip of the tongue.

No gaps.

For now, though, their parents were visiting. They hadn't seen them since Thanksgiving, months ago. They'd apologized, but Lorna had got them set up on an epic collab over Christmas. Their lessons from Professor Divekar's networking seminar had come in handy. Still, none of Uncle Steve's deviled eggs or Mom's eggnog, or Dad's dorky Christmas sweaters. Success, as ever, came with a price tag.

Dad graciously accepted a beer, their mother one of those flavorless lime seltzers she always complained she couldn't afford to splurge on. The sisters told them all about

their classes and how much they were learning. About some volunteer work they'd done cleaning up around Bear Lake (omitting that that Lorna had turned into a super hot winter bikini shoot with a local photographer). About the friends they were making. (They didn't mention that these friends were other models scattered around the globe, but it should have been obvious. Their future was not on a trajectory to go palling around with Samantha from Intro to Comp.) About whatever things they could dredge up that filled in gaps in their parents' expectations of their normal college experience. Parties and dorm stuff and tailgating and blah, and blah, and blah. Lakeview was nice and all, but it had a hard time competing against playing with baby elephants on the beach in Thailand.

"You three think at all about getting jobs?" their father asked, finally.

It was the segue they'd been waiting for.

"Daddy, we already have jobs!"

"Daddy...!"

"Daddy, we work *hard*."

"Yeah, just being a student is a hard job already."

"Most of the girls around here don't have jobs."

"And modeling is hard, too."

"Do you know what it does to your body to fly to Barcelona,"

"Do two days of shoots,"

"Try to expose ourselves to a little culture and nightlife,"

"And then fly back"

"On a four-day weekend?"

"We were worried she was going to faint."

"*Faint*, Daddy."

"She couldn't even go to class the next day."

"It's true. I couldn't."

The sisters paused, shared a look. For the first time, they each felt how tired this routine was becoming. The perky, bubbly, chatty blonde teenage triplets speaking in swarm. It was... childish. Yes, they finished one another's thoughts and sentences naturally, but that was habit. The cutesy way they did it around their parents was something else. It was hard enough threading the needle between jailbait and clickbait, sexy sweet and lasciviously lighthearted. It was not automatic, the ability to project beauty and innocence and joy, but also to sell clothes and promote a brand, all with enough skankery in their orbit that the ones who just wanted to jack it had something to work with.

Learning to switch on and off one's identity as a sex object, in tandem with one's sisters? It grew one up in a hurry.

One last time, though.

“It’s hard work, but we’re actually doing really well.”

“*Really* well.”

“Kind of... shockingly well, actually?”

“Speak for yourself – I’m not shocked at all!”

Giggle giggle. Pillow throw. Suppressed eye roll at their own bullshit display.

“But seriously, it’s going great.”

“We’ve been very blessed.”

“And we’ve been making sure we keep an eye on the bottom line, too.”

“Yeah, we’re not just spending our allowance as it comes in.”

They didn’t point out that the money was coming in faster and faster, while that allowance had stayed the same for over two years now. Approaching this as a grievance was a no-win strategy.

“We want to be careful, you know?”

“It’s like you always say, Daddy, we won’t be cute forever.”

“Speak for yourself!”

Giggle giggle. No pillow this time.

“We just want to make sure we’re thinking long-term.”

“Managing our portfolio carefully.”

“And we’re getting pretty good at it.”

“Plus the agency has people to help.”

“And it’s *help*.”

“Assistance and advice, not oversight.”

“Yeah, Lorna’s not just controlling our investments.”

“I know you worry about her sometimes, Daddy.”

“But really, we’re getting triple A’s in all of our business classes.”

“I seem to remember *somebody* telling us we needed to make sure we’re not only exercising our bodies.”

“Hmm, who could *that* be?”

Lone giggle. It was getting close. They could feel the tension.

“So we were thinking—”

“Only thinking, but we wanted to hear what you thought.”

“—that maybe—”

“If you thought it was time, Daddy.”

“We could be put in charge of our own assets.”

His face immediately soured around a long swig of beer. This had been anticipated. They rushed on.

“Only some of them.”

“Obviously!”

“So we can learn from *doing*, like you always say is the best way.”

“Remember when you taught us how to change a tire?”

“Well when our jeep broke down between Silver Beach and Chaweng when we were shooting in Koh Samui back in October?”

“Who do you think changed that tire? All these guys standing around watching the little blonde chicks tighten lug nuts without even getting any grease on their hands.”

“We just thought we might be ready for more responsibility is all.”

“If you agree.”

“Lorna thinks we’re as ready as any clients she manages.”

“Even ones who are as old as the three of us combined.”

“And we’d be really care—”

“ENOUGH.” Their father’s voice rumbled around the tight confines of their dorm room. So many arguments yet to make, insinuations and softening tactics, all cut short. The girls stood by patiently, smiling beatifically. Dad had always said no man could withstand that. They hoped he was no exception.

He let out a slow breath, glancing at his wife, but only glancing. This was his call, his name on the paperwork. “No,” he said finally.

He paused, expecting a torrent of pleading and pushback from his daughters. They said nothing, listened patiently.

“You’re young still, girls. You don’t see what I see. The warning signs. Just look around you at this room. Even on your allowance, you’ve already let the temptations get to you. This fancy little fridge, clothes that cost more than my truck I bet, and I’ll wager you couldn’t even fit all your makeup and sprays and creams and whatnot in the closet.”

He’d seen the boxes shoved under the middle’s bed. They didn’t dare try to argue. The only thing that stiffened him up faster than being pushy was dishonesty about what he was being pushed toward.

“If we hand those accounts over to you, how long will it really last? What’s going to happen when the swindlers get wind of it, a trio of teenagers with all that scratch? You’ll be getting fake phone calls and emails coming at you in ways you couldn’t even guess a person would try. Nigerian princes and car warranties won’t be the end of it, not by a long shot.”

“Our car warranty expires June of next year,” stated the eldest firmly. Her smile was gone. “We know how to spot a scammer. We’re not stupid, Dad.”

Her sisters shared a fleeting look. What the fuck was she doing?! They’d agreed, no arguing back. This was to soften their father up, let him know it was on their mind. None of them had expected a win today, but they’d plant the seed, show them a nice time, then send them home and let Mom go to work on him. “*Come on, honey, they’re not your baby girls any more.*” Then they’d try again when the time seemed right. Suddenly, without warning, she was *arguing?*

It was less offensive because it was doomed to fail. No, it cut deep because it was *one*. Not *three*.

“Oh you do, do you? That’s what I’m trying to tell you, girls, is that you don’t even know what you don’t know. You should see some of the stuff on *Dateline*. Or, hell, if I believe half of what I’ve read online about the ways these sickos prey on young girls like you, you’d never sleep again.”

The middle and youngest shared another look, and this time, their sister caught it. “You’re right. I’m sorry, Daddy. I didn’t mean to be difficult. We know you’re only looking out for us.”

“I’m not saying I don’t trust you girls,” he said in a way that they each found independently mistrusting. “But you’re young still. You know, maybe when you graduate – if you graduate, because it’s no guarantee if you start taking shortcuts – we can talk about what’s appropriate for you then.”

“Oh, Daddy,” said the middle. “You’re always so overprotective.” Giggle giggle. The youngest pounded the eldest with a pillow. Hammered her.

“Hey, did you want to see some pictures from spring break? Honolulu is gorgeous this time of year.” Their trip had been to Bora Bora, which their father had expressly forbidden, but he didn’t know the difference in film. He’d only ever been to seven states, most of which were this one and the ones neighboring it, and had never left the continental US.

“I’m sorry.” The eldest’s voice penetrated the icy silence in their room that night, drifting down from her loft. It had been hours since their parents had left, but her sisters were still angry. As angry as they could remember being at her.

Ten minutes of muffled yet still audible crying later, she tried again. “I’m sorry. Look, yell at me if you want, but say something. I didn’t mean to. I was just mad.”

The middle shoulder checked her while they were getting ready the next morning. The youngest refused to so much as look at her. They had no choice but to go meet their parents for breakfast before they headed back home. Once the dorm room door opened, they were out in the world and the gaps had to close. In the meantime, they could let their anger show.

“We could sue him.”

The younger sisters spun on her, eyes glaring malice, and unloaded. The absence of the eldest threw off their cadence, however slightly.

“He’s our father.”

“And he might be wrong, but he’s doing it out of love.”

“Which tantrums and jibes will only turn into spite.”

“Like we fucking talked about.”

The eldest listened, chin ever-so-slightly lowered to convey her remorse. She’d broken rank, and deserved excoriation.

“But no. Let’s not work this out talking to our parents. Let’s *sue*.”

“Sue!”

“Wouldn’t those make for good headlines? ‘Entitled Influencer Brats Sue Own Parents.’”

“Maybe our followers would respond to a little greed and petty backstabbing.”

“Teenage millionaires are such a sympathetic demo.”

The eldest folded her arms. She had been wrong to step out of line without consulting them, but she wasn’t convinced she was wrong about her larger point. “We’re never going to be millionaires if we can only get at *our* money with *his* say-so.”

“Do you realize how long it took for public sympathy to reach Britney?”

“Years.”

“Lots of years.”

“We had a plan.”

“You agreed to it.”

“And when you change it without asking, it hurts us.”

“You hurt us yesterday. You *hurt* us.”

The eldest winced as if struck. “I’m sorry. I know we– I–” Her arms slumped to her sides, her face crestfallen. “I’m sorry.”

“He’s our *father*.”

“And he’s our father.”

But the Daddy’s were sparing at breakfast, and there was no more giggling.

“No!”

“NO.”

“No fucking way.”

“We *cannot* do another year in the fucking dorms. No. No!”

“This is unacceptable.”

Their father laughed at his daughter’s concerns. “Don’t be so dramatic. The dorms are a good place for you. Structure. Oversight. Discipline. No huge raging parties every night of the week.”

“One tiny room for the three of us.”

“Group showers.”

“Tiny closets. No storage space.”

“It’s always noisy,”

“And usually dirty,”

“And bugs, Dad!”

“There were *bugs* last year.”

“We were living with *bugs!*”

Their father, however, merely rolled his eyes. “Right, because nobody gave the bugs a map to the apartments. They’d never find you there. Besides, even your handler, that Lorna woman... You know I don’t like it when I agree with her, but she went out of her way to set this up for you. Even got you upgraded from Wendell to Higgins, she said, right? Plus, I can’t help but notice that Allison’s been awfully quiet. Maybe a rare moment of dissension in the ranks?”

“No, I haven’t been,” Allison retorted.

Allison, who had indeed been silent, frowned. It felt like this had been happening more lately, her sisters taking her name, putting words in her mouth. It was fun sometimes, slipping in and out of one another’s identities, but not here. This was Mom and Dad. Family. She wasn’t going to keep silent this time. “The dorms aren’t *that* bad. Higgins is closer to most of our classes, great upload speeds, and they made the floor coed. We could actually *meet* people.”

Her sisters pushed back immediately, and hard.

“Bugs, Allison!”

“Lorna doesn’t decide things for us, Dad. She advises, and we decide.”

“BUGS.”

“We meet people all the time.”

“And how many people do we meet that we wish we didn’t?”

Their mother injected her voice softly. “I think she meant meeting *boys*, you two. Go on, sweetheart. Speak up.”

Allison gave a little shrug. “I mean, it wouldn’t be so bad, right? To actually go on dates, have boyfriends, like normal girls? There’s more to life than just work, you know?”

They’d been over this, however, as Allison well knew. It was why she’d broached the topic here in front of their parents. Their father was forever salivating over the notion of having normal daughters who did normal daughter things. Maddison and Addison, however, had met this Vince fellow, and were not impressed.

“Who needs a boyfriend?”

“Do you really think you’re going to find some Delta Delta Dude-brah who’s ever going to know you like we do?”

“Who’s going to love you more than we do?”

“You know he won’t even be able to tell us apart.”

“Or if he does he won’t care.”

“Like Oliver.”

“And when are you going to see him anyway?”

“Maybe a quick brunch before we’re rushing to the airport. Maybe enough time to kiss him goodbye.”

“Remember that party?”

She did. A boy (not Vince) had been trying to hook up with Allison, and had smacked Addison’s butt by mistake even though she was wearing a totally different skirt. Even though he hadn’t even asked Allison’s sisters for their blessing. Neither had Allison.

“We can date when we graduate.”

“We can *talk* about dating when we graduate.”

Addison and Maddison were seething. Did Allison not think they had sexual needs, too? Was she so head over heels for some boy that she’d try to recruit their parents to overrule their desire to get out of these gross squalid dormitories? That apartment they’d checked out had been *amazing*. What in the hell was wrong with her?!

Dad shook his head. “I don’t know, maybe it’s time you girls put yourselves out there. No, no, I know, me telling you to let the boys chase after you, who is this impostor dad and what did he do with your old man. But seriously, you’re getting older. Might do you some good to meet some real, normal boys. College boys, not these cabana boys at all these Asian resorts.”

“Dad...!”

“I’m pretty sure cabana boys are Latino, not Asian.”

“And we do *not* hook up with cabana boys.”

“No-ho-ho, we don’t.” Shudder. A second shudder. A shiver, visually indistinguishable but entirely distinct in causality.

“Also why is it we can’t date college boys at an apartment...?”

“And why are the people we meet at work not ‘real’ or ‘normal?’ Are you saying *we’re* not real and normal?”

Mom was there to cover for him in a flash. “Of course he’s not saying that, darlings. You’re perfect exactly the way you are.”

“Well, I am and I’m not,” corrected their dad. “You’re *not* normal. You’re better than normal. You’re special. Just ask good ol’ Lorna, since you worry so much about what she thinks. That’s why your mom and I worry so much. We don’t want you winding up with some pretty boy – boys – who think you’re ‘good for their brand,’ or however you girls like to put it.”

“So you’re punishing us for wanting to date people like us.”

“That’s not fair.”

“Just because *she* wants Higgins doesn’t mean *we* do.”

“Should we vote?”

Everyone rounded on Allison.

“Vote...?” repeated Addison, aghast.

“Like, raise our hands and just... vote...?” re-repeated Maddison.

The triplets had never voted. Once they were old enough to be able to make their own decisions, they had always decided together. If they didn't agree, they talked it over in private until they were in agreement. Sometimes one of them grew presumptuous and decided for them on the spot, which was only an opportunity to reinforce their united front. If it turned out to be an unpopular decision, the sister who'd made it was expected to stay her tongue for a while and make sure their heart was in the right place.

Voting, though...? Voting had winners, and losers. Voting didn't eliminate gaps and strengthen sisterly bonds. Voting hurt people, and made them bitter, and drove them apart.

Her sisters capitulated after only a momentary delay. Bitterly, but immediately.

"We can live in the dorms, if that's what you want, Allison."

"If that's what you want."

"Relax."

"Yeah, it's just sex."

"Exactly. It's just sex."

"It's going to be really good."

"That's what everybody says, what you said with Oliver, that it's really good. But when you've never..."

"Yeah. That's fair. And remember, it can hurt a little the first time."

"But not a lot. And not always."

"Not always."

"Did it hurt for you?"

"Not really. Like for a few seconds."

"Yeah, same. Then it felt... *really* good."

"Relax. It's going to be good."

"So good."

The middle checked the peephole to their hotel room. Nobody in the hallway that she could see. "It's clear."

With that, the youngest opened the door and led them hurriedly to the room across the hall. The card Lorna had provided worked, and they slipped in unseen – including by the room's occupant, a young man around their age. (He was legal, they'd been assured.) His head cocked this way and that at the sound of someone entering the room, but with his wrists bound to the bedposts and his eyes blocked by a black cloth blindfold, that was as much as he could know.

"Hi," he said, his accent showing even in that monosyllable. A local. "Are you...?"

“Yes,” said the youngest. The sisters eyed one another. No talking over one another. No triple speak. “Are you comfortable?”

He stretched, the joints in his arm testing the restraints, but gently. He was positively gorgeous, lean muscle, hairless apart from the pile of black curls atop his head. His penis was soft, but they’d only just arrived. He’d been made to wait for some time.

“Oh yes, don’t you worry, Miss. Very comfortable.”

“Good. Did... did they tell you to call us Miss, or...?”

“They did not tell me very much, Miss. Only to be good to you, to not ask you any questions, and to do as you like. Would you like for me to call you something else, then?”

The eldest waved her hand in front of his face. He didn’t move. She made to punch him, or at least her best approximation of a punch, but still no flinch. It was as good a test of the blindfold as any. “Miss will be fine.”

The sisters took positions around the bed. No shoes. Paranoid, probably, but he was absolutely not to know who they were. He’d been told, Lorna said, to expect two, not three, along with some veiled suggestions to give the impression that they were friends vacationing on the islands. The presence of the triplets, models, was conspicuous. They attracted attention like Turks and Caicos attracted tourists. The last thing they wanted was for word to get out that the sisters were paying for sex. The local population was hardly bigger than Lakeview’s, after all. Nevertheless, Lorna assured them it had all been arranged just so, that this young man had been well compensated for his company and his discretion, and they should be able to enjoy themselves in peace.

They did not feel peaceful. Sneaking around in the middle of the night to take turns fucking a total stranger in front of their sisters did not engender feelings of peace. This wasn’t the fantasy – not a handsome boyfriend eagerly awaiting their return from another gig in an exotic locale he couldn’t afford to follow them to but supported them wholeheartedly; not another set of triplets, equally committed to their brothers, appreciative of the unique and delicate relationship between them. A male prostitute in some random hotel room. (To be fair, his real job was in guest services at another resort a couple miles down the beach, but as of tonight, he had accepted money for sex and so the term applied.)

The man said nothing while they studied him. Was he nervous? As nervous as they were? He didn’t seem nervous, though the blindfold made it hard to assess. Lorna had probably told him to speak when spoken to. She understood them as well as anyone apart from the sisters themselves.

“Should we undress...?” suggested the middle.

The question had been addressed to her sisters, but the man on the bed answered. “I think that would be very nice, Miss.”

The girls gathered on one side of the bed and helped each other out of their clothes. This was almost routine, something they did at shoots all the time. It wasn't a sexual thing then, like it was tonight; it was simply better to have someone else watching to make sure everything was in its proper place, everything matched. Tonight, nobody would see them but each other.

"Oh my god, your nipples are so fucking hard."

"It's cold in here."

"You're horny. It's OK to admit that you're horny."

"Yours are hard, too."

"Because I'm horny."

The middle snapped her fingers. No triple speak, right. Their voices were identical. If they didn't make it so obvious, he'd likely not notice. To him, they aimed to sound simply like two more tourists with foreign accents that sounded fairly similar, nothing more.

This was it. Tonight, it finally happened. No more virgins in the sisterhood. "Closing the thigh gap," the eldest had jokingly called it. Sex. The big stupid rite of passage could finally be done and over with for everyone. They'd get to come, together and equally. No more private whining about loneliness and horniness. They'd see if it was weird, seeing one another intimate like this, or hot, or mortifying, or what.

They could touch each other, they'd agreed. Not make out, not kiss or suck on or finger. But touch. A little. She'd alternately begged and demanded to know what it would feel like to feel their identical flesh in her identical fingers. Incestuous, yes, but heavily limited, a toe in the water to test the temperature. Nothing more. At last they could bury all the veiled suggestions and inappropriate (or were they?) flirtations.

No more gaps. They'd fuck the cabana boy, and watch each other do it, and that would be that.

"May we touch you?" asked the youngest.

"Of course, Miss." It was a customer service voice, indulgent but apathetic. For all he knew, they were a pair of lumpy middle-aged spinsters. If he could see what was about to fuck him, he'd be whistling a giddy little tune.

She hopped onto the bed beside him, the middle and eldest settling onto the bed simultaneously at her side to give the impression of precisely two bodies. Their hands roamed over his bare skin, careful not to use too many at once.

"You have very soft hands, Misses."

It earned him a smile, though it didn't earn him three. He was a prop, after all, not a lover. The middle dragged impeccably manicured fingernails across his sixpack abs as gradually his erection grew. As impressive as the rest of him. Lorna was earning her annual bonus this year.

Somehow, though, their attention drifted back to one another rather than their intriguing new toy. Sensing it wasn't quite time, they withdrew from the bed. His lips twisted, puzzled, but he said nothing. Good lad.

"So, um, what am I supposed to...?"

Her sisters moved to flank her, those very soft hands coming to rest on her shoulders. They spoke carefully, their replies indistinguishable, one voice.

"Whatever you want."

"Whatever feels natural."

"Ease into it."

"Relax and take your time. Enjoy yourself."

"You don't have to go all the way right away."

"Unless you want to."

"Whatever you want."

Anxiously, she settled onto the bed beside their plaything. She was less experienced than her sisters, and they were inexperienced. It had been more than a year since Oliver, and Oliver had managed to achieve sexual intimacy only a handful of times. Being in bed with a man in her underwear was further than she'd ever gone. He was gorgeous, no doubt about it, but gorgeousness was something she had only ever admired, not actually interacted with. Not reacting to beautiful bodies was part and parcel of modeling. They'd dealt with amateurs who flirted and drooled over them, but most were professionals like themselves. Being around sexy people looking their sexiest all the time, though, took a toll, and tonight the toll would be paid.

Heart thundering in her chest, she slid her fingers between his, the cold metal cuffs sending a shiver down her spine. Or maybe it was the heat of his fingers. His grip seized her hand gently. Anxious lips followed anxious fingers, sucking one of his digits into her mouth and sliding up and down its length.

Was this what a woman did with a man? Was this foreplay? Or was this only an awkward girl stalling in the hopes her nerves caught up with her ambition? She was too caught up in her trepidation to see the effect her touch had on him, though her sisters didn't miss it. Even blinded to their mirrored beauty, he was susceptible to her charms.

She couldn't wait to finally come.

She couldn't wait to see her sister split in half, her identical body trembling atop him while she jilled herself to completion.

She couldn't wait to get this perversion over with so they could move past it, together.

Incrementally, the youngest probed this strange male specimen. He felt *good*. Feverishly warm. The way his breath quickened when she explored some new patch of him emboldened her. It needed to. As fewer and fewer patches remained, her anxiousness was keeping pace.

“You can take your underwear off, if you want.”

“Only if you want.” She shot a firm look at her co-instigator. They couldn’t press.

If they pressed, then—

“I can’t. I’m sorry, but I... I can’t!”

“What’s wrong?”

“Sure you can.”

“Hey, shh, come here. It’s all right.”

The two caught the sobbing one. That only made things worse, as they knew it would, yet there was no avoiding it. They were used to seeing one another nearly and completely naked, used to touching one another with a free hand. Tonight was different, though. This was sexual, and they did *not* touch one another sexually, no matter what certain members of the triad might have propositioned now and again. Tonight they’d been on the precipice of following through on that suggestion, possibly, and that soothing hand on her back was, for the first time, nearly indistinguishable from a pawing stranger.

The stranger, whose paws were still well and truly bound, frowned. He was confident that he hadn’t done anything wrong, but the conversation these girls were having did not reinforce that confidence.

“I’m sorry. I wanted to, but... it just doesn’t feel right.”

“We don’t want you to do anything you don’t want to do.”

“What doesn’t feel right?”

“I feel... I don’t know. It feels wrong. I feel like a creep.”

“Oh Miss, you’re not—”

They spoke right over him.

“You’re not.”

“You’re *not*.”

“He would be lucky to have you.”

“You’re beautiful.”

“You’re perfect.”

“There’s no such thing as perfect.”

“You’re perfect to *me*.”

“It’s all right. Shhh, we’re right here.”

Desperate, she brought the huddle to the foot of the bed. One hand released the clasp on her sister’s matching bra. It slid down smooth shoulders with ease, bare breasts emerging into the open air. The other went between slender thighs, caressing her sex.

“You *feel* ready. You feel so good.”

One sister watched her proceed in silence, curious – curious about what it would feel like to be touched by a woman, by a woman who was herself; curious about whether or not this gambit might work, might finally, finally grease their frigid sister’s wheels so

that they could finally, *finally* dismiss those quaint inhibitions about sexual propriety. She'd wanted this for so long, needed it, that she permitted herself to sit by and watch the pass unfold.

Her sisters' lips met. They looked unbelievable, identical chests pressed together, two hands exploring and one body explored, the only distinction between this and masturbation the angle of their wrists as they kneaded flesh. Neither flinched, not yet. Could this really work? She twined her fingers in a handful of each sister's hair, massaging their scalps as they experimented with matching lips. God, she was wet. All three of them were. Did her slit look as pretty as theirs?

Of course it did. It *was* theirs.

It was working. Once she accepted it, let it happen, there would be no going back. What would come of this? Would *she* be expected to let her touch her while she watched them fuck one another? No matter. If she didn't like it, she'd say as much when her turn came. For now, they were finally about to—

“Stop.”

Or not.

“But—”

“I said *stop*.”

“I'm sorry! Oh god, I'm such a fucking freak. I'm sorry! I'm so sorry!”

“No no, you're not. It's not you. It's me.”

“No! You were being so good, so lovely, but I'm just... I can't... I'm just fucked up, all right?”

“HEY.” She rose to her feet, commanding their attention. They looked up, blinking at their tears. “It's not either of you. It's just... it didn't work out. We all wanted it to, but it didn't, and that's fine. We still have each other, and we still love each other, and that can't change. Hear me?”

The man craned his neck, trying to peer through his blindfold. “Um, I am sorry, Misses, but... how many of you are there? It almost sounds like—”

They left him there and returned to their room, sleeping in a tangled mesh of limbs – but fully clothed full-length nightgowns. Lorna would be along eventually to release him. For now, they had their own problems. The same ones they'd hoped to resolve tonight, which were suddenly laid bare like wounds. The next morning, they detached themselves to go shower up for the day's shoot, one at a time, as alone as they had ever been.

“So this is Higgins, huh? And you thought it was going to be run-down and bug-infested. Looks pretty good to me.”

The girls didn't have a reply. They owned a lot of stuff for a dorm room, and while Dad had provided a lot of muscle, they'd still done most of the work. Plus, they were only here because of him. Well, because he'd agreed with Lorna and her stupid push for another year of dorm life.

Mom and Dad didn't chit chat for long. They had a drive home yet, and Dad had work in the morning. Sitting on his throne atop their mountain of money, and the guy still worked 60 hours a week. It confounded all reason.

Dad held out his arms. "My girls. You three look so beautiful. Come here and give your mother and I a hug? Busy as that Lorna woman is keeping you three, who knows when we'll get to see you again."

The girls acquiesced, and the family joined in a group hug. It wasn't easy. They'd had another fight only the day before over increasing their allowance. *Allowance*. Every passing week the conservatorship chaffed a little more. It was *their* money, yet they were *allowed* a pittance of it. Worse, their father once again hadn't even realized it was a fight. Screaming at him about their rights would only confirm that they were whiny brats, not ready for the burden of such an obscene sum of money. They could only suggest, reason, and choke down their frustration and resentment.

Worse, each was left with the sense that the other blamed them for their role in the dispute. Too aggressive, not aggressive enough, too supportive of the wrong level of aggression. Things had been uneasy ever since that night in Turks and Caicos last month. That stupid cabana boy stunt had pretty much tanked any hope of enjoying their summer together. They were still a unit, but there was daylight showing between them. Allison abandoning them for a night out drinking and dancing. Maddison sulking in the guest room with her nose behind a book. Addison and her long, long workouts, and her long, long showers.

One July day they'd gone out with no effort to coordinate outfits at all, and once that happened, it may as well keep happening. Literally anyone could tell them apart. A barista took their order, and it wasn't until the third sister before he grinned between them. "Whoa, so you're, like, triplets?" He'd been *surprised*.

Their father's decree looming over them, the girls had each packed for the sophomore return to Lakeview individually. No one even knew if they'd be able to match outfits more than a few days a week. They'd been in a bad mood about it in the first place after Lorna sprung the surprise change of dorm on them in the eleventh hour. She'd sworn their room in Higgins would be bigger than their one in Wendell, but it wasn't. It was farther from their classes, more stairs, and it was goddamn motherfucking coed. They'd been pissed, but she'd sworn it was a big upgrade and that they'd thank her someday. Mutual anger hadn't been the catalyst to bring them back together. A long night of fitful rest and a long morning's drive later, here they were, back at Lakeview, back in the goddamn dorms.

“Now I know yesterday you were disappointed,” Dad said once they were released, after a nod from his wife. “I wanted you to know, I do see that you three are trying. You know I like to tease, but we do recognize that you work hard, maybe too hard, and I wouldn’t feel right leaving you here without telling you how proud I am – how proud we both are.”

“I couldn’t be prouder of you if I tried,” Mom echoed.

“Darn straight, honey. And with all your traveling around and living the college life, we thought you could use a little extra. We’ll get you the official paperwork, but I wanted you to know before we skedaddled that you’ll be receiving an extra two *hundred* smackerroos a month.”

The girls stared blankly.

“*Each*,” he added, magnanimously.

Their eyes turned toward one another. They saw it coming, but the two were powerless to stop it. The eldest hammered the gap.

“Lorna’s Q2 commission payment was just over *eight thousand*. Do you know what her cut is?”

Their dad whistled appreciatively, but played it off with a chuckle. “Sounds like you’re paying her too much. Your mom and I are coasting by on our zero percent just fine.”

Fists clenched. This time, there was no gentle hand to forestall what followed.

Mom was crying, Dad growling under his breath about the greed and ingratitude of kids nowadays, when they marched down the stairwell from Higgins 3. The stairwell door was right next to their triple room. It was convenient. *And don’t bother texting*, she texted, promptly thereafter pressing the block button to make sure they couldn’t. Her sisters wouldn’t take it that far. Because there were gaps now, gaps everywhere, gaps turning into big fat canyons with the walls crumbling down into oblivion.

“What on earth were you thinking?!”

“They might be wrong, but they’re still our fucking parents!”

“They’re stealing from us!”

“They are not.”

“They’re–”

“*He’s*.”

“–keeping us from our money.”

“Good job talking him down.”

“What’s the point of being rich if we can’t spend it?! We can’t even take charge of investing it!”

“I think when you told him to go fuck himself, it really put him in a mindset to end the conservatorship. I bet it’s the first thing he does when they get home. Master goddamn stroke.”

“I’m going to have to call Mom and apologize.”

“We are not talking to them. Not until they do what’s right.”

“You don’t get to tell me who I can and cannot talk to.”

“*We* agreed that the conservatorship is unfair. *We*. But now it’s I?”

“You guys...”

“You guys what? Like this is her and me? Like if you don’t ever take a stand, what, it’ll all just work itself out?”

“She does have a point, though. I’m not saying you’re wrong, but—”

“She? Listen to yourselves. She and I and you guys? What happened to we?”

“It’s all right to argue sometimes. We can still talk. We can always talk. *We*.”

“Easy to say when you’re standing by silently, giving up the life we deserve, that we *earned*, just to satisfy our patriarchal suburbanite dickface father!”

“Why is it always about the money with you? I’d give it all up just to go back to how things were before.”

“Does that mean I can have your share?”

“It means you can suck my dick!”

“So suddenly you’re not squeamish about what I put my mouth on?”

“Pervert!”

“Prude!”

“*You guys!*”

There was a knock at the door. After a tense moment, they composed themselves, and Maddison opened the door to reveal... a boy. A cute boy. A little older, but good-looking, with a smile too kind to be taken seriously.

“Hi.”

“Hi, and hi, and hi.” He waved at each triplet in turn. “I hope I’m not interrupting. My name’s Spencer. I’m your RA.”

“Hi Spencer.”

“Nice to meet you.”

“Sorry if we were making too much noise.”

“Yeah, moving is stressful. You probably know how it is, huh.”

He laughed. “Do I ever. And can I just say – and I hope this isn’t awkward – I’m really glad to meet you. Honored, I guess, if that’s not even more awkward. I followed that whole story last year in the *Legend* about the hazing at Sig Eps. That took real guts, what you did, bringing that to light. Ending that saved some folks some real pain, I bet.”

They shared a brief look. What was this guy? People approached them all the time to gush over this or that, but never to praise their courage or humanitarianism. Usually they just wanted an autograph, to ask one of them out if they were ballsy, to ask all three of them out if they were *very* ballsy, or to simply say something crude if they

were altogether *too* ballsy. They didn't have a canned response for "thank you for your service."

"Thank you, Spencer."

"That's nice of you to say."

"I'm Maddison, by the way," said Allison. "This is Allison and Addison," she said, gesturing to Addison and Allison in turn.

"I'm gonna have to take your word for it. I was friends with some identical twins in high school, but there's identical, and there's *identical*."

The sisters inspected one another. They hadn't even parted their hair on the same side. Completely different outfits. Was he blind?

Allison laughed in spite of everything. "If it takes you a while to tell us apart, we understand."

"Happens to everybody."

"If you have to write one of us up, just go with Maddison. She's always the troublemaker."

"Says you, troublemaker."

"Name calling? Troublemakers."

He laughed with them. "Well I promise not to conduct any hazing, if you promise not to expose my tyrannical regime to the press. Although on that note, since you only just moved in and missed some of the drama..."

Spencer briefed them on the situation. A coed floor with no boys, only girls with boys' names. A male RA on a female floor. There had been what he called "an altercation" but context dubbed "a brawl" in the short window between freshman orientation and the sisters' arrival today, the Sunday before classes.

"Oh, and before I get out of your hair, I'm scheduling times to do RCRs – room condition reports? You probably did them with your RA last year. And then also roommate agreements, just to iron out... yeah."

He'd caught the absurdity of the suggestion, but they didn't let him off the hook. "Addison will fill it out for the three of us," said Addison, gesturing to Allison. He didn't even notice the change from their initial introduction. It was almost a shame. Obviously the university wasn't going to let him stay, and he was awfully cute, albeit in a himbo kind of way.

"You got it. Anyway, if you need anything, I'm just down in 310. Again, really great to meet you. Welcome home."

Their RA excused himself.

"I can't believe Lorna dragged us out of Wendell for this crap. Girls already pulling each other's hair out over some B tier college boy."

"I think he's cute."

"Slut."

“Freak.”

And the third said nothing, because they’d already said it.

“I’m going out.”

“Where?”

“What do you care?”

“We have a right to know.”

“The fuck you do. I’m going to a party. By myself.”

“You finished your homework?”

“Sorry, Grandma. Guess you’ll have to turn yours in for me.”

“I can’t. Remember, you changed your login and didn’t give us the password.”

“Then I guess I’ll do it when I get back.”

“You know I’m a light sleeper.”

“Don’t wait up.”

The door practically slammed behind her.

“We could go after her.”

“So go.”

“I hate this. I can’t live like this. My appetite’s shit, I can barely sleep, I can’t concentrate—”

“Me either, with you throwing that big loud pity party.”

“You know? Fuck you. I’m calling Dad.”

“What, to tattle? ‘Daaaaddy, they’re being mean to meeee.’”

“Because I need to talk to somebody who actually likes me.”

“That parasite likes you like a flea likes a dog.”

“You two are the suckiest roommates ever, I swear!”

The door slammed behind her before either of them realized her term of address. *Roommates*. They both, individually, thought back, trying to think if they’d ever referred to one another as anything but what they were. Sisters. Triplets. Joint souls.

Meanwhile, their sister walked to the Lakeview chapel in her sexy party dress, lit three candles, and cried. Alone.

“You can’t masturbate while we’re in the room!”

“The hell I can’t!”

“Tell her she’s being horrible.”

“She is.”

“Thank you!”

“But so are you.”

“Me? How am I—”

“Little Miss You-Can’t-Date-If-I-Can’t-Date? Unlike you, we’re not dead from the neck down.”

“That is so not the same.”

“It’s not, but if you’re going to be a living cockblock, then you have to accept that there might be consequences.”

“See?!”

“So you’re saying you don’t mind if she – your *sister!* – *masturbates* in the same room with you?!”

“I mind a lot of things, but unlike some people in this room I don’t make it a point to blame you two for all of them.”

“Really? Because it sure sounds like you’re blaming me.”

Another night, another fight. It was barely even fighting. At least there were stakes in a fight, winners and losers. This was more like bickering. Bickering, the way their friends and classmates did with their siblings. No call or cause for compassion, so why not just say something mean. Casual meanness was liberating. It trickled right down those gaps like lava flows, burning them wider but happily down below the surface where they could pretend they didn’t feel it.

They all felt it.

A few short weeks into the semester, and they were each entertaining private notions of rebellion. Maybe it would be better if they didn’t make themselves cohabitate any more. Just split up, and go to work together, and give up on their childish dream of becoming supermodel entrepreneur fashion designer millionaire industry powerbrokers – together. Other people were alone all the time. Maybe they were onto something.

The only reason they hadn’t yet, was Higgins 3.

The middle was tired of bickering for the moment, and pivoted. “I’m only saying I don’t blame her. This floor is... weird.”

That was the smart pivot. Room dynamics were familiar, and if the addition of scarcely concealed masturbating was something new to argue about, it wasn’t like they hadn’t walked in on one another now and again over the years. Plus, it was their body. Nothing to be embarrassed of on their own body.

Higgins 3, on the other hand... they’d been acting like they were above it all for weeks now, but the truth was, it *was* strange. The other girls here, they were... hot. All of them. Not those three losers who never belonged here in the first place, of course. Everyone else though, including (especially) the diversity hire in 310, was pure fire. Not all in the same way. Girls with decent faces hiding dynamite bodies, girls with curves packed onto their curves, girls who stood out even in that company. Not a one of them

was below a 7, maybe an 8. (The eldest contended that Leigh's roommate had only secured her spot amongst the so-called Higgins Hotties by virtue of two of the biggest tits they'd ever seen on someone not also morbidly obese, but the middle insisted she was pretty enough without.)

"Weird is one way of putting it."

"We're all so *sexy*, you know?"

"How is it even possible ours isn't even the room with the highest average hotness?"

"311. No, 302."

"313."

"310."

"Singles don't count."

"But you feel it, right? Our RA can *get it*."

"And 'it' is heaped on a big damn platter around here."

"Good to be the king."

"Ugh, don't quote Mel Brooks."

"It's seriously nuts, though. And I don't just mean 'man, that's nuts,' I mean the odds of this happening has to be a million to one. Less."

"I actually tried to get at some probabilities the other day. You know, extrapolating the size of the student body, stipulate that all of these girls are in the top 2-3% of sexual desirability—"

"Except the Three."

"But they left, so we're looking at the odds of now, not move-in day."

"—and ignore the so-called accident of the failed coed attempt, and so on. It's astronomical. Walking out your door and having an eagle swoop down and drop the winning Powerball ticket at your feet."

"Mathematically indistinct from the odds of just buying it at a gas station."

"Some of the girls have theories. There was a huge thread on discord."

"Ugh, quite slumming. You couldn't name three girls on our floor in Wendell last year."

"Theories. What theories do they have?"

"Lots, and most pretty dumb. That Spencer's family is loaded and they bought him a pussy playground."

"But he's not playing in it."

"Yeah, these sluts are literally begging him to, but he's got 'sorry girls, can't date residents' tattooed on his chest."

"That he stole someone's identity, that he's not the real Spencer Lawrence, that the real Spencer Lawrence is a woman, but he stole her spot."

“Which would only mean there was a girl RA who was supposed to but didn’t get a coed floor.”

“Which barely changes the odds.”

“That he has dirt on his boss, or his boss’s boss, set himself up with some scenery.”

“*That* guy? A blackmailer? He’s a young Paul Rudd with a horse cock.”

“Suspiciously identical to current Paul Rudd with a horse cock.”

“Last weekend I saw him break down in tears in the lounge watching a youtube video about a bunch of villagers rescuing snakes from some third world hole in the ground.”

“I caught him picking up other people’s left-behind trays in the food court.”

“I didn’t say I believed them all. I don’t think anybody does. It sort of wound down as people just said they liked it here and so whatever the reason for it, they don’t really care.”

“I care.”

“I care.”

“I care, too.”

It was quiet for a moment. The sisters each found themselves hiding a matching grin. How long had it been since they’d spoken like this? The “hive mind,” they used to call it, a term one of their elementary teachers had used for it that they’d adopted it until it got to feel too dorky.

“We should look into it.”

The eldest and youngest looked at one another around the middle. At the most basic level, they agreed with the others. Higgins 3 was, by dorm standards, amazing. The people were beautiful, the room was freshly renovated and tucked in a quiet nook by the stairwell, and, well, there was Spencer. Whether or not he was the godsend some of these basic bitches thought he was, he *was* attractive. Very attractive. The male equivalent of that Scottish “500 Miles” song, he got in your head the moment you were exposed to him and wouldn’t leave. Even aside from that, he was their kind of RA. He gave them their space and didn’t try to force them to join the Higgins Harem, as the eldest had called it at the floor meeting their first night here.

If they had to live in the stupid dorms, this was actually pretty OK. And if it came with a free mystery to solve – together! – then better yet.

They dove into their luggage and searched out their RF detectors, scanning every nook and cranny, every screw and joint and seam that might hold a camera or microphone. The rooms in Higgins 3 were roughly 140 square feet. Theirs, the triple room, was most of a foot skinnier to accommodate the plumbing running to the kitchenette in the adjacent lounge, but also several feet wider, thus granting room for a third bed. All told, they were still shy of 200 square feet.

They scanned the room for equipment for over an hour. They usually found any stray recording devices in under five minutes when they traveled. Lorna couldn't always be there to check for them, but she'd supplied one of her scanners, but it was mostly junk, barely picking up the activity of their own phones from three inches away. Their dad had agreed that they should spare no expense when it came to their privacy and security, so their new detectors – one for each daughter – was the best on the market. By the time they agreed no one was watching, they were exhausted, collapsing onto their respective bunks with those grins no longer hidden.

“We’re going to figure this out.”

“Yeah we are.”

“I love you two.”

“I love you.”

“I love you.”

“And, um, if you gotta... you know...”

“Thanks. And, you know, back at you.”

“Perv.”

“Muah.”

“There she is.”

“Finally.”

“Go go go!”

The car backed up all of two feet before the driver saw them standing behind it. She regarded them in the rear view mirror a moment, then eased back into her parking space. The window lowered, but the engine stayed on.

“Did I forget something in the lounge?” the woman asked.

“Hi.”

“Yeah, hi.”

“Can we talk to you?”

She frowned. “If I tell you girls any more embarrassing sex anecdotes, Spencer’s going to kick my ass. Sorry, chicas.”

“That’s not what we wanted to talk about.”

“Are you really a sex expert?”

“Not that you don’t sound like one.”

“But that’s what you do, right? Study sex?”

Marisa nodded. “That is what I do, yeah. And on behalf of the entire sexually aware world, allow me to thank the three of you for your contribution.”

The sisters shared a laugh. They'd had a good feeling about this woman. "We just wanted to talk with you."

"We could buy you coffee, if you're up for it."

"Not about Spencer."

"It's a tad late for coffee, don't ya think?" Spencer's ex-girlfriend/sexpert guest presenter pointed upwards at the night sky. "You twenty-one? If you're set on buying me something to drink."

They laughed. "We're nineteen, but nobody cares. It's *us*."

Marisa grinned back. "No, I suppose they wouldn't object, would they. All right, climb on in. Call me intrigued." When the sisters made to pile into the back seat, she interjected. "Whoa, hey now. I'm nobody's chauffeur. One of you get up here in the front seat so I don't feel like I'm dropping off my three identical sexy nieces at daycare."

After a conversation in their eyes, the youngest accepted the charge and climbed over the center console up into the front seat. The middle patted her ass as it waved in front of them. They'd been doing things like that more lately. Celebrating their sex appeal, they said. Trying to patch up the bond, find ways to support one another, show kindness and self-love. Or, to put the motivation behind the touch another way...

"Is it normal to feel turned on all the time?"

Marisa once again backed out of her space, double checking her mirrors in case another Hottie meant to ambush her. "Well, not wasting any time, are we?"

"That's not exaggeration. *All* the time. First thing in the morning, all day, and into the night."

She rounded the corner, contemplating as she made her way down the street dividing Higgins from Penderdast Quad. "Hmm. Well then. I suppose my knee-jerk reaction to the question is a qualified yes. Sex drives vary tremendously between individuals, and while the data says women's sex drives are most likely to peak in their 30's—"

"Not until their 30's?"

"No way."

"That sounds made up."

Marisa shrugged. "I hear ya. As someone with a very healthy libido myself, it's wild to imagine that in ten years it'll be stronger. Though again, like all statistics, individual results are a whole 'nother thing. Still, I want to take you at your word here since you were very explicit. *All* the time?"

The middle nodded. "Not like every single second, but... a lot."

"A lot."

"A *lot*."

"All three of you?"

"All three of us," answered all three of them.

Marisa drummed her fingers on the steering wheel. “Hmm. And when you say ‘turned on,’ how do you mean?”

“Turned on. How many ways are there to mean it?”

“It’s a broad term, like a lot of emotional vocabulary. There’s *grumble grumble* angry, and there’s punching a hole through the wall angry. Likewise, there’s ‘hmm, I wouldn’t mind a little kiss and tickle’ turned on, and there’s ‘I’d fuck anything that so much as looks at my vagina’ turned on.”

“Seven out of ten?”

“Eight.”

“I was going to say nine, so yeah, eight. So... Is that normal?”

“Hmm. I guess it’s worth pointing out that the word ‘normal’ has no place in a discussion of sex. Sort of embarrassed I didn’t say so right away. I guess being peppered with questions by your friends back there threw me off my game.”

“They’re not our friends.”

“They’re just a bunch of hot girls we happen to live with.”

“Thirty conspicuously hot girls, on the same floor as us, professional models who made *Vogue’s* list of thirty under thirty to watch—

“In modeling. Not like, out of everyone on the whole planet.”

“Obviously.”

Not the classiest brag, but they were proud of it. Lorna had even managed to persuade them to give each triplet their own spot on the list. A good gimmick for one, the kind of clickbait bullshit the triplets’ brand was made for, and if it only worked because a lazy staff writer was stoked to skip a couple blurbs in their listicle, what of it.

Marisa looked them over for a moment at a red light. “And so humble, too.”

“Humility is a fine virtue for the unremarkable and unachieved.”

“It’s certainly done wonders for womankind over the centuries.”

“Look at you. You’re gorgeous. If you had two more of you, would you be humble?”

Marisa snorted. “All right, all right. Fucking cage match in here with you three, Jesus.”

“I’d think someone who managed to snare a man as sought after as Spencer wouldn’t be so concerned with keeping it humble,” said the youngest. It was too greedy, though, too conspicuous. Marisa saw it, saw they saw it. She did not, however, know that she was meant to think she saw them seeing her seeing it as part of a larger investigatory strategy.

With an amused shake of her head, Marisa switched on the radio and cranked it way too loud to be talked over. She left it there until she arrived at Mother Bear’s, a Lakeview-loving sports bar just off campus. Lakeview’s mascot was painted fierce and proud on a sign above the entrance, his fur white except where it was red around the

jaws from his latest feast. It was a weeknight, so business was slow and parking easy. Considering how casually the doorman waved the trio in, Marisa muttered aloud a contemplation of whether these humblebraggarts could have gotten her valet parking, too.

“Spencer and I used to come here a lot, when we were dating,” she said as the group settled into a booth. The sisters tried whenever possible to take one side of the table, but it would be awkward here, so the youngest sat on Marisa’s side.

It wasn’t an interesting piece of information, and unlike the shameless sluts back on Higgins 3, the sisters didn’t live and breathe gossip about their RA’s depressingly boring life. They fantasized about fucking him – separately or together – not hanging out with him at Steak & Shake and listening to stories about how he’d played varsity sportball as a junior at Hugivesafuk High.

(As the youngest had put it when the middle pressed them to go to one of his floor programs, “Wake me up if he’s throwing everybody to their knees at the door for his seminar on how to balance a treat on your nose while giving a world class blowjob.”)

None pressed for more info, so Marisa had to supply the engagement on her own. “He likes all the... yeah.” She gestured to the wildly excessive TV screens hanging everywhere around the bar. “It’s funny. He’s such a goddamn sports nut, but he doesn’t have any favorites. Not favorite teams, not even favorite sports. In fact, the more obscure the competition, the more he’s sucked in.”

“Yeah, we’re not big on sports.”

“We did ballet for a while.”

“Then gymnastics, but our tits were growing in small enough as it was.”

“But yeah, we basically don’t really follow anything.”

Their disinterest in the topic was becoming painfully acute, but Marisa soldiered on to her point. “Yeah, I only do a little. Like me a little contact. But anyway, Spencer, I remember this time we were in here – that table, I think, we usually sat at that table – and they had this women’s flyweight MMA thing on, and I swear, I could have poured my long island down his pants and he wouldn’t have noticed.

“So I asked him, what gives? Just two chicks the size of your leg scissoring each other with spandex on. He finally glances my way, and he says something like – and I’ll do my best Spencer without trying to over-do it too bad – ‘Look at them. Sure, yeah, two chicks the size of my legs, and they’re kicking ass at the top of their game. It’s nuts, right? Think about that. The world’s not a kind place to 92-pound girls who want to pick fights, you know? But here they are, living their dream.’”

“That’s... really sappy.”

“It does sound like him, though.”

“From what we’ve seen.”

“He doesn’t talk to us much.”

Marisa finally flagged down a waitress, holding up a finger to bookmark the conversation. She ordered a sangria; the triplets each ordered a cosmopolitan, issuing the request in eerie unison.

“Here I thought you’d need to be thirty years older and have gone through a divorce apiece to kick off your Thursday night with a round 1 cosmo,” Marisa jibed.

“It’s made with triple sec.”

She arched an eyebrow. “You’re kidding, right.”

“Do we look like we’re kidding?”

They effortlessly shifted to a matching face that was impossible to tell if they were kidding or not. That one never got old. It drove people nuts.

“Anyway, you wanted to talk about Spencer, and your all-day-hornies for him,” Marisa went on. “I open with this charming anecdote because I want to do you a favor. Stop wasting your time, which I’m sure is valuable.”

“Wasting our time?”

“Horny for Spencer?”

“We don’t want to talk about Spencer.”

“Unless you’re saying there’s something you think we should know.”

Marisa sighed. “What you should know is, don’t. That’s it. I get that he’s a big cutie bear and all, or maybe you’re Kind of a Big Deals who just want to flex on the peasantry on your floor for style points. Whatever. But Spencer isn’t a guy looking for the walking embodiment of a fetish like you three.”

The three shared a rare sheepish grin. It was uncommon for someone to get them so easily.

Marisa continued, “For one, he means it when he says residents are off limits. That RA gig is his religion, not his job. For two, he’s looking for fuzzy wuzzies. Connection. True love. He likes sex as much as the next guy, but only if he’s vibing with you. And no offense to either you or your legions of adoring fans, but a six-lip incestuous blowjob isn’t the kind of vibe he’s after.”

Their waitress returned, distributed drinks, and left. It gave Marisa just enough time that her muttered, “As for me, I wouldn’t necessarily spurn an invite...” gained sufficient delay to not merit a reply. Besides, the sisters seldom had women flirt with them. Fellow models, sure, but mostly just playfully, a segue to future collaborative shoots.

“OK, so you’re saying, don’t bother with Spencer. Fair enough,” said the middle as her sisters took identical measured sips of their cosmos.

“It’s not a reflection on you. I mean obviously. No hate on Rihanna to say that she’s not got a future in courting clansmen. Though now that I think about it, bad example, she’s fucking Rihanna. Anyway, suffice to say, he’s already feeling pretty overwhelmed by your co-humble not-friends on that floor. If he’s saying he’s in over his

head with the regular girls, then you three... Whew. He already chewed me out on my way out the door for supposedly encouraging them.”

They were less interested in Spencer’s approach to courtship, however, than they were in his position as the sole male on a floor full of babes. The other RAs, too, for that matter. Even his boss was a catch, though their surveillance confirmed she was at least married, and therefore not on the menu. But there was alcohol now, and Marisa was talking. They just needed her to keep talking.

“He’s been an RA for a while now, right?”

“I think he said this was his... third year? Fourth?”

Marisa drank deep from her sangria. “Yeah, something like that. Fifth, I think actually, but I wouldn’t swear to it. He was at it before he and I were at it.”

“Have you two done a program like this before? The sex Q&A thing?”

“Sure. I think almost every year since we first hooked up. When he was at Rowland, he’d bring in a girls floor to do it with. Between that and all this, it was an easy draw, crowd pleaser, and a public service. Win/win/win.”

“Is that something Hancock does with a lot of RAs?”

The triplets took a sip in perfect unison. As it was intended, the eeriness of it distracted from this, their pivot to their real interest.

The Hancock Institute.

The three of them had done a lot of contemplation in the past couple weeks since they’d first decided to make a hobby out of exploring this mystery. Hancock had made the chart early as a contender. Not officially a part of Lakeview but literally across the street from it, a sex research institute privately funded and publicly opaque. Their website was a circular where it wasn’t dead-ended, from their mission statement to their research to their assets to their staff to their mission. The middle and eldest thought it was simply a poorly conceived site, but the youngest felt like it meant something.

They agreed, however, that it was worthy of pursuit. Other investigations had already concluded. The Lawrence aristocracy angle had gone nowhere. Spencer’s great aunt had died when he was eighteen, and had owned a modest estate. Zillow listed the property at \$615,000, and that was after years of inflation following the woman’s death. Even if every last nickel had gone to her super-favoritest great nephew (which they doubted he could be, not even mentioned in her obit), it was nowhere near enough to fund sinister conspiracies. Core to any theory was the reality that someone in the housing office was complicit. They’d made a formal complaint to the hall manager, Ms. Tinsley, who apologized and said the person responsible had been fired, which was such bullshit that it only made them wonder where the buck really stopped. Regardless, Spencer wasn’t bribing anybody to craft his Higgins 3 setup on his 1/18th share of his great aunt’s holdings, which meant the pressure to put all that tantalizing flesh in his orbit came from somewhere else.

Other angles had been trickier to disprove. There was an eccentric psych professor who'd published a study in 1996 about rethinking residence hall arrangements. Very iffy. A creep working in the Lakeview housing office with a crush on long-time student employee Spencer Lawrence who expressed it as a gift of ambient hotness, which was dumber still. In the absence of any detectable concealed recording equipment, the voyeur porn angle was DOA, too.

Out of what they had left, Hancock remained the favorite. And here in this woman they had an inside source, and one intimately connected to Spencer. If this went nowhere, it might be time to get back to the middle's tongue-in-cheek suggestion that Spencer was possessed by some kind of sex demon. (She was still an agnostic, while her sisters were both converts to atheism. It was a source of some small friction on occasion.)

To their question, Marisa nodded. "Sure, sometimes. It's not, like, a premier service, but we work with the res life department now and then. Free PR, and frankly, so many of these kids show up with no sex education at all. Or worse than none. I still remember the time Spencer and I were doing the program, same basic deal we did tonight, and a girl put in a question, 'is it true you can't get pregnant as long as he always pulls out and comes on your face?' Like, what do you even do with that kind of ignorance?"

"Come on its face, I suppose."

Marisa almost did a spit take, barely managing to keep the spray aimed into her glass. "Nice. Triplets got jokes, huh?"

"She's very funny."

"Hey, you're funny, too."

"Looking." An old joke, heavy on the sarcasm, but it always got at least a chuckle.

As the drinks flowed, the twins carefully rotated their glasses so that the middle remained clear-headed while the other two took the brunt of the inebriation. For the next few hours, alcohol did what alcohol does and loosened their quarry up. Some time later, once Marisa was good and soused – along with the youngest and eldest – they made their move.

"So Marisa. What's it like working for Hancock?"

"Yeah, do you just, heh, sit around watching porn all day?"

"I mean, some days, pretty much yeah." Marisa fished her phone out of her purse and held it up to them. Evidently she'd been checking out their socials while she'd been peeing. On the screen was a reel from their shared instagram account showing the three of them posing dramatically in matching swimsuits as the sun set on a beach somewhere far, far away. It offered a dynamite view of their ass right at the end, to promote rewatches. Suck it, algorithm. "You three just sit around posing for porn all day?"

"It's not porn."

“That was such a fun shoot you guys!”

“No way. Remember that butt glue? Our buttocks kept showing around the thong any time we weren’t, like, clenching.” She grunted, squeezing her butt cheeks.

“Oh god, the gut blue, yes! Err, the butt glut. Blue– AUGH. Butt. *Glue*. God. But yeah, damn, never mind, proclamation of funness rescinded.” She frowned accusingly at her drink.

The sober sister brought them back to their topic. “I bet Hancock never makes you use butt glue, huh.”

“Not so much. It’s actually a pretty cool gig. Internship pays shit, but when you love what you do, ya know?”

“So you just... research sex?”

“Yeah, what does that even mean, you know?”

“Hypothesis: men like blowjobs. Test: suck a cock, ask...” She broke down into hysterical laughter, but her equally drunken sister finished. “Ask him if he’s gonna reciprocate, record what percent of douchebag boys make excuses.”

Marisa chuckled. “Spoken from experience? But no, yeah, it’s... something like that. Porn’s bad for research, unless you’re researching porn, ‘cause yeah, nobody actually fucks like that. Mostly it’s interviewing people, surveying people, collating interviews and surveys and blah blah blah.”

“What are you researching right now?”

“You should interview Spencer!”

“Oh my gosh yeah, you should interview the shit out of Spencer! You know?!”

The sober sister narrowed her eyes, pinching her sisters’ legs under the table. “I’m sure it’s not ethical to conduct research on your ex-boyfriend. Too bad, though, really. I bet there’s something to be learned from our floor. Sex-wise, I mean. Thirty hot girls, one hot guy...? A rule against hooking up? I bet that’d be an interesting study.”

It was much too on the nose, far too close to their actual theory, but Marisa didn’t seem sharp enough by then to be suspicious. Like her sisters, the woman was drunk and having a good time. “Oh my god, yes! Or at least some diddle-worthy erotica, for sure. I should pitch that to the muckety mucks. They’d have a field day with you guys!”

“Oh? I was only joking, but... you sound serious. What’s so interesting about it?”

Marisa took her hand, then the youngest’s, then giddily thumped their conjoined hands atop the eldest’s. “No no no! I’m serious! That’s one of the hardest things to fabricate in a sex study is the baseline attraction. It’s practically and – bleh – ethically problematic to pay people to fuck, ruins the results. But you guys, girls, that whole floor, you’re all so hot! Like, kind of annoyingly hot, honestly. Shit, yeah, so it creates an environment where everybody’s dtf. Even the LBQ chicks have the other chicks to drool over.”

“Definitely have a handful of those around,” added the youngest encouragingly.

“But what’s to study? Young hot people doesn’t sound like much.”

“Yeah, what’s to study?”

“Off the top of my head? Oh man, where to start... Efficacy of workplace rules prohibiting fornication; the role of power dynamics in sexual attraction; successful and unsuccessful techniques for attracting a partner against heavy competition; psychosexual impact on community engagement in a scenario where attraction is preemptively guaranteed by selection of study participants who check every damn box for conventional hotness? Shit, so much!” Marisa stamped right through the mildly perplexed gazes of the triplets. They were smart, but two of them were drunk and that had been a lot of rapid fire jargon. “Cause that’s the thing, see? Everybody’s sexy. Everybody’s primed to say yes to the sex, you know? It’s a contained environment full of people who all *want* to fuck each other. And they don’t, because rules and because we’re not stray cats, but the baseline, before any interaction beyond just looking at each other, is ‘yes, I want to fuck you.’”

Marisa downed the shot they’d ordered for her while she was peeing (and, apparently, subscribing to their insta). “Man, if only you could get rid of that rule. If you guys could just go for it, balls to the wall... shit. I’d give my right tit to get in on that.”

“How could *we* get rid of the rule against RAs sleeping with residents?” She sounded a little too interested.

“She meant if *someone* could, not us specifically.”

“No I know. I mean, yeah.”

Marisa wiped her whiskey face off on her forearm. “No shit, but you guys would be a highlight of the case. Too bad twin studies got such a shit rep after the whole, you know. Thanks, Adolf. But seriously, if that was my little research playground, I’d fucking *beg* you guys to get in on it. Three identical people with huge overlap in lived experience. Put you in a room with Spencer, see which one he goes for. Or does he try for all three? If it was just bodies and libidos, maybe even he’d cede that doofusy-hot moralistic high ground of his and just go nuts. Or not! Either way, I’d love to be a fly on that wall.”

“Are you saying you want to watch your ex-boyfriend have a foursome with us?”

Marisa laughed. “Oh come on, a chick who opens with ‘we’re all of us horny all the time’ and prances around the beach in *that*,” she said, trying and failing to thrust that beach video in their faces, “is suddenly squeamish about talking about a foursome?”

“We could definitely get him, if we wanted.”

“Yeah we could.”

“Not that we have any intention of doing so,” reminded the middle.

“No sure, I hear you. And I didn’t mean anything by it, chicas. Guess you probably get your share of pervy shit said at you. I’m sorry. Seriously, you’re actually pretty cool. Forgive a bitch?”

“We forgive you.”

“You’re not a bitch.”

Then they were hugging awkwardly and gigglishly across the table, and the middle let the conversation flow on. They’d learned what they set out to learn and then some.

It was after midnight when Marisa straggled back from the bathroom, continuing where she left off like she hadn’t been gone for ten minutes. “I mean, sure, yeah, I like, I mean I like love the guy. You don’t, you know, fuck that shit was strong, you don’t stop loving Spencer. I can’t even say, ‘a guy *like* Spencer,’ because what guy is like Spencer?”

“He’s unusual.”

“He’s remarkable.”

“He’s *delectable*.”

“You two are drunk.”

“You one are... hot.” The inebriated sisters burst into giggles, at which their sober sibling rolled her eyes. “What? It’s not incest to say we’re hot.”

“We’re so hot.”

“You’re hot, too, you know. Like, you could be a Hottie.”

Marisa grinned. “You know it, triple team! Ow *ow!*”

Unprompted, the group sensed it was becoming time. The triplets had to be at the airport by 9 AM, after all, and Marisa assuredly had her own life to live. Her GPS navigating, the sober twin chauffeured Marisa and her sisters in the backseat.

“What was the hottest sex you ever had with him?”

“With who? Spencer?”

“Ya.”

“And be specific.”

“I don’t think he’d like me kissing and telling his residents...”

“Aw, come on!”

“Yeah, how are we gonna know how to knock him off his moral high ground if you don’t give us any advice?”

Marisa laughed, almost threw up, wiped her mouth on her arm and tried again. “You three know damn well you don’t need my advice. But sure, you want a story, I’ll give you a story.”

“Yay!”

“*Specific.*”

“So this was a few years ago, not too long after we got together. He’d brought me home with him to meet his folks. I’d already made him do mine – like, why date a Spencer if you’re not going to show him off to your mom, right? – so it was my turn. So his sister–”

“He has a sister?”

“Um, yeah.”

“Innnteresting.”

“Yeah, flesh and blood sister, but can ya believe it? She doesn’t even look exactly like him, weirdest fucking thing.” Marisa poked the driver in the rib, nearly causing an accident. “Anyway, his sister’s on the school dance team at his old high school. There’s a home football game that weekend, and he’s all ‘I gotta support my sister’ even though it was obvious he wanted to show me off to his old crew. But whatever, I don’t hate football, and it’s a nice night, and she seems cool enough.

“So we head out, and of course we’re bumping into people, making the rounds. And like, not to toot my own horn, but boyfriend parents? They *hate* me. Nobody wants their kid hooking up with the sexologist, especially not a lil’ snack like me. But the trade is that it’s hella braggable to everyone else. So I’m meeting half the damn town just so his old buddies can take turns doing that ‘nice brah’ nod thing guys do. You know the nod I mean?”

“We know.”

“We know.”

“So yeah, among the rabble is one of his ex-girlfriends. Three of them, actually, and why the hell three twenty-something chicks are all hanging out at their old high school’s football game on a Friday night I have no idea. But yeah, one of them, I can see there was something there. The way he looks at her, tenses up when she touches his arm. I’m not saying he was carrying a torch, but there’s some unresolved shit, plain as plain can plain. Err, can... be. Yeah.”

“You are *so* drunk.”

“Keep going. Get to the sex.”

“Bah, kids these days, no sense of dramatic tension. OK, so I note it, we move on. I give it until our next date night, and when he shows up at my apartment, there I am in her old uniform.”

“Uniform?”

“What uniform?”

“Fuck, right. See, this is why you shouldn’t rush a *TURN HERE TURN HERE TURN HERE!*”

The middle whipped the wheel to the right so abruptly it felt like the car almost flipped. Her sisters screamed in alarm. Marisa covered her mouth and held her stomach, nearly averting a lesser catastrophe.

“Ugh, sorry, there’s road construction on 9th and... oof. Oh fuck. Ooooh fuck. Gonna hurl.”

“Road construction?! You almost killed us!”

“We’re fine. Go on, the uniform?”

“Yeah, what uniform?”

“Like ROTC? Cheerleader? Cincinnati Bengals? Fucking what uniform!”

“Was it hot?”

“I bet it was so hot.”

“You two are incorrigible!”

“Shh. Go on, Marisa.”

Marisa took a few more deep breaths, then reached past the youngest to roll down the window before at last continuing. “OK. Um, so yeah. So she was a cheerleader. And really weirdly proud of it, for someone who wasn’t still leading cheers, you know? Brought it up really conspicuously, like ‘oh, Spencer and I used to date back in school, when I was a cheerleader’ or something, like it’s a power move to brag on your high school resume to the guy your ex-guy is currently fucking.

“So anyway... yeah. I waited until half-time and snuck into the locker room and stole one.”

“Stole one?”

“Weren’t the cheerleaders wearing their uniforms?”

“Yeah, why was one just lying around waiting to be stolen?”

“One your size, for that matter.”

“Yeah, good question. Hmm.” She contemplated a moment. Or maybe was readying herself to puke again. “Oh yeah! Yeah, that’s it. There was some kind of routine they were doing at the half-time show, that’s why I did it then. It was some Constitution Day garbage, they had to put on these flag outfits or whatever. Nationalistic fucking bullshit.”

“Ugh, yeah, our school did stuff like that, too.”

“Not that we were cheerleaders.”

“Ew.”

“Ewww.”

“So yeah, I swiped it. I don’t know if I honestly knew what I was doing, but I had this feeling, like... Whatever. I have really good sex instincts is all. So yeah, he comes in, there I am. And he’s like ‘wtf are you wearing,’ and I said ‘I thought you were into cheerleaders.’ And he’s like ‘what’s that supposed to mean?’ So I told him how I saw he couldn’t take his eyes off... fuck, what was her name? And yeah, you can park here.”

The middle pulled over next to a three-story house, three mailboxes sharing a post outside. “Let’s take her inside, just in case.”

“And to hear the story.”

“Yeah, the good part.”

“Yeah, get to the good part.”

Sensitive to her downstairs neighbors, Marisa kept quiet on their way up to her residence on the third floor. That is, apart from stumbling back and forth into the walls, jostling the triplets around with her. Finally they arrived at her apartment, where she

collapsed onto her sofa. The drunken sisters flanked her, the middle taking a seat in her recliner.

“So. The uniform.”

“Which we definitely believe you stole.”

Marisa snorted indignantly. “You saying you don’t believe me?”

“Just get on with the story!”

“This was supposed to be a Spencer sex story.”

“Yeah, and you’re taking forever to get to the sex part.”

“Oh no. No no no. No, n-no no *no*.” Marisa stood up. “Come into my house and call me a liar? I got sex stories way weirder than getting hate-fucked in a cheerleader uniform.”

The sisters had no response to this. Their delay provided Marisa an opening to storm out of the living room, throwing her bedroom door shut behind her.

“Did she say ‘hate-fucked?’”

“Spencer?”

“That does *not* sound like something he’d do.”

“Is she coming back?”

“Yeah, should we go, or...?”

“Thanks for being DD by the way.”

“Yeah, thanks. You’re the best.”

“You’d have done the same for me.”

“We should go out like this more often.”

“Yeah! This was fun.”

“I missed hanging out with us.”

“I fucking *love* us. Do you know that?”

“Not as much as I love us.”

“It’s not a contest, you two. Because if it was, I would be winning, because I love us.”

They were still debating who loved themselves the most when Marisa’s bedroom door opened, revealing the sight of the trim, sexy grad student stuffed into a black and gold cheerleading uniform that was plainly a few sizes too small. It was a hot uniform on its own, baring the midriff completely and featuring a skirt that wanted to start twirling up over her underwear with the slightest pivot. On Marisa’s well-shaped body, the bottom of her breasts were visible, squeezed down beneath the hem of the top. The skirt flashed her panties when she turned to shut the door, and it flashed them almost to the waist. They weren’t matching panties, either, probably just the same pale blue pair she’d been wearing to the program and the bar. She’d done her hair up in a high ponytail, though it was poorly done. It suited her inebriated aesthetic.

“You really have it!”

“You look so hot!”

“Kind of small on you, isn’t it?”

Marisa sniffled. “It was three years and ten-ish pounds ago, OK? And it didn’t fit great then. Thieves can’t be shooters – err, *choosers* – either. But yeah, still cute, right?”

“But Spencer didn’t like it, you said.”

Their hostess flounced into the living room, thrilling in the attention of women who were much more commonly on the other end of the attention-paying v. attention-paid-to continuum. “Oh he liked the uniform fine. What he didn’t like was the game. He didn’t give me much time to tease him. Before I knew it, he was up and ranting at me. Like, zero to pissed off in no time.”

“Pissed off why?”

Marisa tugged on the top, but it only made it snap back higher than before. Her nipples were still hidden, for now. “Because he’d never had a disloyal thought, and I was trying to make him jealous. I was acting like... fuck, I wish I could remember her name. Like a word name I feel like, like Faith or Hope or Harmony or something. Fuck. Anyway, that I was acting like he was still into her. Like he even *could* be into her. And then he was ranting about her. About the games she played, about what a bitch she was, and a bully. And how she’d brought out the worst in him, how they’d both dragged each other down, and how he wasn’t that guy any more.”

The triplets frowned. Spencer? A bully? It was hard to imagine.

“So I could see I’d struck a nerve. I’d only wanted to figure out what his deal was with this chick, but all of the sudden he’s yelling and he’s calling me names and stuff. Calling *her* names, really. But it felt like something he needed, shit he wanted to say but couldn’t just belch out at a football game. So... I figured I’d help him process.”

“Process... how?”

Marisa stood in front of the couch, looming to the extent her tiny frame could loom. Her hips swished side to side, but not drunkenly. Mostly. “So what, baby? Don’t front. You know you still want this. And I want you to have it. Don’t act like you’re all the sudden better than, too good for me. You’re a horny little piece of shit same as me, baby. So just shut up, and let’s—”

She shook her head, her roleplay suddenly shifting characters, assuming a deep voice, deeper than Spencer’s own. “No. No, I’m not. It’s not better than, I’m just done wallowing in your toxicity. Our tokshitissy.’ Err, fuck, you know what I meant. And this is all way TMI, I know, but yeah, he was like shaking. So I pushed, you know? Never gonna get that last drip of toothpaste if you don’t squeeze.”

Marisa sunk down to her knees, the transfixed triplets watching her, rapt, as she reverted to the bratty nasally cheerleader character. “Fuck toxic. Let’s remind these puds who runs this school, right? You and me, baby. Put it in my mouth, baby. I miss you. Put it in my mouth like these dorkwads fucking dream they could.”

“Did he...?”

“Put it in your mouth...?”

“And did you...?”

“It took some back and forth. ‘I’m not your king douchebag any more.’ ‘You’re still hung like my king.’ ‘Was there ever anything between us besides sex? Sex, and feeding off each other’s assholery?’ ‘Are you saying you want to eat my ass? Because...’ And so on. I got his pants off. Or he took them off. I forget. But I remember when he told me to shut the fuck up and shoved his cock down my throat.”

Marisa took one hand of each of the girls on the sofa, extending one digit and sucking them into her mouth. They stared, mesmerized.

“That sounds violent,” said the middle from behind them. “It doesn’t sound all that hot.”

Marisa rested the fingertips on her lower lip. “It was hot for that time and place,” she said. “It was what he needed, to unload on someone he couldn’t unload on without going back to being the guy who unloads when he’s angry. It was therapeutic, and I could see in those soft pretty eyes that he knew it for what it was. He took me up on it. I didn’t know then if I was ending our relationship or if he was falling in love or what. I honestly didn’t care. He... wow, yeah, just like that actually,” she said as the eldest grabbed her ponytail with her dry hand. The youngest seized it too, and soon the two pressed their fingers back into Marisa’s mouth.

It wasn’t gay, they told themselves. Or incest. Both of them were imagining they were in Marisa’s place, dressed slutty, on their knees, his dick fucking their thirsty mouths raw. They should be so lucky. Their sister watched from behind, eyes narrowed, unsure what this could mean, and why it made her so fucking hot.

Hotter than usual, that is. Like she’d said, these days, she was horny pretty much all the time. Eight might have been a low estimate after all.

“He came on my face,” she said between licks up and down the sisters’ fingers. “Spencer never comes on a girl’s face. Honestly he tends to be pretty erratic about the when and where, but he tries to be ‘respectful,’ as he sees it. But that night, right in the eye. He called me a bitch, a slut, a slutty fucking bitch, and came in my face.”

“Oh wow.”

“Oh *wow*.”

“Were you mad?”

Marisa turned, frowning. She was well beyond the point of being able to remember any of this; soon, she’d be passed out on the floor. “Mad?”

“Yeah. You weren’t the one he was actually angry with, but he took it out on you.”

She shook her head, nearly losing her balance in the process. “No no no, sweetie. I was only getting warmed up. I went through my slut-bitch phase, same as this chick. This was me plugging that monster of a dick into my past and letting it fuck away my

demons. No no, I wiped my eye clear, looked up at him, and I go, ‘Is that all you got, you fucking pussy?’”

“He had more, didn’t he.”

“So much more.”

Marisa nodded, absent-mindedly bestowing tiny little handjob on the finger-cocks before her. “He was past the anger of it by then, mostly. We were both just sort of doing, not thinking. So when he grabbed me by the hair and tossed me over the armrest, ass up, I took this super sarcastic cunt tone, like ‘Aw, baby wants to fuck without eye contact and cuddles?’”

While she relived the memory, she went through the motions of it. The girls didn’t pull her hair – much – but neither did they let go. Her neck was held backwards as far as it would go, the top flipped up and over her tits. One of the sisters had lifted her skirt over her underwear, too, though none of them were sure which. The look on Marisa’s face said she didn’t want them to stop, so they didn’t.

“And I swear to god, I will *never* forget it. Sonofabitch tore my panties off. Literally grabbed the waistband and tore them off. They had some strong elastic, too. Fucking hurt. I yelped or something I guess, because I remember he said something lava hot like, ‘You wanna act like a bitch? Then you get fucked like a bitch.’”

Marisa was too far gone not to reach under her body and slip a hand into her underwear, sliding two fingers as far as they would go into her pussy. “Oh god... Oh god, yes... Like a fucking *bitch*, Spencer, like your fucking bitch...”

Someone squeezed a hand full of her ass, and when she moaned, followed it with a percussive *slap* that filled the apartment. Someone else – or the same someone, so many hands, impossible to be sure – jerked that pony tail handle until her ear was right against their lips. “You like this, you little bitch? You like this?” Another slap, this time across her exposed tits.

“Harder,” Marisa whimpered. “Unless that’s all you got.”

Two more slaps, tits and ass in perfect unison, from two hands belonging to two girls who were drowning in the fantasy of being bent double, asses and tits exposed to their RA’s hungry eyes as he pounded their holes and their flesh like he owned them. Like he was doing them a favor. And he would be, they realized as someone spit into Marisa’s open, panting mouth. If he lined them up and painted his cock blood red with what scant virginity remained between them, they would thank him.

This was what she needed. Not some pathetic cabana boy who let himself be trussed up like a ham for a fistful of pesos. Not some high school boy who’d nudded in his underwear just from being allowed to say the word “foursome” during a makeout. A man who could turn this sexpert into sex jelly by throwing her down and fucking *taking* her. One sister would be beside herself to be fucked at all, and the other would lose her mind about the chance to touch these stunningly sexy self-replicas she’d been gifted at

birth. But she would come from how firmly she would tell him no, we have bigger ambitions than you, you're beneath us, I won't stoop to blowing some random college guy – and how firmly he would shove his dick down her throat and tell her to shut up. He would free her to live in the moment and think of her momentary needs – and her sisters would wait their turns to taste his cum on her lips before trying to coax some out for themselves.

She blinked. That had gotten really vivid, hadn't it.

Meanwhile her sister was thinking of the girl in front of her. They'd never been with a girl, not even to the extent of their sporadic makeouts and few instances of vanilla missionary sex. They'd talked about being with each other, agreed they'd never do it but permitted that so long as she owned that she was kind of a perv, they could concede it wasn't crazy to fantasize about it. Suddenly, seeing those perfectly white teeth sink into those pale blue panties, she wondered if she'd been wrong to give up so easily.

“You guys, this is...”

“Hot.”

“So hot.”

“Touch her. It's OK. She likes it.”

“I... we shouldn't. She's drunk.”

“And straight,” added Marisa clumsily, fellating a triplet's fingers. “And you definitely should.”

“You should.”

“It's fun.”

“She's so fun.”

What were they doing? This hadn't been the plan. They'd only set out to learn about the inner workings of Hancock, not to get it on with one of their interns. They hadn't discussed this. And they were both so *into* it! There was no denying it. This woman was turning *her* sisters into some kind of... into...

Oh, fuck it.

“Stop turning us gay, you fucking slut!” Her hand hit that ass so hard that it was hard to imagine she'd hurt Marisa as much as herself.

“Try and stop me, bitch.”

Gritting her teeth, she seized those panties and *pulled*, pulled until there was a satisfying snap as the waistband gave way. There were Marisa's fingers, probing her glistening wet snatch, someone else's probing experimentally at her clit. She wished she'd had more to drink. Or less. Whatever the amount would be that she'd black this out as surely as Marisa, or flee the scene before it was too late.

She tried to stop her. She really, really tried.

“How did he sound?”

“Pissed.”

“Pissed, or just annoyed?”

“More annoyed, I guess. But he seemed pretty stressed.”

“OK. Let’s go.”

Spencer accepted their invitation, as expected. They were identical again. No man could refuse them identical. Their father, maybe, as one of the only men on the planet who didn’t want to fuck their identical pussies. Pussies which, they had conceded, were wet and ready to fuck all the goddamn time. For this man, and this man only.

That had been what put them in their position to weigh matters objectively. These other girls were roommates. Friends, in many cases, but new friends, maybe just friends until their strange freshman year together ended. Even the lesbians in 313 weren’t a truly united front. They acted like it, but really they just liked fucking one another. They argued at least as much as the typical roommates on Higgins 3, even if they were good at (loudly) fucking it out afterward.

The sisters were, thanks to the man grudgingly plodding along in their wake, a united front once again.

Not to him alone, not really. He was the beginning of their investigation, not its conclusion. They had long since satisfied themselves that he simply couldn’t be the mastermind behind it all. If he was, then far too many other things didn’t make sense. His reticency to fuck the Hotties. His embarrassment that he’d let his guard down and put it in that redneck girl from 304. That whole beach day fiasco a couple weeks ago, when the girls had been throwing themselves at him, stalking him into the shower, masturbating audibly in the adjacent stalls, staking out his dorm room and listening to him make out with that boringly mega-hot RA, the one with the repulsive and disqualifying scar, while they played with themselves. He could have whipped it out and let them take turns sucking him off. The eldest had observed, and she was sure of it. Instead, he’d dragged them all down to the lounge and yelled at them for disrupting his evening.

They remembered Marisa’s story, the allusion to some erstwhile Spencer who tore of clothes and hate-fucked, even if Marisa didn’t remember telling it. She’d awakened the next afternoon with a throbbing headache and some big questions about her bruised ass and the cheerleader skirt draped over it. The triplets responded to her text with a made-up lie, denying any involvement; whether or not she believed them, they’d continued to enjoy each other’s company in the ensuing weeks. Marisa was actually pretty cool, they decided. Plus, they all privately hoped they’d get her drunk enough for another story.

The eldest had gotten to hear Spencer yelling live, to see the vein throb in his forehead as he ordered them about, telling them how they were to behave on his floor from now on. Lucky. The middle and youngest had lain in their bunks with their ears pressed to the wall adjacent to the lounge, playing with themselves as they imagined him thundering away at the slut-bitches of Higgins 3. There was no more taboo against masturbating in the room. Having to go down to do it in the shower was degrading, and they did not degrade each other. Not any more.

They led Spencer into their bedroom, standing shoulder to shoulder to shoulder, regarding him with eyes downcast. He looked annoyed. He couldn't possibly be as annoyed as the sisters. Drawing straws first to see which two could attend massage night, and again to see who would be privy to those licks he was giving away after his stunt at the end of the program. It had created resentment, inequity, bitterness. But they loved each other enough to endure it.

Plus, it had led them here.

Spencer stood by imperiously, waiting to see what they wanted this time. He had no way of knowing who had done what with him, nor who hadn't. He knew as much as they chose to tell him, as much a pawn in Hancock's game as the Hotties.

"We're sorry."

"We agreed that since we were all at fault, we'd take the blame together, as sisters."

"We shouldn't have lied to you just for a little fun."

"We want to make it up to you."

"All three of us."

"If you'll let us."

Time to see if Marisa was right about him and his chivalric ideals. First that.

Spencer looked between them, and after a moment, sighed in resignation.

"Forgiven. Look, I'm not mad. It's just been a weird week, and this was one more thing. I was in the middle of finishing up a bunch of classwork, but it's done now and I'm me again and... blah blah blah, whatever. Don't worry about it."

Classic Spencer. Kind Spencer. But not the Spencer they wanted right then.

"But we want to apologize."

He shook his head. "Really, it's fine. I was glad to see the two of you that came to the program hanging out. The girls are always excited whenever you make an appearance. A little starstruck."

He took a step like he meant to leave.

"We wanted to offer you a massage!" blurted the middle hastily.

"Triple team."

"One of us missed the program, but, um, was grateful you, you know, let her get that sneak peek yesterday."

Pheromones. It had to be – or something like it. She'd come back from his room the day before, her tongue still tasting of his sweat, and for the rest of the night, she'd been beside herself. They gave up telling her not to apologize for how loud she was being. Then they gave up not joining in, though they couldn't keep up with her enthusiasm.

That had been the control of the experiment. No lick, no horny whiny helpless coming their brains out. Pheromones. It had to be. Nobody was actually as hot as they all thought he was.

Today, just to triple check, they would all get their taste.

Spencer wasn't ready for it yet, though. "Oh. That's really thoughtful of you, really. I'm so flattered. But I have some errands I've been putting off. I'm sorry. But thank you."

The girls adopted their sulk. They weren't prone to sulking. They were privileged, and they knew it, and they seldom wanted something they couldn't have – access to their own fortune aside. Sulking seldom entered the picture. When they did sulk, however, they were a true and total triplication of entitlement.

"Please?"

"Yeah, please?"

"Please?"

They poured that entitlement into their pleading. It wouldn't be begging to his ears. It was the petulant demand of three liars who'd invaded his privacy, pushed him across his boundaries, and now had the audacity to act aggrieved that they hadn't gotten more.

It wasn't his ex-ex-girlfriend's cheerleader uniform, but they hoped it would suffice.

"Please, let you give me a massage?"

"Or even just, you know. Our lick. One of us really didn't get to."

"It's not fair!"

"Please?"

"Please, Spencer?"

They may as well be telling him he was being an asshole for not having already given them what they wanted. It was implied in their haughty tones, their condescending looks. His nostrils flared, his jaw set. It was working.

"You know, I've been lied to enough by the women in this room that I have a hard time seeing why I should cut you any slack. I think this is how you learn your lesson about treating your floormates respectfully."

He turned again, his hand on the doorknob.

Shit. Time to up the stakes.

"We'll do it in our underwear!"

“Like the other night. Like everybody else did.”

“Just don’t go. Please.” *Let us do you a favor, you selfish prick*, the tone implied.

He hesitated. They moved on him. Six hands met on his back, sides, arms and shoulders. Six hands, caressing him commandingly.

“You really want it?”

“We *deserve* it.”

“It’s only fair.”

“Yeah, come on already. Give us our licks.”

There was that look again. Not quite a glare. Glaring wasn’t this self-righteous.

“Fine. One lick. But *I* get to say—”

The sisters sank to their knees, pawing at the man in the center of the triplet triangle. As one, they took off their tops, folding them and setting them down as kneeling pads. They had no bras, just six perfectly matching tits. Together, they shimmied out of their shorts, revealing three pairs of identical panties.

“Where should we lick?”

“Yeah, you were saying... You wanted to say, right?”

“And make it somewhere good.”

The final prod did the trick. Spencer lowered his shorts to his knees, revealing a thick red cock that shamed the one they’d imagined when listening to Marisa’s story. The fight video from discord didn’t do it justice. “You two each get a cheek. And you... pretty sure that was you yesterday.” He was wrong. “These are all yours.”

Per their rehearsal, they each affected a pout, holding back as long as they could make themselves until finally one leaned forward, extended her tongue, and awaited her sisters before bathing his ass and his balls with their saliva.

“And give Terri a follow, would you? It’d mean a lot to her.”

They agreed without realizing what they were agreeing to. For the rest of the day, they were electrified. They never did manage to get their clothes back on.

Pheromones. No doubt about it. That night at Mother Bear’s, Marisa swore to them there was no such thing, but they were united in their insistence.

“Ready?”

“Ready.”

“Ready.”

She set her phone in the middle of the table and pressed the green button. The ring sounded loudly on the speaker. It rang twice. Once more than they’d been promised it would ever ring when they’d signed their contracts.

“Allison, hey! Didn’t think I’d be hearing from you for a bit. How’s Maui? You and your sisters enjoying fall break?”

“Maui’s Maui.”

“It’s Maui.”

“We didn’t call to talk about Maui.”

There was lots of background noise. She wasn’t at home. Driving somewhere, or maybe walking around. “Oh. Then hey to Maddison, and hey to Addison. What’s up? Parents grating on you again? You know I love a good venting session as much as the next agent, but this isn’t a great time.”

“Our parents are doing fine.”

“More than fine.”

“Oh. Then, um, something with the accommodations? I can call the desk, make sure they... shit. Sorry, shit’s pretty crazy over here. Every driver in the goddamn city is... Can I call you back in a few? Then I can make you three my three top priorities.”

“It’s our accommodations.”

“Yeah. Our accommodations.”

There was a long pause. Was it conspicuous, or just traffic? “Pull over so you can talk to us.”

Lorna growled, maybe at traffic, but maybe at the bossiness of her clients. “This really isn’t a good—”

“She said, *pull over.*”

“She said it nicely.”

“If that doesn’t work, try *pull the fuck over right the fuck now.*”

Lorna grunted. She was used to them being grateful for every dribble of attention she paid them. “I’m in the middle of... what the fuck do you... Hang on.” It was as aggravated as she’d ever sounded with them. They waited, arms folded.

“OK, wish granted, I’m pulled over. Very, very illegally, I might add.” Indeed, she was tricky to hear over the sound of someone honking. “Tell me what’s wrong. Did they not have a third bed in your suite? Or, how shall I say, do you need another male prostitute?”

It was sass, and her 10% most definitely did not relegate them to accepting her sass. No matter.

“Not our accommodations in Maui.”

“At Lakeview.”

“Lakeview.”

“Higgins.”

“Higgins 3.”

“Our dorm accommodations.”

Lorna sighed. “You’ll get better results just putting in a work order. Hang on, I think I have the number for the desk—”

The youngest cut her off imperiously. “Funny you should mention prostitutes, though.

“Pimping people out.”

“Not so funny.”

“Not haha funny.”

“Do you want to tell us why you fought to put us in Higgins 3 instead of back in Wendell?”

Lorna’s voice was strained. “Why I... what? What on earth are you even talking about? You... you don’t like your room?”

“We don’t like that you pushed your seven-figure clients into the middle of a collegiate harem, Lorna.”

“We don’t like it at all.”

“We are, one and all, displeased.”

The honking finally died. Whoever it was must have given up on her. The triplets were not yet done with Lorna, though. “I have no earthly idea what you’re talking about,” she said with the gall to sound annoyed. “Harem? Is this about those third rate streamer skanks you were complaining about, or...?”

“Send us the emails.”

“Right now.”

“Forward them on over.”

“What the hell emails? Have you three lost your—”

One held up her own phone and read. “August 3rd of this year, you texted us, and I quote, ‘been emailing Lakeview back and forth all day. Got you the biggest triple room on campus.’ ‘Way bigger than Wendell?’ Allison replied. ‘Way bigger,’ you answered. ‘Had to bark all the way up the chain, but I got you in on Higgins 3! You’re welcome.’”

“You... want me to show you the emails about moving your dorm room? Are you fucking kidding me? Mind telling me what for? Going on two years you’ve been my client, and I never got a complaint about my results from you before this.”

“I understand if it takes a minute.”

“That’s how long you have.”

“Timer’s running.”

“Forward the emails. August 3rd.”

“Fifty-six. Fifty-five.”

“Fifty-four.”

Lorna’s voice was sharp. “Your little countdown isn’t necessary or productive. I don’t keep pointless crap like that, and even if I did, I resent being interrogated over it.”

“We happen to know that you’re required by your firm’s legal team to maintain copies of all communications pertaining to the service of your clientele, Lorna.”

“Fifty.”

“Especially when those emails feature you agreeing to feed your clients to the whims of mind-fucking pheromones!”

“We agreed no yelling.”

“Sorry. I just thought about what she tried to do to you and I got...”

“Forty-four. Forty-three.”

“Pheromones? Harem? I have no idea what you think I—”

“What did they offer you? Money?”

“Must have been quite the sum.”

“I guess the Hancock Institute knows a thing or two about making sleazy deals though, considering the nature of their research.”

“Thirty-three.”

“Would you stop counting at me, you spoiled little bitch? I told you—”

“Don’t raise your voice to her.”

“Don’t you *ever* raise your voice to her.”

“Twenty-seven.”

“That kind of cash is hard to hide, though.”

“And risky.”

“We all know how you like to let us be the ones taking all the risk.”

“Turning us against each other, turning us against our own family.”

“Our blood. Our genes.”

“Fifteen.”

“Personally, I think they just offered you what you really wanted.”

“Your three pretty little cash cows, hooked on whatever they’re pumping through the vents in that building.”

“Too horny, too dizzy to resist.”

“You were going to turn us into sluts.”

“Porn stars.”

“Whores.”

“Did you think we wouldn’t notice?”

“Did you think we’re stupid?”

“Did you really think we’d let you hurt either of them?”

“I would fucking *kill* you before I let you hurt them.”

“Same.”

“Same. With a smile on our face.”

They stopped, watching the timer count down to zero.

Lorna spoke in a measured voice. “I didn’t do anything wrong, and if you think you can throw a tantrum and get me to admit to something on whatever you bimbos are using to record this, you’re even dumber than I thought.”

“We’re not recording.”

“We don’t consent to being recorded.”

“Which, as a pre-law major with a 4.0 GPA, I should inform you means that in both of our states of residence, this conversation is inadmissible.”

“Say, what was your GPA, Lorna?”

Pre-law was a recent development. After deciding to never ever ever *ever* let anything or anyone come between them again, they agreed that one thing that might help was permitting them a little space. They had three identical brains, so why squander them with identical information? Pre-law, business, marketing, communications... They would run their own modeling agency someday. Their fashion empire.

But first, they needed to deal with their present agency.

They could hear her breathing, hot and angry. “Yeah, well, think what you want. Your contract with the firm is ironclad, so unless you have some kind of proof, which we both know you don’t, you can all get bent – but not too hard, OK? I have money riding on those asses of yours. Oh, and because I wouldn’t want you to think I’m not earning my cut, some advice: Don’t bother trying to get a room change. I just have this feeling you’re going to run into some unexpected red tape at the Housing office. But hey, enjoy your break, have fun on your shoot tomorrow. Thanks in advance for my ten percent. Fucking brats.”

“Oh, you’ll be canceling our contract.”

“Today.”

“When we hang up.”

A laugh sounded through the phone. “Oh? What makes my little cash cows think I’m opening their pen?”

“Because it will keep us quiet.”

“Unless you think we couldn’t get an article published about what you tried to do.”

“‘Teenage triplet sex slaves’ does seem like the kind of headline that people would click on, doesn’t it?”

“It does. Thanks for helping to teach us about how to craft a good headline, by the way.”

Lorna sneered audibly. “And why do you think I—”

“They must have shown you what they can do.”

“Why else would you have signed on?”

“It’s basic logic. If they tried to force the change on you, you would’ve fought back and kept us in Wendell. After the ΣXE incident, no way this campus is going to risk pissing us off again.”

“Which means they had to find a way to get you onboard. You weren’t about to give up your most promising clients, so they had to give you a way to make bank off of it.”

“Off of *us*.”

“And if there’s one thing you’ve always been, Lorna, it’s a mercenary. Suddenly you got a hire bid, and you changed banners. You just didn’t think we’d ever figure it out.”

“Or if we did, that we’d pin it on you.”

Their agent grumbled something with the phone away from her mouth. It sounded like a curse. Then she was back. “Yeah, well, that’s a fun little theory. Unfortunately there’s a thing called ‘libel,’ so good luck finding a publisher.”

“We figure it’s probably easier to just go to the source, threaten to expose them.”

“I’d bet they’re very motivated to keep their little project quiet.”

“Yeah, the kinds of people who turn teenagers into some guy’s cum-starved sex slaves probably wouldn’t like that kind of publicity.”

“You know, I bet they could do it to a regular old woman like you, though. Maybe we could tell them we’ll keep it quiet if they just gas you with some of this shit, make you so fucking horny you’ll beg them to let you join that cabana boy in the oldest profession.”

“It would certainly keep you quiet, wouldn’t it?”

“And believe us when we say that once they get to you, you’ll be happy to keep quiet so long as your gag is someone’s dick.”

“Believe us.”

“It will come on your fat peasant face, and you’ll be thankful for it.”

“Believe us.”

Lorna harrumphed. “Doesn’t sound like it’s kept you three from wagging your tongues.”

“Because we’re rich.”

“Influencers.”

“Media darlings.”

“Sisters,” they said in perfect unison.

“We can do whatever the fuck we want.”

“You have an hour to get that contract canceled.”

“Starting now.”

“Fifty-nine minutes fifty-seven seconds. Fifty-six.”

“Goodbye, Lorna.”

They hung up the phone before waiting to hear another bullshit excuse.

“You were right.”

“I know. Your theory was good, too.”

“Plus it was your plan. It was so smart.”

“That evil bitch didn’t know what hit her.”

“I meant it when I said I would kill for you.”

“Same.”

“Same. Though... not my plan A.”

“I love you.”

“I love you.”

“I love you.”

The sisters embraced, laughing, crying. It was only somewhat a bluff. Long talks and lots of idle handsiness had convinced all three of them that they liked living with Spencer and his Hottie harem just fine. Sexy and horny and impulsive was fun – surprise, surprise – and now that they knew what it was, they could opt out at their leisure. It turned out that whatever this was, it had been just what they needed to restore perspective. They could still be ambitious, hard-working, successful, while also trying to have a little fun and enjoy themselves. With Marisa’s help, maybe enjoy Spencer’s fine-ass self a little, too.

The doofus had landed himself a free harem after all. Surely he owed his subjects a little affection.

“Come on. Let’s go find Dad before he tries to citizens arrest the bartender on suspicion of being a nefarious cabana boy.”

The sisters made their way outside. It was blue and green and gorgeous, hot in the way that beaches are hot, in that way that even winter types couldn’t complain about it. The resort had a bar by the pool and, around the back of the same small building, a second one facing the beachfront. Their parents were seated at the latter, Mom gaping at one of the models they’d be photographed with tomorrow strutting along in her thong bikini. Dad was sipping at an almost completely full strawberry daiquiri, looking around like he was worried one of the other guests was about to pickpocket him.

But he’d crossed an ocean to be with them, and he’d failed to hide his delight at being asked to.

“Hi, Dad.”

“Hi, Mom.”

“Girls!” Their mother hugged each girl in turn. “I was starting to worry you might come out here dressed like some of these girls...”

“Yeah, well, we will for the shoot, but right now, we’re hanging out with you two.”

“We don’t want to embarrass you.”

“We’re just glad you could make it.”

“I know how Mr. Curtis doesn’t give you much time off.”

Their dad smiled. “I told him my girls wanted to drag me off to meet their bikini buddies in Hawaii. Old goat said it was too close to his lifelong dream to deny me.”

“Gross.”

“Daddy!”

“Super gross.”

“We’re glad you’re here, though.”

The bartender saw them and approached automatically. Here, these gorgeous threefold teenagers were the real money and he deduced it easily. Incorrectly, though it was a good guess. The girls each ordered a cosmo and took seats by their parents.

“Uh, excuse me? Last I checked, you three weren’t twenty-one.”

“Yeah, for like six months.”

“We’re growing up, Dad.”

“And if you don’t trust us with a little…”

“How will you ever be able to trust us with a lot?”

He gave his wife a long-suffering look. “See, I told you. Dragged us out here with promises of sun and fun, but it’s really to butter us up for another go at the conservatorship. Couldn’t even sit by us on the plane so we could at least get it out of the way before we hit paradise.”

“That’s not it, Dad.”

“We booked you first class so you could be comfortable on the flight.”

“And they didn’t have five side by side seats in first class.”

“And we figured we had all week to talk, if we want to talk about it.”

“So why rush?”

“Well let’s make it a short talk, then. The answer is still—”

The youngest interjected. “We don’t want you to end the conservatorship.”

“—in, um, effect. What now?”

“We talked, and we decided we’re happy where we are.”

“Very happy.”

“Happier than we’ve ever been.”

Their parents exchanged incredulous looks. “Even with the dorm room?” their mom asked fretfully. “I know you were so cross with us over that. Oh god, you’re not dropping out of school, are you?!”

They laughed. “Mom!”

“Yeah, Mom!”

“We’re not dropping out.”

“We actually really like our dorm.”

“Yeah. It’s actually really cool.”

Four days away from Higgins and the worst of Spencer's pheromones seemed to have subsided. They felt normal again. Annoyingly so. Being constantly pumped full of their RA's love particles had been... electric. Passionate. Exhilarating. They'd bonded over their fantasies of swarm-fucking their RA like almost nothing else in their lives. They'd keep talking it out as they grew more confident that they were back in their normal minds, but they each knew what conclusion they hoped to arrive at. Fall break was simply a bad date. You didn't break up with the guy over it. You just hoped he'd come along and sweep you off your feet next time. Or better yet, throw you on his bed between your sisters and take turns making you come.

Not that they knew much about dating, but they hoped to know a lot about being thrown on Spencer's bed.

For now, though, there were more important things to consider. Things long overdue.

"Actually, that's not quite true."

"We did want to talk about the conservatorship."

"See, honey? I knew—"

"Not like you think, though."

"We don't want to use it on us."

"You... you don't? Uh oh, I think our girls might have been kidnapped and replaced by pod people, Lydia. Just tell me it's not some scam to—"

"We want to pay off your house."

"Or buy you your dream house, if you'd rather."

"We want you to be able to retire, Dad."

"Not in twenty years."

"Right now."

"Today."

"We've run the numbers—"

"We'll show you. There's spreadsheets and all."

"—and we think there's enough in there to get you the house and take care of you both for good."

"In style. You can travel, Mom."

"See the world."

"Come along with us on shoots."

"Sometimes."

"Yeah, sometimes. But really. Sometimes."

"It would set us back a lot, we realize."

"But we're getting a good education."

"And we're still us."

“Cute blonde triplets don’t seem to be trending downward, according to the metadata.”

“So we’ll be able to make it back. Might be a few years, depending on what neighborhood you’re looking at.”

“But you’ve always worried about us.”

“And taken care of us.”

“A little too much sometimes.”

“We’re always worried about taking care of each other,”

“Like you taught us when we were little,”

“And we want to show you we love you, too.”

Their parents stared almost uncomprehending. Without warning, their mother’s eyes brimmed over with tears and she threw her arms wide enough for all three daughters. Dad joined in the hug, too.

“I, um, I’m sorry I don’t always listen, girls. This is... Are you serious? Don’t answer that. I know you are. But I’m... I’m blown away.”

“Three cosmopolitans,” said the bartender behind them. “If, ah, it’s all right with Mom and Dad.”

Their dad laughed, tears running down his red, sweaty face. Dad hardly ever cried, especially not out in the open like this. “Oh, go ahead. I’ll have to learn to loosen up a little bit if I’m going to be hanging out with my supermodel daughters and their supermodel friends, huh?”

“Dad!”

“Oh, Daddy.”

“I love you, Dad.”

“That’s the booze talking, honey, don’t believe a word they say.”

“Daaaad!” they groaned in unison, but it was with the same smile they’d go on to use at their shoot the following day to generate a million clicks. To their credit, a shot of their parents gaping in disapproval at three matching dental floss bikinis scored almost as many. Dad’s blush was authentic, even on the fifteenth take.

Somewhere on the other side of a big blue ocean and a whole lot of hills and prairies, Spencer received their follow and took it as an invitation to follow back, as it had been meant to be. He smashed the like button on every single one of their posts. They could hardly wait to get back home and frig themselves blind over it once those delightful pheromones of his got them back in the proper mood. But for now, there was the beach, and the ocean, and family.

“Yeah, hey, Happy Halloween or whatever,” she said as the sisters entered the party, fashionably late.

The other Hotties didn’t look up at all from where Peyton of all people was busily giving their RA the hottest lap dance they had ever seen. Which was fine. They weren’t looking to stay long. It was Halloween, for heaven’s sake. Terri – who had actually turned out to be surprisingly cool, they’d discovered during that collab Spencer had mandated in exchange for licks – gave them a friendly wave. She was dressed up like Curious George’s friend, except without the yellow hat. They had no idea what to make of this. Either way, their lust and gratitude for Spencer notwithstanding, dorm parties were weak sauce, and they had no intention of dawdling. Make an appearance, score a nice moment with Spencer to jill off to when they got home from the real parties, and goodbye.

Half-watching the proceedings, they walked over to the refreshments table, then sidled up to Katrina at the DJ station. There behind the speakers, they could actually hear themselves think.

“What’d we miss?”

“Yeah, isn’t she gay?”

“I’d have sworn someone on discord said she and that other one are girlfriends.”

Katrina nodded. “As of last night, I’m not sure any of us are completely straight. Were you there?”

“No, what happened?”

“Oh wow. Wow, you three must be under a rock or something. I mean, you live right next door, and... Anyway, so yeah, he and Tori, and Casey, and, um, me? We... yeah. We patched things up.”

“Oh cool.”

“That drama was so fucking stupid.”

“Totally. Fuck Tori.”

Katrina frowned. “She was trying to do what she thought was best, you guys. Besides, it’s all in the rear view mirror now. No sense holding a grudge. Trust me, she and Spencer are same team going forward. Um, big-time.”

“She just changed her mind, overnight...?”

“There’s no classy way to say it, so... yeah. She and Tori and I, um, blew him? In the lounge? In front of everybody...?”

“You *what*?!”

“How did we not hear this?!”

“Are you freaking kidding me?!”

Katrina shrugged, but there was the tiniest bit of smugness to it. The triplets got it. These other girls might not understand *why* they lived and breathed Spencer, but the social cache from sucking the man’s dick was undeniable. It was a shame they couldn’t

tell him what was going on. He was a sensitive soul. It would crush him to find out his good fortune was unearned, and perhaps to some, unwelcome.

They looked at Tori in her wind-up fucktoy costume. Maybe not so unwelcome. Maybe she'd just needed to marinate a while before getting back with the program. She was indeed back with it, though; someone pulled her string, and instantly she belted out an exuberant, "There's a *snake* in my puss!"

As for the triplets, they had his ex to thank for teaching them the beauty of sexual coupling enhanced by a chemical or two. Now that they'd found he was willing to domineer the outwardly haughty Hotties, they couldn't wait to get him alone. Just the four of them.

The dance concluded. There was an odd moment where Peyton demanded a solid fucking, only to institute some especially cruel take-backsies and swagger out with her girlfriend. Loyalty test or something, it looked like. The rest of the floor seemed to find it charming, though the triplets could only roll their eyes at love so feeble that it needed to be tested to be believed.

They took the opportunity to corner him when he was fleeing an entirely too guileless offer to follow Kyu-Ri back to her room and tag-team her with her roommate. ("That would be so spooky!" the international student said, leaving all to wonder who the hell had defined that little vocab word for her.)

"Hey, you three made it! That's awesome. You look... Yeah. You look nice."

His stutter was on account of what he perceived as their lack of costume, which they'd anticipated. "I'm dressed as Allison," said Maddison.

"I'm dressed as Maddison," said Allison.

"I'm dressed as Addison," said Addison.

"Ha! Now I get it. Yeah, that's a good one."

They frowned as if they didn't understand what joke he was making.

"Anywhoozle," he went on, "Are you three sticking around, or...?"

"We have places to be."

"Dorm parties are a little... yeah."

"Residence hall," he corrected. "But that's cool. I'm still glad you stopped in."

"We heard last night's party got pretty unhinged."

"Is that true?"

"Did you really let Tori and Casey and Katrina go down on you?"

"At the same time?"

"In the lounge?"

"In front of half the floor?"

"While they played with themselves?"

Spencer grimaced, tugging at his collar. "Um, yeah. I guess you could say it was... political? Not that it wasn't fun," he added quickly, seeing Tori frowning. She'd been

lurking in his shadow since they'd arrived. Bitch. "But you know how it's been around here lately. I guess we all wanted to, you know, move on."

"Sorry we missed it."

"So sorry."

"Maybe sometime soon you'll let some girls who didn't stage a bitter insurrection show them how it's done."

"She means us."

"In case that wasn't obvious."

They grinned in unison. "Kidding, obviously."

"Man, the look on your face."

"What kind of woman makes her apologies like that, anyway?"

They'd made sure their voices carried. Indeed, the brief exchange had drawn eyes. It wasn't the needle scratching the record in the jukebox quiet, but it was quieter.

"You have something you want to say to me?" snapped Tori, hands on hips.

"Let's see. Do you have something you want to say to us?" The sisters fanned out, one of them maneuvering behind Spencer as a screen and deftly giving Tori's string a sharp tug.

Tori frowned, mortified, but her eyes were suddenly riveted on Spencer. "You've got a fuck buddy in me!" Tori said, then clapped a hand over her mouth.

"I can't believe he settled for this slag."

"Embarrassing."

"I feel bad for him."

An oh-no-you-di-int vibe was spreading through the lounge in a susurrus. Spencer, triggered by his RA instincts, quickly spoke up, interposing himself between the triplets and Tori.

"That was rude. Tori and I made up, and if we can, so can you. How about everybody apologizes for the way they've been acting, and we go back to having a fun party, yeah?"

The triplets focused their eyes on Tori, who was giving a pleading look at Spencer. When he didn't bend, she turned her gaze on them with obvious resentment. "I'm sorry." That was it.

"We're sorry."

"Yeah, we're sorry you can only win your friends back after you stab them in the back by sucking their dick."

"Badly, from what I heard."

Spencer's eyes flared. "OK, that's enough, you three, with me, in the hall, *right now!*"

Tori stuck her tongue out at them of all the childish responses, but then she followed Spencer's ass as it herded the triplets out of the lounge in a decidedly un-childlike way.

"OK, I know you're upset with her, but I won't stand for bullying. Tori... She's going through a lot of stuff right now. She doesn't need the three of you trying to belittle her when she's already apologized and then some."

"We said we're sorry."

He snorted. "And then you said some other, less contrite, words."

"Fine. We didn't want to go to some dumb dorm party anyway."

"This guy, acting like *he'd* be the one doing *us* a favor *letting* us suck his cock."

"Come on, let's get going."

"Sorry I dragged you in there."

"Same. And this time I mean it."

They were ten steps down the hallway before they heard their RA's throat clear. Turning around, they saw him standing there in the hallway, his cock out and massively erect.

"Uh, what are you doing?"

"Yeah, are we supposed to swoon or something?"

"It's not even as big as I remembered it."

His expression soured by the utterance. "This is how Tori and Katrina showed they were ready to rejoin the community. Maybe it's how you need to prove you're part of this group, too."

"So, what, you want us to blow you...?" she said skeptically, fighting down her instinct to drop to her knees and crawl to him.

"So that, what, we can get invites to dorm programs...?" she said derisively, trying not to address that part of her brain that had been scoured clean and branded with the taste of the man's scrotum. She swallowed, lest he see her drool.

"You realize this is sexual harassment, right...?" she said, imagining him pounding that beast down her and her sisters' throats until they couldn't talk for a week.

Spencer didn't budge. "Your call, ladies. But what you just did in there was not acceptable. If you want to be a part of this community – not just live here, but to really be a part of things – then I won't have you looking down on your neighbors like that."

"Pff."

"Sure, OK."

"Yeah, whatever. Have fun with your slut army. Come on, we're out of here."

They strutted away – stopping the moment they rounded the corner to blitzkrieg rock paper scissors. On the fourth round, paper finally covered two rocks, and the owner of that flat hand hastily doubled back. Spencer was still zipping up his pants.

"Forget something...?"

She stopped in front of him and squatted. “What? You said you wanted it. So whip it out or don’t. It costs six tickets if you wanna stand there and stare.”

Spencer fidgeted, his bluster of moments ago already fading as she undid his doings. “Uh, what about your sisters?”

“They went on to the party. So what?” Her fingers worked quickly. God, there it was. His cock. The cock that had made a thief out of his ex-girlfriend, a pauper out of a modeling agent, and simultaneously made wanton sluts out of a governor, a diplomat and a rebel. The three sisters, however, were still that. His cock had only given them one more thing to bond over.

Spencer let her inhale his musk. It *had* to be pheromones. A cock didn’t just... smell good. Not on its own. She was almost panting. God, this floor was amazing. Staying had been their best decision ever.

“I don’t know, um...”

“Maddison,” she lied, maybe.

“Maddison. It’s just... I know you all... You know. Like me. In your own way.”

She took a lick. Perfection. “So?”

“I don’t know. I just... I don’t like the idea of coming between you. I don’t pretend to get your whole triplet bond thing, but I have a sister, too. Maybe we should just...”

The others, eavesdropping around the corner, were already on their way back. Crawling.

“Maybe we should just... what, Spencer?”

“Maybe we should put you between us.”

“See how it feels.”

“You can tell us how bad we’ve been.”

“*Show* us how bad we’ve been.”

“Punish us.”

“If you feel like we deserve it.”

“For telling that traitor she doesn’t know how to suck your dick right.”

“We know how.”

“We know.”

“We accept your punishment.”

One of them had opened the door to their room, and the other two were dragging him in behind them. Katrina’s selection of “Psycho Killer” was audible through the wall, as were the sounds of the rest of his harem singing along. Spencer looked around the room sheepishly, not quite ready to accept the hunger he’d awakened in them.

“Oh hey, is that the, ah, what do you call it, newspaper thingy from when you were born? Birth announcement, duh, yeah. I never noticed that. That’s cool.”

A pair of lips descended softly over the engorged dome of Spencer’s cock, and his distraction ended. A second pair met a third around the base of the shaft, and together

glided along the length of him until they came to rest against the first. Their tongues slid out, dancing together against the cock of the only man in the world they would never ever mind sharing. He moaned.

“You... you planned this, didn’t you. Somehow, you... oh god.”

None of them said a word. Their lips and tongues held together, swirling him into pleasure neither they nor he had ever known. Their tongues met over a dribble of precum, and there were no gaps between them at all.

END, PART SIX

Part Seven: The Alternate's Tale

"I mean, shit Nessa, that's why I didn't want you moving into my place. You're just not... Look, you're not ugly or anything, but I swear, it's like... dating... soggy... cardboard." Myles nodded, as satisfied with his simile as he was dissatisfied with his apparently now ex-girlfriend. "I just felt sorry for you."

"I'm sorry."

"I know you are. That's the problem. You're always sorry. Just..."

Vanessa watched Myles go. She was proud of herself for how well she handled it. She managed to gather up her clothes before she started to cry. It did make it harder to put them back on, though.

It was a long walk home on a frigid December night. Her only company were the contemplations of what Myles' "*Just...*" would have been if he'd thought she was worth finishing a thought for. Lots of cars zipped by, but that only made her more afraid. Too many times some jerk yelled something at her, or a car slowed so some boy inside could leer. She'd hoped Lakeview, a place of higher learning, would be better than it had been back home. It wasn't, though. The only difference seemed to be that the creeps were younger, and they had cars. She supposed that was an improvement from following along behind her on foot.

I don't even have a butt, she thought. That's what Myles had told her the first time she took her dress off in front of him. Their third date, way back in September. A "second back," he'd said. He'd apologized, said he was only teasing, and then he'd proven he liked it just fine. Or at least that he could pretend to.

Her coat was in Myles' car, though, back at the house party. Vanessa wrapped her arms around her thin top, trying to rub warmth back into her arms. Her phone buzzed after a few blocks. She hurriedly retrieved it, praying to see Myles' name on the caller ID. Even if only to give her a ride back to Higgins. She'd settle for Frannie. Frannie had a car. She might be willing to come get her. It was over a mile, and the sidewalks were slick with ice and slush from a nasty snow → melt → refreeze cycle. Vanessa had wanted to look cute, but her heels were proving to be a major mistake. *Another* major mistake.

It was her mom. She couldn't handle trying to hold her phone in this cold, not unless it was for a way to get out of it.

An hour later, her ankle bleeding from when she'd slipped and scraped it on the curb, Vanessa made the climb up to Higgins 3. A persistent, frigid winter breeze had done its part to halt her tears, though only when she was back in her room and inspected herself in the mirror did she see what had become of her makeup.

She slid open the selfie she'd taken with Myles when he'd come to pick her up, a few hours ago in that other lifetime. She'd looked so cute. Not cute enough, apparently.

There were always cuter girls out there. Girls with real butts and actual boobs, girls whose eyebrows matched their hair color, without dustings of ugly freckles. Girls who smiled by default instead of only when their boyfriend reminded them they weren't. Girls who were probably dancing with Myles at that party trying to console him because they'd heard about the breakup but didn't know he didn't need consoling. Girls whose blue lips and disheveled hair and streaked makeup didn't make them look like sad ugly clowns.

Vanessa took a long shower. The shower heads here always stung, little needles of hot water shooting into her skin. The chill in her bones only made it worse. Still, it was warm, and private, and she could cry as much as she wanted and let the water carry it all away.

Just...

You have the body of a twelve-year-old.

You never initiate, and you don't know how to do anything.

You're depressing to be around.

You're soggy cardboard.

I feel sorry for you.

No. That wasn't it.

I felt sorry for you.

There it was. Past tense. Myles was done feeling anything for her.

Back in her room, she put on her PJs and shut out the light. Frannie wouldn't be home for hours, probably. She had a fake ID, and so did her friends. Just as well that hadn't been her calling. She would have been too drunk to drive. Frannie would have had to feel bad to tell Vanessa she couldn't help her. So that was nice.

She got out her phone, and after staring at it for a few minutes, pressed the button to call back her mom. It wasn't too late yet back home.

"Hey honey! I was figuring I wouldn't hear back from you until tomorrow."

"No yeah, I got home early. I figured you'd still be up. I hope I didn't wake you."

"Oh, you did, but I don't care. Fell asleep watching the news and doing my Wordle. Have you done today's yet?"

Vanessa let herself smile. "You know I won't give you any hints, Mom."

"I wasn't asking for hints! I was only asking..." She grunted indignantly. "I still have a couple hours I guess. So, how was your party? Isn't it only 10 something there?"

"I, um... I..." There were those tears again. She probably looked so ugly, crying this hard, this easily. "Myles dumped me, Mom!"

For a few minutes, her mom did like moms did and talked her down, shushed her sobbing, told her she loved her, that she was so pretty and wonderful and Myles must be an idiot not to appreciate what he'd had.

Then, she did like most moms didn't. Like she always did. She opened softly, at least. "Did he say why, honey?"

"He... He wanted to..." Vanessa didn't need to finish the sentence, thankfully, because she didn't think she could have. "But I said no, I wasn't ready, and he got really mad, and he said I was too skinny and I'm soggy cardboard and he felt sorry for me, and...!"

"Soggy cardboard...?"

"That's what he said," whimpered Vanessa.

Her mother's second reaction to her blubbering was more on brand. "Oh honey. Maybe doordash yourself some ice cream, huh? It'll make you feel better, *and* maybe it'll help you pack on a few pounds so the next boy won't have anything to complain about. Put it on the credit card, my treat."

"Mom!" Her retort stopped there. It would have only been the same old thing.

I told you, nothing I do helps me gain weight, Mom.

I just want to look like I went through puberty, Mom.

You know Dr. Djuricko said empty calories aren't the way to go, Mom.

I know lots of girls would be jealous, but I'm not, Mom!

"Sorry, forget I said anything," Mom said, as if she'd just gone through the same mental exercise. "Not like you ever listen anyway."

"Mom, do *I* really have to be the one comforting *you* right now?"

"Well what do you want me to say, honey? I'm proud of you for being a good girl. I am! You know I am."

"But."

"But, you can't expect a man to feel the same way. These college boys, they're looking for adventure! Something wild and carefree and exciting. Girls go to college looking for a husband, but boys don't start looking for a wife until they're on their way out."

"So you're saying, what, I should have let him...?"

"Did I say that? No, I did not. You know, I do not like this attitude, young lady. If this is what you've been showing Myles, then small wonder he walked away."

"Mom, it's not even just about getting dumped. He was going to let me move in with him in January! Now I have to stay in the dorms, which I can barely afford, if I can even keep my spot here now that I applied to move out. I *hate* it here. A year and a half of being here where there's always people, always. You're never ever alone." She didn't want to say it, but she was certain her RA Mason could hear her in the next room right through the shared wall, too. Which was why she didn't want to say it.

"Socialization is good for you. You let people walk all over you, sweetie! You always have. Being around people will help you stop being so shy all the time. You'll

meet a new boy before you know it, and if he's no Myles, I'm sure he'll still be perfectly nice, because you're perfectly perfect."

But Vanessa heard more of the first part of the assessment than the second. "I, um, thanks? But yeah, Frannie's home, so, yeah, I need to go."

"Good night, honey. I love you. S—"

Say hi to Myles for me. That had been what she'd been going to say.

"Mhm, love you, too."

Mason stopped by oh so casually the next morning, rapping at the door even as her knocks swung it open. Vanessa would never ever leave it open like that if she had her way. Frannie was social, though. Half the floor was friends with her, so she always left the door open – though with her hangover, only a crack that day.

After a brief exchange of howdies, her roommate made an excuse to bolt. She didn't like the RA. Not because of any particular incident, but Frannie broke rules and she had a broad dislike of snitches. Vanessa never broke rules, but she wasn't a snitch, so they got along OK.

"Hi."

"Hey, Nessa." Vanessa hated being called Nessa. It made her think of the Loch Ness Monster. Myles had asked her before he kissed her at the end of their first date if anybody called her that, but he'd misconstrued her answer and walked away thinking he'd come up with a special name for her only he used. She hadn't want to disappoint him, so she'd let him keep using it.

"Hi."

"So, now that it's just us then, I'ma come clean. I heard you last night, talking to your mama. First, I'm so sorry about Myles. Never liked that one. He's the type, you know what I mean?"

Vanessa didn't know anything about types. She'd had one boyfriend in her life, briefly, and she'd obviously not figured out how to appeal to his. There was an art to talking to people naturally, comfortably, and Vanessa's artistry was the equivalent of a toddler scratching the wall with a Sharpie. One time at high school the boy she'd gone to the dance with told her he was tired of trying to make her talk and left the dance early. He hadn't even had a ride, just walked home in his dress shoes, just to get out of spending time with her. She'd been thinking of him last night. He probably hadn't thought about her in years.

"Yeah."

"So first, don't worry, I'm sure they'll let you stay here next semester. If you want, I'll walk down to the housing office with you, help you find the right one to talk to. OK?"

Vanessa had applied to cancel her housing contract online. She'd had the page linking to all the housing forms bookmarked for weeks while she'd waited for Myles to decide if he'd really let her move in, and had clicked on it every night before bed to

daydream about filling it out. She knew full well there was a link to email about questions, concerns and alterations. She'd been sulking about it last night, but it would probably take all of thirty seconds of clicking and typing to rectify.

"OK."

"And I heard your mama talking about you needing to be more confident," Mason continued in a comforting tone. Vanessa felt incredibly uncomfortable that her mother was audible across the miles and then right through the walls. "I lie there thinking about it, and you know what? I think she's onto something."

"Oh." Oh.

"You know what I think? I think you should apply to be an RA. Think about it! Nothing builds up confidence like having to wade into a screaming match between two high school besties about the one stealing they's curling iron so now they ready to throw the fuck down. You could be such a badass, Nessa girl!"

Vanessa had several thoughts as she listened to this terrible idea unfold. First, that it was a terrible idea. She didn't even really understand what her RA did other than show movies and order pizza and write people up for stuff. Maybe that was all she did. Second, that her RA's phone conversations were also audible through the wall. Vanessa had heard her complaining to someone, probably another RA, about an edict handed down by their boss, that lady with the pretty accent she'd met once or twice when picking up her mail at the center desk. (Ms... Tinsley? That sounded right. Vanessa was bad with names, but at least nobody wanted to interact with her so much they wound up noticing.) According to her own unavoidable eavesdropping, the RAs all had to get at least one resident to apply to be an RA. There hadn't been enough applicants the year before, so this would fix that. Apparently Mason thought Vanessa would be easy to pressure into applying so she could check it off her list.

Third, that she would rather die than be forced to get into the middle of a screaming match between two people she didn't even know. It sounded absolutely terrifying.

"Oh. Um, no thanks."

"Come on, just apply! Even just making a case for why you should be the next best thing to yours truly might make you feel more like the warrior queen inside."

Vanessa felt validated in her cynical assessments of her merits. She also didn't know how to say no to someone she'd just said no to without feeling like she was yelling at someone.

"OK."

"Vanessa Steger. Steger? Steeger?"

“Steger,” she said softly. She didn’t like correcting people, but he’d asked. Most people just mispronounced it and moved on.

“Great. Thanks for coming in today. I’m John, and you can call me John.” He laughed. She imitated his laugh. “This is Gauri.”

The young woman extended an arm. She had dark skin, but there were darker patterns on it. Henna, she thought it was called. Mason had bullied her into going into a program where they were doing that, but she’d snuck out before anybody did it to her. Nobody noticed.

She accepted the offered hand, and the woman gave it a little shake. “Hi, Vanessa.” Vanessa knew she was supposed to use a little pressure from the speech class they’d made her take in high school, but like in speech class, she was too terrified to remember to do the things they’d told her to do.

“Hi.”

“And this is Spencer.”

The young man – handsome, with kind eyes; Myles had had kind eyes, she’d thought once – extended a hand as well. “Nice to meet you, Vanessa.” She shook his, too, but he suddenly wrenched his arm like she’d shocked him. “Dang, watch out for the grip strength on this one.”

They laughed. Vanessa laughed. He was teasing her, which she usually hated, but he’d somehow done it without hurting her feelings. Like dang, what a weak grip you have, but it’s cool that you do it that way.

John resumed speaking. “Gauri and Spencer are both current RAs. Gauri’s up in Penderdast, and Spencer works for me down in Rowland.”

“I thought you told me I worked for the betterment of mankind, John.”

“You’ll thank me later for lying to you. The betterment of mankind pays even worse than we do.” John winced, but playfully. “Which I probably shouldn’t joke about during a job interview. I’m sorry. Where were we?”

Gauri rolled her eyes. “Sorry, Vanessa. This is our seventh interview this afternoon. We were much more charming in the first couple.”

“Most of us, anyway.” John eyed Spencer askance, but they each cracked a smile. He had a very attractive smile. “Anyway, we’re just gonna ask you some questions, and you can ask these two some questions, and then we all finally get to go home. You’re our last of the day.”

He was joking about how bad he wanted to get out of there. Wasn’t he? But Gauri had said they’d been doing this for hours. They probably had a million candidates. No way she was going to get this job. They must interview everybody, even people like her who had no chance.

“Why don’t you start by just telling us about yourself, and why you decided to apply to be an RA?”

Probably best to keep it short, then.

“I’m Vanessa, and I’m a sophomore, majoring in environmental science. I’m from Tennessee. I applied because my RA said I should.”

The three of them shared a look. That was probably a really stupid answer. She didn’t want to lie though. If she tried to pretend she liked people and wanted to be a “leader” or something, they’d see right through her, and then she’d be a girl with bad answers *and* a liar. Not that she was going to get the job anyway, but she didn’t want to fail on purpose.

“Right, straight and to the point. I like that. Now Gauri, do you want to, or should we just yield to Spencer and let him get his little question in?”

Gauri laughed and deferred to the boy RA. Spencer. She’d never met a boy named Spencer before. What a nice name. “It’s a good question!” he insisted.

“You like to ask it, you mean,” said John.

Spencer waved it off. “OK. Vanessa. My question, and there will be a followup—”

Gauri laughed. “Followup this time?”

“—is this: If we asked your friends to describe you as any sort of animal, what would they tell us, and why?”

Vanessa felt her heart racing. This wasn’t one of the questions she’d read they would ask in an interview. None of her other jobs had ever had an interview. They just figured she had two eyes, ears and hands and could figure out how to work the grill. Interviews were supposed to ask about strengths and weaknesses, past experience, a hypothetical to assess your attitude or work ethic.

An animal? What would her friends say?

“I don’t really have any friends here.” They would tell her to answer honestly, if she did, so she did. “I did, but one graduated and another transferred to another school closer to home.”

The girl looked plainly disturbed. John made a face like she’d just told him she was a three-legged possum or something. God, this was why she never talked to people. They made you feel stupid because you didn’t have something clever to say. Vanessa wasn’t stupid. She just wasn’t clever.

Spencer chuckled, though, and she clung to that like a baby bird in a hurricane. “I’m a fifth year senior, so I totally feel you. The worst, right? So how about you? How would *you* describe yourself? What animal, and why?”

Vanessa felt her cheeks burning. He was too handsome. She didn’t deserve that smile. It made her talk without thinking about what she was saying. “A swan. A baby swan. Because I feel – um, sometimes – like I’m weak, and helpless, and ugly, but, um, I’m not. And I know that I’m growing, and I’m only going to get better.”

A beautiful smile touched the boy’s lips. He loved her answer, she could tell. She couldn’t even remember what she’d said. It had just come out, spilling out of her into

those eyes. “That is hands down the best answer to that question we’ve heard yet. I know all I need to know. Hire this woman.”

“I’m just waiting to hear the followup,” Gauri muttered. Plainly the answer hadn’t impressed her. Had she really said swan? What? Vanessa Steger, a *swan*? Swine was more like it.

“Followup, Swan: What do you think of my question? Be honest.”

I love you. “I love it.”

It was the end of the portion of the interview in which she wasn’t transparently bombing with all three of her appraisers. They really liked pitching scenarios to her and asking how she’d respond – roommates fighting, cyberbullying, what sort of program she’d do to help new students make friends. Most of her answers were some variety on asking someone who knew what to do what she should do.

It was short at least. They’d probably appreciated that. Then John had asked if she had any questions, which she didn’t. He did a spiel about remuneration that sounded both rehearsed and rushed. Vanessa already knew that anyway. Full room and board and a small monthly stipend. It was the best paying job on campus by far, as she’d said when Gauri asked her to say what she looked forward to about the position. It was the only reason she hadn’t let herself chicken out of this interview. Her big sister Ellen had graduated last year and was constantly complaining about her loans. Vanessa had started looking at the math on it, and started imagining what grad school would do to that. She couldn’t get the job, but the compound interest formula wasn’t lying about how good it would be if some mistake in the paperwork let her land it.

Spencer. Oof. She was still sitting near the little meeting room in the student union where that disaster of an interview had taken place, texting Mom to tell her how it had gone, when her interviewers exited the room. They each saw her, smiled in acknowledgment, and promptly went on about forgetting her forever. Now that she could see him standing up, he was even cuter. He worked out, for sure. Then he walked over to this absurdly pretty Latina girl who’d been evidently waiting for him in a little sitting area. She pulled him right down into a kiss so hot it was almost scandalous.

Of course he was with someone like that. She probably had sex with him every week, not make him feel bad when he touched her because she wasn’t sure if she was getting turned on or having a panic attack or both. It was fun to fantasize, though. Vanessa had spent a lot of time trying to look pretty for the interview, so it wasn’t even *that* silly to imagine he’d give someone like her a second glance.

Gauri wandered off quickly enough, but John had bumped into someone he knew, too. An older man, gray and wiry, whose posture clearly communicated he was above John. They were standing there talking in the direction she needed to start going, unless she wanted to sit here trying not to notice Spencer making out with that hot girl.

Vanessa tried to squeeze by surreptitiously, something she was usually pretty good at. For the second time in half an hour, however, she failed, with John as a witness to both.

“Whoops, excuse us,” said John, stepping aside. “Vanessa here just interviewed with us for an RA position, Bob.”

“Ah, nice.” Bob glanced at her like he didn’t want to have to waste time glancing at her, much less having to learn her name. Only then he looked back again, and smiled. Sometimes it took a moment for people to remember their manners. “Very nice. How’d she do, John?”

“Oh you should ask Spencer – he was sold on her after the first question.” John smiled politely. That was nice of him.

The man, Bob, turned to where Spencer and the girl were now merely talking, though only inches apart. They were a ways away, so he had to raise his voice. “Hey Spencer, how’d she do?” He sounded like someone very comfortable shouting to be heard.

Spencer looked over, smiled, and yelled back “She’s a swan!” Right in front of his girlfriend. That wasn’t very nice of him, but Vanessa would forgive him in an instant if he’d agree to exchange the courtesy of forgetting they’d ever met.

Five weeks later, after nearly breaking into tears during a second interview – a group one this time, where they made her work in a *team* with *other applicants* in what might have been the most uncomfortable morning of her entire life – Vanessa received an email informing her that she had not gotten the job.

She wept with relief.

“Oh, honey, tell me you’re not going to Sunday brunch in *that*,” her mother said, frowning through her reflection in the mirror as she adjusted her pearls. Fake, Vanessa knew. She’d heard her father making the case to sell them so they could afford to renovate Ellen’s old bedroom, so he could have a man cave. A second story cave seemed ill-considered to her.

“What’s wrong with this?” Vanessa asked, inspecting herself. She liked this dress. It was blue, pale blue. Her favorite color. She wasn’t about to go trying to show the cleavage she didn’t have in front of Nana, so what was the matter?

“It makes you look like you’re still in middle school is what’s wrong with it. It’s three sizes too big for you at least! Go change into something that actually fits.”

“I’m going to grow into it,” Vanessa argued. “I’ve already put on four pounds this summer.”

“I put on four pounds on that meatloaf last night,” said her dad as he fidgeted with his tie. He always wore it too short, and always took too long tying it. “I thought college girls were supposed to put on fifteen, something like that?”

“That’s during their first year, dear, the ‘freshman fifteen. But maybe the third year will be the charm for her.”

Vanessa had lost six pounds back during her freshman year. She hated the food at the Penderdast food court. It was so processed and unhealthy. Six different national cuisines serving the same batter-fried chickens in different sauces. Then she’d had to go to the hospital when one of her ovaries had gotten inflamed and had nearly ruptured, which Dr. Djuricko had said her being underweight and malnourished had contributed to. Which her dad knew, because he was still complaining about the medical bill because their HMO had decided that her moving out of state for school put Dr. Djuricko out of her network. Their lawyer was still fighting it, which was another bill frequently brought up at dinner.

“I’m trying, Dad.”

She was. Sophomore year, she’d only lost two.

“Yeah, well, do what your mother asks. We only get the chance to see her mother day-drunk on champagne four times a month usually, so let’s be grateful to some dead Romans for gifting us this fifth opportunity this month.”

Vanessa didn’t argue. She knew why they were sucking up to Nana, and knew that someday she’d probably be the beneficiary of enough money to pay a chunk of her loans. Probably. Unless Nana changed her mind. She used to be mortified by the obsequiousness of her parents, but she was beginning to comprehend what the money would mean for them. Vanessa might only throw away half her thirties paying down loans instead of all of them. So she marched to her room, considering herself noble for this gift to her distant future self. It was better than feeling like a con artist, working on her own family.

Vanessa spread the dress out smoothly on her bed. She could change back into this after brunch, maybe go to the library and read by that new fountain they’d installed while she was away. It was too hot out, though. She’d burn. Oh well. Maybe she could just wear it around the house later. It was so pretty, though probably more so than she had business wearing.

She was standing in her underwear looking at her reflection, trying to imagine where those pounds would go and how she might look with them, when the phone rang.

HIGGINS CENTER DESK, read the caller ID. What on earth? She knew why the number was in there, so if she got locked out of her room and couldn’t find Mason to help let her in, she could get one of the other RAs to come do it. That was it. Why in the world would they be calling her in the middle of July? Or, like, ever?

She answered, braced for it to be some new sophisticated scam where a random number from her contact list tried to warn her of an expired warranty on a car. Nana would have to die awfully soon for her to think she might get a car before she finished grad school.

“Hello?”

“Hi. Vanessa Steger?” Vanessa remembered that voice, the accent.

“This is.”

“Good morning, Vanessa. This is Ramona Tinsley, the hall manager of Higgins Hall at Lakeview. How are you doing today?”

“I’m well.” She set down the much tighter though no more alluring dress she’d been dreading wearing. Her mother had bought it for her, and insisted it made Vanessa look incredible and that it was melodramatic to complain she couldn’t breathe in it and that being able to fit in such a pretty thing at all was proof Dr. Djuricko didn’t know what he was talking about.

“Good, good. Look, I realize it’s the weekend so I apologize for bothering you, but, well, I’ve found myself in a bit of a predicament here. It’s time-sensitive. I was hoping you could help me out.”

“Me? Why me?” Vanessa turned away from the mirror. It felt creepy talking to a stranger while she could see herself in her bra and underwear. Only now she could feel invisible eyes on her flat bottom, which didn’t feel any better.

“How would you like to be an RA?”

Vanessa dropped her phone. Not in excitement. Girls dropped their phones when they got calls that their auditions had succeeded on reality shows. They were excited. Vanessa was not excited. It was like her brain decided all the months of anxiety she’d skipped over by not getting the job needed to be inflicted on her in a second. The woman must have taken her squeak of surprise and embarrassment, along with the thud in her ear from the phone bouncing off her footboard, to make the other assumption though, because she laughed.

“Careful, Vanessa, we’re not liable to replace your phone until you accept!”

Vanessa shoved the phone back against her ear. “I’m so sorry. Did you say... RA? That doesn’t make any sense.”

“Sorry to ambush you with it like that, truly. I don’t know how else to get to it, though. Are you all right? Is your phone?”

The screen had cracked. Not too badly, she hoped. If it was broken, she might be better off if this had been a scammer and she’d just kept working at Wendy’s next year. Maybe she should anyway.

“It’s fine.”

“Good, good. So, to give you a little more information, I found out yesterday that I’m losing three of my five RAs for next school year. Fun Friday night update, right?”

Anyway, we had a million and a half applicants this year – long story – and so I reached out to the head office and said, ‘who do you got for me? Don’t make me read all those alternate files, just tell me who our best applicants are.’”

Who had they been? Why would they all decline the offer until this woman had no choice but to reach out to Vanessa?

But the woman kept on making no sense. “Your name was one of the top names they gave me. One of the only names, in fact, which I can only take to mean they think I’d be stupid not to offer it to you. So here I am!” The woman made a noise. “Sorry, and I should probably give details so you know what I’m offering and not just what I’m asking.”

Mrs. Tinsley reiterated a lot of what John had told Vanessa in her interview. Higgins 2. Private room. That was all she’d needed to say, really. “I was on Higgins 3 last year. I, um, don’t suppose...?” She cut herself short. If the woman wanted her on Higgins 3, she’d have said so.

“Really? You were one of mine? Oh, right! I remember you, with the freckles.”

“You remember me?” That was surprising. She was usually pretty good at being forgettable. It would be nice to be remembered for something other than the stupid freckles, though. Oh well.

“I try to get to know as many residents as I can. But anyway, I unfortunately can’t give you Higgins 3. If it’s important to you, I can give you any other floor you want, but that one’s the coed floor, thematic community, and one of the RA’s they let me keep already has it. Just please say yes. I need you!”

The woman was doing a good job of making her professional irritation sound like sincere pleading, Vanessa decided. Still, “Why me, though? I did horrible in my interviews, and they said they weren’t considering me.”

A moment’s pause, the tapping of keys. “Hmm. No, I’m looking at a copy of the email. It says you were offered a position on the alternate list. Now, I don’t see a response from you accepting alternate status, so maybe that’s why...? I don’t know.”

“Vanessa, honey, we’re waiting! You know Nana doesn’t like it when we’re late!”

“Good call making her change three minutes before we needed to be in the car,” she heard her dad grumbling downstairs.

Vanessa was certain she hadn’t been offered a position as an alternate. Because it was common for RAs to have stuff come up and bow out, they kept a list of people who were good enough for a position but they didn’t quite have room for. Spencer, that amazing boy from the interview, had compared it to having people on the bench in sports. She remembered that guy, John, explaining that alternate status was something that could happen, and she remembered that it hadn’t. That email had remained in her inbox ever since arriving. It was at times a rebuke of how her shyness ruined

opportunities for her, and at times a source of relief that she'd dodged the frightful sounding job.

"Pleeease, Vanessa. Higgins needs you!"

Her door swung open a few moments later while she was still staring through the wall reliving the dread she'd felt at the prospect of having to respond to those scenarios in those interviews. Then she realized she was in her underwear and dove for cover. It didn't seem to bother her dad, though. He didn't permit locked doors in his house. When things like this happened and she complained, he told her if she didn't like it, she was free to buy her own house and lock whatever she wanted.

He was also a fan of blaming her for it, which he presently did. "Damnit, Vanessa, a girl your age ought to know better than to sit around looking like that when we have places to be! Tell your friend you have places to be, and let's get to them, yeah?"

Normally she would never take such a long time changing. Bad judgment. The door had been closed, though. Why did they have to hire her? Her muscles remained frozen in place.

"It's not a friend. It's someone from Lakeview."

"I'm sorry, that didn't sound like 'I'll be ready in a minute, Dad,'" he griped.

"Can you please just go? I'm on the phone!" she whined, hoping her thumb was blocking the noise from reaching Mrs. Tinsley. Wishing she had a super-thumb that would block her from her dad's jerk intrusions.

"Well hurry up and get dressed. We'll be in the car."

"Dad!" Great. Now Mrs. Tinsley knew she was undressed. The feeling of eyes on her magnified. They were squinting at her, now.

A private room.

She lifted the phone to her lips again. "Higgins 2 sounds great. I accept."

"Whoof, you're a lifesaver, Vanessa! I'll email you everything you need to know. I can't wait to see you again in a couple weeks."

"Um, yeah."

Vanessa hastily put on the other dress and ran down to the garage. The car was backing out before she had her seatbelt on.

Her mom was inspecting her hair in the side view mirror. "Your father said you were late because you were on the phone...? Who were you talking to, honey?"

"Someone from Lakeview."

"Yeah?"

"They offered me a job. As an RA."

Dad barked a laugh that was much too loud for the small car. "Don't RAs have to break up fights and bust parties and stuff? You sure it wasn't a wrong number?"

"No."

He laughed again, quieter, as Mom pointed out, “You didn’t tell us you applied to be an RA.”

“I didn’t think I’d get it.”

Her mom’s hand reached back and patted her daughter on the knee. “Well see? That’s what you get for not being more confident. We’re proud of you, sweetie.”

“Thanks.”

“I think if we have to do one more diversity training session, I’m gonna hate crime her. Don’t get me wrong, Ramona’s a chill boss, but...” Carmen’s cheeks puffed out as she forced out an exasperated breath. “Straight up hate crime her. You watch me.”

Carmen was a breath of fresh hair. She filled so much *space*. Tiny though she was, no bigger than Vanessa despite the steady diet of breaded breading with a side of bread they kept feeding the staff during RA training, she was a conversational giant. She never ran out of things to say. It was welcome not only because Vanessa generally liked her, but also because it was fewer opportunities for someone to force Vanessa to speak. RA training had been over a week of non-stop talking, and it wasn’t over. Some of the buildings had dozens of RAs to do all that talking. Higgins had six. Ramona did her best not to let sessions stagnate, but six people could only comment so much. (Except for Carmen.)

“Look, Carmen, the white folks need to demonstrate their guilt complexes so we can all go on woking it up in peace and harmony.” Vickie gritted her teeth, glowering between her colleagues on the opposite side of the Higgins staff’s table at the food court. People who so happened to mostly be white.

Then she cracked a grin. “Damn, you guys need to lighten up. I’m kidding.”

Vickie made Vanessa nervous. But in a good way, she thought. She was funny. Witty. Edgy, as her latest foray into racial prankery on the mostly white Higgins staff aptly demonstrated.

Vanessa had never given much thought to social justice prior to this past week. She didn’t think about society much in general. That was part of why she was studying environmental science, because it would hopefully take her far, far away from people. It was interesting, though, thinking of her new job as trying to actually help people, contemplating the way people’s words and actions and biases impacted interactions. Even so, she was right there with Carmen. There was such a thing as beating a dead horse.

Vickie had seemed even less interested in such matters than the white people or even Carmen, though. Vanessa wasn’t sure what to make of that. She’d never had a black friend. Her high school graduating class had been just over five hundred students with

just three of them black, neither of whom numbered among the two who were friends with Vanessa. Not that Vickie was a potential friend. Vickie was *cool*. She said things that sounded like quotes but weren't. The closest Vanessa had come to being quotable had been confessing what a loser she was during a job interview.

Savannah overcame her discomfort first, offering a laugh. "You shouldn't joke like that, Vickie. You know how sensitive we are." She elbowed the people on either side of her, Spencer and Vanessa. "Right, fellow white people?"

Savannah was the most terrifying woman Vanessa had ever met. She'd never been one for fighting over boys, having never met one she found interesting enough to contemplate shedding her cowardice over. Until Spencer, anyway. That only made Savannah the more intimidating. Looks aside—

No. There was no putting those looks aside. Rather, in addition to those looks, she was also gracious, charming, patient, a good listener, and gave freely of her kindness. She'd practically dragged Vanessa to their girls' nights, sneaking out after hours at training to grab drinks. Carmen wasn't twenty-one yet, which meant there was all that extra space where Vickie and Janis and Savannah looked to her to say things.

She'd followed Vanessa into the ladies room two nights back, sitting in the stall next to her and speaking just loudly enough to be heard over the music. She said, unprompted, that she knew Vanessa didn't like being the center of attention, but that it meant a lot to her that she was stepping outside of her comfort zone to help make their team feel like such a tight group. That she'd been nervous taking on a leadership position, too, and that any time Vanessa felt overwhelmed or alone or wanted to vent, she'd be there. That even though they'd only known each other for a couple weeks, and only because of random chance of hiring and placement, she felt like Vanessa was a friend. And she hoped saying it through the stall so there was no need for eye contact made all that sappy stuff easier to hear.

Which it did. Holy *shit*, it did. After their two sessions on LGBTQIA+ issues and concerns, one half an hour and one a full, Vanessa had felt some biases she hadn't realized she'd harbored melting off of her. Savannah Gray was a dangerous woman to befriend over drinks and country dancing when one was in the midst of learning acceptance of alternative sexualities.

In a gulp, Spencer downed the dinky little orange juice container that came with the tightly budgeted RA staff breakfast. He elbowed Savannah back. "Ha! This will be fun fodder for conversation during this afternoon's white guilt reinforcement training."

Spencer was an improvement on perfection. Spencer was equal parts deliciousness and mirth, dumped in a blender and spiked with warmth and a tangy aftertaste of total obliviousness. If Savannah was dangerous, Spencer personified armageddon.

Vickie eyed that exchange of elbows subtly, but Vanessa was perceptive. She might not speak much, but she watched people closely. It was a coping mechanism for having to be around them so much. Spencer was single, he'd shared. Evidently things hadn't worked out with that one girl she'd seen him with at their interview in the spring, that good kisser chick. Vickie had been eyeballing him ever since he'd shared it. Girls night had featured a lot of discussion of Spencer. It was embarrassing, talking about how cute he was. It came so close to revealing her stupid pointless crush. Maybe Vickie felt the same way. Then again, if Vickie wanted him, all she had to do was take him. That was what girls like Vickie did.

Not as in people of color! she chided herself mentally at the stray thought. *Cool hot people, that's all.* Maybe she needed more diversity training after all.

Janis, however, nodded seriously at Spencer's joke. "Right? We've talked and talked and *tawked* about minorities and women and the handicapable and every non-Christian religion ever invented. Doesn't it seem weird that we're not talking about the actual majority of our residents?"

Janis was the absolute worst. Over drinks, she had let slip that like Vanessa, she'd been sent a rejection email by mistake and had been intended to be offered a position as an alternate. Unlike Vanessa, she thought the mistake was the original email and not the one that had wound up in the file sent to Ramona when she'd needed to fill Higgins' three sudden vacancies. (Carmen had filled the third, but she actually had been an alternate, no paperwork glitches.)

That the candidacy of someone as repellent as Janis had been resurrected from the ashes of rejection only confirmed what Vanessa had presumed. Someone in the Lakeview Housing Office was playing a really mean joke on Ramona, dumping the two of them in her lap.

Breakfast went about itself. Janis complained, Vickie mocked her so subtly she didn't notice, Spencer said something to make peace between them, Savannah said something in support of peace in general. Carmen filled the rest of the space. They really were a great team. At Wendy's she'd barely known her coworkers' names. As an RA, she'd been in their homes, gone out to drinks with them, given and received advice. She'd been hugged – and sometimes by the most dauntingly incredible boy she'd ever met.

So long as her residents didn't show up Wednesday, Vanessa thought she might like this job.

It was soon time to get back to Higgins for yet another training session. She found the whole affair less tedious than the others seemed to, though probably only because she had so much more to learn about leadership and rules infractions and communication and confidence. She wished she could take notes, but nobody else was taking notes.

That was a thing she'd learned on her own about people. Don't be the only one in the room taking notes.

The Higgins RA staff emerged from Penderdast as a team. It was only 9 AM but it was already hot outside, but their own small residence hall beckoned from right across the street. That was why she'd requested to live in Higgins as a freshman, why she'd stayed as a sophomore, why she was glad it was where she'd gotten a job as an RA. Fewer than 200 residents, the smallest hall on campus. Janis grumbled something about how Vickie was so lucky she couldn't sunburn. As they departed, though, Spencer fell in beside her.

"Hey Vanessa."

"Um, hey. Spencer." She smiled. A baby swan, she'd called herself when they'd first met. (He hadn't remembered her interview, though he'd apologized for the lapse. Embarrassing, yes, but all the better considering how terribly it had gone. She was still sad he'd forgotten the swan, though.)

As for Spencer, he was a golden retriever puppy, through and through.

His pace slackened, she noticed. The others were pulling ahead fast, hurrying out of the humidity and the heat. It was a couple minutes walk as a stroll, but Spencer's casual gait would double that. Fine by her. He was the best part of training. Vanessa slowed, folding her arms behind her back. No breasts to speak of to catch his eye, but she could at least make it harder for him to notice her absentee butt.

"Hey, I wanted to talk to you about last night, if that's OK?"

Vanessa's blood froze. How had he find out? She'd never done that, *touched* herself like that, in her entire life. Vanessa wasn't stupid, she knew what masturbation was. Myles used to make her watch pornography of other girls doing that with him, he said to help put them both in the mood. It never had, not for her, but she'd been glad at the time to try to make him happy.

Soggy cardboard. His words suddenly bounced around her head and she heard herself wheeze in sudden panic.

"Are you OK?" he asked, smiling, as she literally stumbled over the figurative fear that Spencer would find out how bad she was at being a girl. She'd nearly tripped in the middle of the street. He would rescue her, though. He talked about being an RA like he woke up first thing in the morning to think about how he could make Higgins a better place to live. He was *so good*.

Working with Spencer... *That* put her in the mood. It wasn't only his looks. It was everything about him. It was so sappy it wasn't even cliché, but he was... dreamy. She literally dreamt about him – but alone, by herself, in her own private room, with no witnesses.

So how had he found out she'd been fucking herself with his water bottle?!

She hadn't meant to. It was creepy as hell, she knew. Perverted. Disgusting. Whorish. Vickie had been making a crude joke about blowjobs to make fun of Bob, the housing director who was always trying to foist off handfuls of condoms on everybody. Spencer had joined in. He didn't worry about the sort of immature "no homo" posturing so many boys Vanessa had known did. It was funny when Vickie did it, and it was funny when he joined in.

Only, for reasons she hadn't fully understood, she'd swiped the plastic bottle he'd fellated and taken it back to her room. The idea that his mouth had been there, on the thing she was putting inside herself... It made her so *horny*, even if she knew it was totally illogical. She'd felt like such a freak doing it, but that image, his mouth sucking and licking...

Myles had never shown her porn where guys put their mouths on girls down there, but she'd heard of it. That thought – plus the slender-necked bottle stretching out her virgin pussy – had given her the first orgasm of her life. She'd thought she'd had them before, but those had been nothing. She was embarrassed to think she'd let Myles fool her into thinking she'd come with him.

The bottle had proceeded to give Vanessa her second through fifth. Then she'd noticed she was bleeding, and she'd had to rush around gathering cleaning supplies before it seeped into the mattress. She'd already done her RCR with Ramona when she moved in. That would be mortifying to explain at checkout next June. Or however long she lasted.

Spencer was waiting for a response. Her near-death stumble in front of traffic had never really registered, still gripped with horror that he had somehow found out her nasty dirty secret.

"I... I... I'm sorry! I'm so sorry!"

A couple dozen paces ahead, Savannah turned back. Vanessa must have looked a sight, because concern immediately touched those sculpted features. Spencer was suddenly in front of her, waving the others ahead behind his back. Vanessa wanted to throw up. Pass out. Die. Oh no. She was such a deviant. She'd known she was weird for not being as interested in guys as her friends. Finally she met a guy she really liked, and she turned into a freaky deaky freakoid overnight. Oh no.

Spencer put his hands on her shoulders and squeezed. It kept her upright even as it threatened to melt the ice in her knees. "Hey! Hey, whoa there. Are you...? Vanessa, whoa. Whoa whoa, hey, it's OK, it's OK, just—"

Did she faint? Had he simply swept her up in his arms? Either way, she was vaguely conscious of being carried, hefted effortlessly in strong male arms and whisked over to one of the benches at the Penderdast bus stop. Shade. That was nice of him. There had been a closer bench in the sun, but he'd gone the extra few steps and put her under the canopied one. Such a nice man. Such a nice bottle.

Oh no.

For a few minutes there was nothing to do but let him hold her hand and fan her with the bottom of his shirt. He was speaking, but today's panic attack seemed to have decided to deafen her on top of the paralysis. Finally, she began to breathe, consciously breathe, and her brain began to work again.

"Hey, there she is." Spencer was above her. She was on her back? He was smiling. What a smile. He'd put his hand on her! What hands. "That's it, keep breathing. You're doing great."

"T-training," she said.

"Training?"

"We'll be late."

His smile widened. Good teeth. She really liked nice teeth on a man. He was so beautiful. "We're already late. It's fine. I texted Ramona and told her we needed a minute."

Vanessa tried to sit up, but a firm hand on her shoulder held her down. "No, I have to...! She'll be so disappointed. I'll get fired."

"You won't, and she won't, and I didn't tell her why. She doesn't have to know about the panic attack. We'll tell her... I don't know. Tell her we forgot our binders at the food court, but they'd locked up on our heels so we had to go banging on doors and yadda yadda. OK?"

Vanessa smiled. That was smart. She was such a bad liar that she never dared try. Her voice was so quiet sometimes people accused her of lying even though she wasn't. "OK."

He gave her another minute coming out of it. It wasn't easy, knowing he was only waiting to call her out. It was humiliating. Would he think it was... hot? Some boys had told her she was pretty, before they tried to talk to her and lost interest. Maybe he would be flattered.

Oh, who was she kidding. Maybe she could quit and drop out of school so she'd never have to face him again.

"I can explain," she said finally. "I, um, I got so worked up, and you were so..." Vanessa shuddered.

"Hey. That's nonsense, OK? That's why we practice, so when it's time to do it for real, we have a sense of how to go about it. It's fake and all, but it's good preparation."

"You... You don't think less of me?"

He gasped, as if affronted. It was around this time in their conversation that later, Vanessa would reflect that she ought to have begun to recognize they were talking about two very different incidents. Her Spencer cocktail recipe was astute, though; Spencer hadn't even suspected his bottle had been swiped, much less employed to deflower one of his coworkers. In fact, unbeknownst to her, he had awakened at after two in the

morning with an inexplicable preoccupation with its whereabouts. He hardly ever consumed bottle water – his eco-ethics were far above average, one of the sexiest traits a man could have in Vanessa’s book – but that day he had partaken after the campus-wide sexual harassment training in anticipation of the long walk back to Higgins in this awful heat wave.

(He’d even firmly corrected Janis when she attributed the weather to “global warming,” a term she had been using ironically, an incident which had figured prominently in her masturbatory pursuits.)

The bottle had been left at the scene of their final training session of the evening, an hours-long series of roleplays where the staff practiced confronting both common and serious behavioral issues. His reference to Vanessa’s activity of the previous evening was targeted there, to a scenario in which she, in character as an RA, had been walking down the hall and stumbled upon an underaged resident played by Savannah, staggering down the hallway inebriated and concealing a vodka bottle poorly.

Each scenario ran twice, once with its surprise factor intact, and once after discussion and reflection on the mixed results of the first run. It had been Vanessa’s turn to go first that scenario. It had gone predictably terribly. She likely wouldn’t have confronted a real resident at all, but it was less embarrassing to make an effort for the sake of the exercise. By the end of her awkward, fumbling attempt at assertiveness in the face of Savannah’s criminally inept deception, she’d not only let Savannah leave the scene with her bottle in hand, but also failed to ascertain her correct identity. (“I’m, uh, *Gina*,” Savannah had said. She’d even laughed this ditzzy drunken giggle, just to make it really, really obvious Vanessa should be checking her ID.)

“Are you even trying?” Janis had asked when Ramona finally called it off after Vanessa failed to realize “Gina” had passed out in the hall behind her as she walked away. A fair question. It must have looked like she wasn’t, but in truth, she was just afraid. Like usual.

Spencer answered her question in the spirit of the dialogue he had meant to initiate, Vanessa trying to quell the hammering of her delicate heart while she listened in the spirit of hers. Her realization of what they were actually talking about would come soon, but not yet. “Think less of you? Oh my god, not at all! It was your first time, that’s all. You should have seen me my first time. I was a *mess*.”

This, Vanessa knew more of. Myles had always been very messy. When she made him come, he’d come *hard*. Probably because she didn’t do it as often as a girlfriend evidently should. Once Frannie had even noticed his spots on her dress. It had been so embarrassing. Her cheeks colored, both at the memory and the conjured image of Spencer spurting all over her face, like Myles had always pestered her to let him do.

Disgusting. Unless it was Spencer. That might be interesting, she thought.

“I can’t believe you’re not upset. If I were in your shoes, I think I would be really upset with me. You’ve been so nice to me, so patient, and that’s how I repay it.”

The diverging lines of their conversation blurred, the notion of repayment not quite gelling, but Spencer figured this girl was simply awkward, and just snapping out of a panic attack. “Hey. You made it here on your own steam. You don’t owe anybody anything. You just need practice, that’s all. I’d be happy to help, if you want.”

“You... you would... *help?*” Vanessa’s mouth was hanging open, she knew. On her back, she couldn’t even blame gravity. Oh god. Would he use his mouth? Or his...?! Oh god!

“Sure. Look, I know you’re shy, Vanessa. There’s nothing wrong with being shy. We just need to work on switching the shyness off and switching the you that’s underneath that on.”

“I’m, um, feeling kind of switched on right now,” she said, giggling. Had she *ever* giggled before? He was making her feel so normal about it, though! How could this man even be possible? Maybe she’d hit her head on the sidewalk and this was all just a vivid hallucination.

Spencer’s smile shined down on her. “I’m not sure doing it on a bus stop bench while they’re waiting for us at training is the best time, but I like your enthusiasm, Vanessa.”

“Oh. Gosh, right. I didn’t mean...”

“After our last session today, why don’t you stop by my room? Or text me and I can come to yours, if you’d rather. Whatever you’re more comfortable with.”

Oh god. Oh god oh god! This couldn’t be happening. Was it a prank? She’d come to his room, offer to kiss him, and then Savannah and Vickie would pop out of the closet and laugh at her for thinking she had any chance with him when women like them existed.

Not worth risking it was sincere, though. Those lips. That smile. What his voice did to her insides. She found herself nodding.

“OK. Wow. Yeah. Your room would be good. That sounds... wow.” Suddenly she was hugging him around the waist. It took a little contortion, but she figured he’d be seeing her in a far more compromising position tonight anyway.

“Don’t thank me yet,” he said, not able to hug her in their respective positions, but patting under the arm a little, where his hand naturally landed. Did he feel her bra? That would be so hot, probably. She didn’t really need a bra, and sometimes went without, but around Spencer her nipples were *always* hard. It would be too embarrassing.

“Do I need to bring the bottle?” she asked.

Spencer's head cock to the side, which from her angle looked like twisting unnaturally on an axis it wasn't supposed to have. "The... bottle? Oh, you mean Savannah's prop? Pretty sure we tossed that in the recycling."

"Savannah's bottle?" She frowned, considering. It had had a long neck, she supposed. More like a man's thingy. "OK, yeah, I guess that would fit better."

"Um, yeah, if we still had it." Again, he gave her that nervous look. (Had she hit her head after all? Was she bleeding or something?) "You know – sorry, this is so stupid, but you look like you could use a reminder of how ridiculous I can be. So speaking of bottles, I left my water bottle in the basement hallway last night, OK? Random accident. But then I remembered in the middle of the night, and I just thought of custodial coming in this morning and finding it lying in Savannah's hallway, only us RAs in the building so they'd figure the new girl thinks she can dump her trash anywhere like it's their job to bustle around tidying up after her. Felt *awful*. Three in the morning, I'm getting dressed to go find a bottle four stories down. Maybe Vickie's onto something with this guilt complex thing, huh. Stupidest thing. I'm creeping down there hoping to god nobody hears me, you know? Like what a b.s.-sounding excuse to be wandering around somebody's floor in the middle of the night."

As he explained, Vanessa at long last realized her misapprehension and nearly died of shame all over again, only this time of how dense she'd been. As if Spencer were going to casually offer to help teach her how to pleasure herself after dinner. Stupid stupid stupid! And oh shit, now she'd offered to meet with him, *alone*, in his *room*, for *roleplay*! Vanessa had never done anything that kinky, but she knew the word had sexual connotations. Oh god!

"It wasn't there, though," he said, grinning sheepishly. "I don't suppose I have you to thank for cleaning up after me, do I?"

"I don't have your bottle!" she blurted.

Spencer simply nodded, though. "Probably Savannah. I'll have to apologize and say thanks. Anyway, you think you're ready to try your legs? No rush if you're not."

Vanessa almost sat up, but her vision swam. That had been so embarrassing – the panicking, the reminder of how badly she'd done last night, her dumb miscommunication. His bottle! "I, um, still feel a little lightheaded? But, you know, if you wanted, maybe you could... carry me? Again?"

"You trying to make everybody think I'm a stud, huh?" He laughed. "Why don't we just sit here for a few more minutes."

Vanessa took his hand. It was the boldest move she had ever made towards a boy. He accepted her immediately, and held it until at last Ramona called them to return. "So we're still on for tonight, right?" he asked as he helped her to her feet. Even once she was standing, he didn't try to extricate his hand from her grasp.

“Yes. Thank you. I, um, could definitely use the help. I don’t know if you noticed, but I’m not exactly the most assertive person.”

“You’re going to do great, Vanessa. Believe me.”

That night, after floating back down to her floor after hours of nerve-wracking but also very helpful practice with the best guy in the universe, Vanessa removed the door tag on Higgins 210. She’d always had a little talent for arts and crafts, an easy way to pass hours in companionable solitude. Each name on each door tag had a distinct pattern or symbol. Her own door tag was a puffy paint rendition of herself, reading a book by a creek. It read, quite simply,

VANESSA STEGER

The Higgins 2 staffer took up her puffy paint, and atop the creek added two letters.

VANESSA STEGER

RA

She believed him.

“My daughter lives!”

“Hi, Mom.”

“You were so busy all through that training of yours that I wondered if I’d ever get to talk to you again. Then with classes starting, I didn’t want to be a bother. I know how you like to seclude yourself.”

Her mother was right about that, though she’d not been given the opportunity to in weeks. She’d thought dorms were places of constant social imposition when she’d lived here as a resident. As an RA, it was like there was a flashing arrow outside her door. More than once during move-in week, there had been an actual *line*. Pure hell.

“It’s been busy all right.”

“Yeah? You spent all summer moping around the house worrying yourself sick over it. Is it as dreadful as you worried? Tell me all about it. I know you’ve been gone a few weeks but it feels like ages. I miss your voice.”

Vanessa smiled. She never knew which mom she’d get. The good one, today. “Oh, it’s nothing so interesting.”

Her mother was probably frowning, never knowing which daughter she’d get. The quieter one, today. “No? Well I guess that’s good, right? When you’re a leader,

'interesting' usually means something bad is happening. So your girls, they're all getting along?"

"It's not 'possessive' to tell you not to use one of my purses without asking, Gabbie!"

"You have like twenty purses, Alyssa. You have so many that you had to ask me if you could store some over my closet in my storage bin!"

"You said you weren't using it! Just because I put it on your side doesn't mean you can just use it!"

"Fine! Then get your shit out of my...! Oh hi, Vanessa. About time."

"Hi. Um, what's...?"

"She's stealing my things!"

"She's a paranoid control freak!"

"Tell her she can't just take my stuff without asking!"

"I borrowed it for like three hours and you wouldn't even have noticed if you weren't up, again, talking to your boyfriend, ALL NIGHT!"

"You weren't even in the room!"

"You do it even when I am!"

"Um, can you guys keep it down...? And, um, good luck. Try to, yeah, not make, um, accusing...? statements? I'll just... have a nice night."

"Yeah, mostly."

"Mostly? No fights or anything too ugly, I hope."

"There was one fight, but I wasn't there for it."

"Oh? What happened?"

"Oh? What happened?"

"Well I missed the beginning. By the time Ramona and I got there, it was almost over. The one girl, she was just... berserk, and the other one, she was just trying not to get clawed or choked. I felt so bad for her. She was terrified."

"Yeah yeah yeah, now back up to the part where he was naked? And do be specific." Carmen leaned in, steepling her fingers.

"You're so bad. But really, I was doing crowd control with my back to the fight. Can you believe some of those girls of his were trying to record it? Nasty. But I barely saw anything."

"Which means you saw something. And what you saw was...?"

Savannah's face slowly split into a big grin. "It was... yeah. About like you'd expect."

"Meaning...?" Carmen looked desperate for a crumb.

The Higgins basement RA glanced to make sure no residents were coming up to the center desk, then held up her hands, parallel, most of a foot apart. Vanessa wasn't sure what that meant, but the way Carmen and Vickie reacted, it was very exciting.

“Somebody ought to go up there and comfort the guy,” Carmen suggested.

“Oh I can be hella comforting. Maybe just slip into something a little more comfortable first, know what I’m saying?” Vickie’s eyebrows did a couple waggles. “I’m saying I’m gonna go up there and the rules about coworkers be thrice damned, y’all.”

“Actually,” said Savannah, cheeks flushing, “Ramona asked me to hang out afterward and make sure he was OK, and we got to talking... and...”

“Aaaand, he asked you to send in a pro?”

For once, nobody had a laugh for Vickie’s jibes. The details were too potentially juicy. “No, but we... I think we’re gonna... hang out. Tonight.”

“Oh my gosh. Do you think you guys are gonna hook up? What about Price?”

“Price? He and I... We’ve been drifting apart for a long time. When we broke up freshman year, I told him I couldn’t do the long distance. But then he just started driving up to see me a couple weekends a month, so I was like, maybe this will work. When we broke up last year, I said our lives were just going in different directions, but then I went back home for the summer and he’s made apprentice, and my parents wouldn’t shut up about him, so I...”

Vanessa looked at Vickie and Carmen. Were they as bored of hearing about Price as she was? She thought so. How could they not be? Say more about Spencer, Vanessa thought.

“Anyway, I gave him one last shot, but I just think, for once, I have to think about what’s right for me.”

Carmen managed a smirk. “Translation: she’s totally gonna climb Mount Spencer.”

“Minus the climb,” said Vickie. A sub-par effort, Vanessa judged. It meant the same thing with or without “climb.”

“I’m totally gonna go hang out with Spencer. Seriously you guys, it’s no big deal!”

Vickie held up her hands the same way Savannah had. “Looks like a pretty big deal to me, but if you’re not into it—”

“I’m into it! I’m into it!” Savannah hopped up and hurried toward the exit, off to see Spencer, apparently. “Vanessa, I’ll meet you on my floor to start rounds at 10, OK?”

“OK.”

“Two girls got into a fight is all. Over a boy.” One literally over him, and one under.

“Oh goodness. Wherever I might have failed you as a parent, honey, I can at least take solace that I didn’t raise the sort of girl who got that bird-brained over boys. Or at least, I didn’t raise two girls who...”

Vanessa laughed, though her mind was going back to that day again. Like Vickie and Carmen, she fervently wished she’d been there to see it. Still, part of her was glad

she wasn't. Spencer wasn't just a body. He was her mentor. Her friend. And she *was* absolutely bird-brained over him. She hadn't even thrown away his bottle until that very morning, and it didn't even count, considering.

Vanessa took a moment to smooth out her hair before opening the door. AA surprise visit from Spencer! He was the sweetest boy in human history. "Well if it isn't my favorite blonde coworker. Not that you had much competition." They laughed. Janis was terrible. "I was heading over to grab lunch, and I wondered if...?"

"Sure! I'd like that."

They talked the whole way over to Penderdast about this and that. Classes, how hot it had been this semester so far, about how much he missed his dog. Vanessa talked, too! Somehow it just felt easy with him. About the research she was helping one of her professors with, about how his suggested breathing technique had helped her running, about how she had a niece or nephew on the way. Vanessa didn't like people, but she had a feeling this new little creature might make for an exception.

Only when they were sitting down in a little nook by some potted trees, secluded happily away, did they start to talk about work stuff. She'd known he'd make the transition at some point, but it had been nice to just be normal friends for a while first.

He wasn't subtle about it. They both knew he was gnawing this bone so much with her because she was so obviously awful at the job. He swore Ramona wasn't making him do it, and she believed him. (She believed it a smidge less each time he repeated it, though.) Still, she didn't mind. Vanessa really did want to be better. This job wrenched her out of her comfort zone constantly, but thanks to Spencer, she thought she was getting ever so gradually less afraid of it.

She opened up to him about everything. In their one-on-ones, Ramona mostly wanted to talk about issues. What was wrong, and what Vanessa had done and still needed to do to address it. Spencer, however, just wanted to listen. For the first time in her life, she wanted to talk.

So she told him about roommate conflicts. The girl in 222 who was miserably homesick. How she felt bad submitting work order requests, like she was bossing around the custodians. The near panic attack she'd had over having to go confront Martina in 202 over all the food she left sitting around her room, a beacon for critters that would impact the whole floor.

After a while, she realized he was just sitting there smiling at her, a weird, dopey smile she didn't know what to make of. "What?"

Spencer chuckled. "Vanessa, do you know that you've been talking to me, non-stop, for almost twenty minutes?"

"I was?"

He nodded. "Clock on the wall behind you. I didn't start a timer, but when I realized it was happening, I started keeping an eye on it. At least sixteen. I thought I was having lunch with Carmen for a second."

"Oh. Oh gosh. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to—"

But he only reached across the table and took her tiny hand in his. "Vanessa, hey, no! I loved it. Seriously. I like listening to you talk. And I think you seem to know what you're doing."

She did not. "I do?"

"Absolutely. Now, you just gotta do it. That's the easy part. Knock, knock. 'Clean this up, ya nasty.' Knock, knock. 'Stop borrowing her stuff, and you stop being so dramatic.' Type, type. 'Got a squeaky hinge that needs some WD-40, won't take but a minute.' You got this."

She smiled. Were her teeth showing? She never smiled that big. Seeing Spencer smile back made four long years of braces completely worth it. "You think so?"

"I know so. Say, you wanna hit the gym with me in a bit? I could use a running buddy, and none of my other friends can keep up. It's fine if you're busy."

"No, that sounds fun! Um, you're sure your girlfriend won't mind?" Girlfriends, technically, but that felt rude to say.

The water bottle at the rec center vending machine were a lot better shaped. Vanessa bought them both a bottle, and replaced that uncomfortably wide one from training at last.

"It's going really well so far, Mom. I think I might not suck as bad as I thought I would."

"I told you you'd rise to the occasion, honey. You usually do."

Their first staff meeting in September, the RAs filled out the duty schedule for the rest of the semester. By then, the Higgins RAs had their classes, extracurriculars, and social schedules determined as best they could. It was a perk, being able to not only know your work schedule months in advance, but to have direct input. At least, it was a perk for the rest of the staff. Vanessa didn't have a social calendar.

Unlike when they'd scheduled the preceding few weeks during training, though, the women on staff had gone from joking behind Spencer's back about trying to score ("score") shifts with him to actually doing it. It was like a game, she supposed. Carmen seated herself so she could see his planner on his phone, avoiding days he was booked. Astute. When Spencer shared his willingness to take extra weekend shifts since he had no life, that was Vanessa's cue to follow suit, and for the same reason.

They took turns, Ramona pulling names out of an actual hat, each of their names in the hat a number of times equal to their remaining shifts. Whenever Spencer's name was drawn, there was a psychological game of how quickly someone else could pounce on whatever night he'd taken. If they were too obvious, it would get weird; if they were too patient, they'd lose it to someone else. They watched for patterns, slowly catching up with the Carmen approach in anticipating his moves. As he settled into a rhythm picking up consecutive Wednesdays, Savannah "realized" Wednesdays also worked well for her, and with a little chuckle, signing her name beneath his week after week. Vickie had a smart play, cracking a joke about how if that psycho from his floor came back, she wanted a dude on shift with her for protection. Then it was safe to joke about needing big strong male protection and latching onto his shifts immediately – until Janis ruined it, that is.

"It's like you guys are all trying to score every shift with Spencer that you can. Obsess much?"

Crickets. Savannah and Vickie both had girlfriend privileges, enabling them to keep poaching his shifts, though it only made them look catty. Their unusual arrangement wasn't supposed to be public knowledge, but it was. Janis complained about it all the time, sometimes even in front of them, and Carmen was always saying something passive aggressive about how jealous she was, and – ha ha – wouldn't it be wild if he went for the hat trick. Vanessa's dad was a big hockey fan and had tried ineffectively to impart this passion to her, so it was a rare bit of sports jargon she comprehended.

As for him dating half the female staff in the building, Vanessa didn't care. Objectively, who her coworkers dated was none of her business. Personally, she actually liked it. They seemed to make him happy, and if Vanessa wasn't worthy to try, someone ought to.

Now that she was officially a habitual masturbator (which the internet swore was perfectly normal), that was her favorite thing to think about while she pleased herself. They would look so beautiful together. She imagined the look on his face, the way his shoulders would slump into a sigh as Vickie settled into his lap and put his thing inside her vagina. Oh god, and that time she'd been going through his floor on rounds and heard him call someone a "cocksucker," only to have Savannah share at breakfast the next morning that they'd had a date the night before, and that it had been magical.

Savannah Gray, on her knees, maybe even naked, giving Spencer a blowjob and moaning as he praised her for being such a generous cocksucker. They were so perfect for each other. She must make him so happy. Vanessa never had any such encounter with him and Vickie, but she had to be incredible. The perfect lay. Why else would he take time away from Savannah's pouty, plump, cocksucking lips to spend time with her?

They probably fucked (a word Vanessa did not like, but found oddly appealing when applied to her coworkers) like a Greek god and his goddesses.

Vanessa was so, so happy for him. A man like him deserved women like them. She'd seen how badly all those girls up on the third floor teased him, and how devoted he was to being loyal to his girlfriends.

It was that sentiment that had primarily led to her getting so few nights on duty with him. Who was she to keep him from getting to work alongside his girlfriends? So she took shifts with Carmen, and yes, even Janis. It wasn't ideal, but it was the least she could do to repay all he did for her.

Plus, he took a lot of weekend shifts, when there were three RAs on duty rather than the usual two. So he could do his rounds with his girlfriends (more often than not) and Vanessa could work primary at the center desk. They closed it down at midnight, and then she liked to race back to her room so she could have her walkie talkie pressed against her sopping naked labia when he announced, "Higgins staff starting rounds."

(Not that Vanessa was some kind of deviant. She sanitized the walkie thoroughly before returning it to the charging station on Marcus's desk.)

Plus, there was one other benefit.

"Spencer?" she whispered.

"If you talk that quiet while we're walking down the spookiest corridor on earth, I'm going to pee my pants, Vanessa."

The dreadway.

That's what the Higgins female RA staff called it when Spencer wasn't around to make them feel like scaredy girls. It was like something out of a horror movie. The basement of the center building was this dimly lit utility area even the maintenance people seldom went to. Because of a slight incline on the Higgins grounds, however, the loading dock was on that lower level. The Higgins cafe had been closed years ago to consolidate resources over at the Penderdast food court, but over two hundred residents received their mail and packages there, plus all the supplies to run a residence hall, toilet paper and trashbags and whatnot. The doors were open by day so delivery people could access the storage areas in the basement, and Marcus locked it up on his way out.

Evidently, one time last year he'd forgotten not only to lock the door, but even to latch it. A mask of raccoons – the official term, she'd informed her colleagues as humbly as she could – had been the only infiltrators, thankfully. Still, the center building housed myriad valuable pieces of art donated by Lakeview alumni. There was a special guest suite upstairs that the university used for VIPs on very rare occasion in which a decorative bed frame donated by a past emperor of Japan was stored. During their facility walkthrough in training, Ramona had shown it to them – but sternly forbidden them to touch it. It was apparently worth something in the low seven figures.

Now, the RAs double checked Marcus's lockup follow-through when they closed the building at midnight. (Ramona insisted explicitly that they weren't inspecting for break-ins, which Vickie quickly noted was Housing's way of avoiding getting sued if some psycho slit their throats down there. Ramona didn't rebut it, which Vanessa had not liked at all.)

The dreadway ran the length of the building, under the atrium, the center desk, and the formal lounge. At the end by the stairwell, there was a single fluorescent light to either side down a short cross corridor, where the utility and storage rooms were. The dreadway itself was unlit. By day, some light shined down the hall from the loading dock. Dim, but adequate for a big featureless hall.

By night?

It was two hundred feet of unfathomable darkness, punctuated exclusively by two tiny red bulbs behind the fire alarms, lights which seemed to serve the exclusive purpose of warning a profoundly deaf person who happened to be standing in the seldom used concrete block utility hallway without any existing desire to exit by either of the available directions. The lights made the entire affair orders of magnitude more terrifying.

As Vickie had put it, the lights were there so they'd have the face of the man who raped them to death burned into the retinae of their souls on their way down to purgatory. (So quotable.) The first time Vanessa had closed down here, she'd done so with Savannah, who had taken one look down the hallway and joined Vanessa in crying in pure terror.

Vanessa did not like the dreadway.

"Sorry." Still whispering. She forced her vocal chords into action. "I was just going to say, I hate checking the loading dock, because... yeah. Like you said. So. Dark. Who uses a blinking red light bulb?"

He nodded, sweeping the dreadway with the flashlight on his phone. Vanessa passed one of those lights and shuddered. They invited a double take so naturally, and of course nobody was pointing a light behind them. Apart from those hellish embers, pure darkness. She shuddered again. "I always think it's going to blink on and I'll see someone standing there." Shoot, she'd whispered again.

Spencer gave her an exasperated look. She liked that look. Most people thought Vanessa was too delicate to give dirty looks to, and they were generally right. She and Spencer were comfortable with each other, though. He could be a little rougher, and she could roll with his telegraphed punches. "I think I just dribbled a little. Thanks for that image."

"Sorry," she apologized again, "it's just... I'm always glad when we're on duty together. You make me feel safe."

Spencer smiled. That feeling he gave her was deliberate, she knew. He was the sort of person who prided himself on making people feel safe. It was often thankless. As Vanessa knew from personal experience, frightened people were often too frightened to remember to also be grateful.

“Yeah, well, if the boogie man manifests at the end of the hall, I’m using you as a human shield.”

Spencer was the kind of man who would jump on a grenade for people – or, if he proved to be insufficiently courageous, he would die regretting it, which was still pretty noble in her book. That he even pretended otherwise made her giggle as only he could. “Spencer! See, there you are, making me laugh when I’m always so scared down here with everybody else.”

Careful to shine his light ahead and stave off the darkness, he turned back and patted Vanessa’s bony shoulder. “I do what I can, human shield.”

She patted his back, though gently. He was Savannah’s, and Vickie’s, and rumor had it three, or maybe four, of his residents’. Did he make those girls feel as special as he did Vanessa? If he did, she hoped he slept with more of them. As she began to retain physical details of his residents, they were emerging into her rotation of Spencerbation fantasies as well.

She never appeared in them herself. She was no Savannah.

“You do good.”

They reached the loading dock, which was, as always, sealed tight. Spencer jiggled the latch as they’d been trained to do, and was satisfied. “You know, if you want, you can hop out here, go in through the back. Not go all the way back down the hall again.”

“I wouldn’t leave you alone down here.”

“We just checked the hallway. Unless somebody ninjaed past us just now...” He made a little show of anxiously turning to double check. “Nope, I think I’ll be OK.”

“You’re really not afraid to be down here by yourself?”

He shrugged. “Hey, I have you to thank for it, though.”

“Me? I’ve never made anyone feel brave in my life. Except for maybe this girl at Brownie scout camp when she found out I was her sparring partner for boxing, but I don’t think that counts.”

Spencer, cognizant of the effect of the oppressive darkness, opened the loading dock. It didn’t do much, and the dumpsters were right there with all their stink, but there were some big lamps in the parking lot. At least it felt like if they were attacked she had somewhere to run. “You? Boxing?”

“I know, right? I have the arm strength of a butterfly.” She did a little footwork, punched the air. “Float like a butterfly, sting like a mosquito!”

He put his hands in front of her fists, inviting her to punch them. Not the way she'd touch him given options, but it was fun to goof around with him. And if some deranged meth head popped out of the nearby dumpsters sheathed in feral raccoons, she'd be ready to land a few blows, maybe distract him long enough for Spencer not to get hurt defending her.

"I'm serious, though. Remember that night in training, we were sitting around the lounge prepping our door tags? Or rather, you were embarrassing us with your door tags?"

"Yours were fine! I'm just sorry you had to redo half of them."

"Yeah, well. Anyway, remember, Savannah asked everybody what they were nervous about. You know, so she could pretend she was making conversation before unloading about her own stuff?"

Vanessa nodded. She'd been very switched on during RA training. At first just because this wonderful boy was there and she didn't want to miss anything, but soon she'd realized she was learning, and sort of making friends. She really hoped she didn't make Ramona fire her.

"Yeah. Janis said terrorists, you cut her off, and then Carmen went on about coming into contact with bodily fluids, for *way* too long."

"She's not wrong, though. My first year – no, second year – oh god who cares – anyway, I had these dudes on my floor, puked everywhere at least once a month, didn't give a crap how much J-board fined them. Oh god, and this freaking nasty-ass jerk who kept – pardon my French – jerking off in the bathroom stalls and getting, um, 'it' on the latch. I've learned there is a non-zero number of people who just can't be trusted to cohabitate with us gentlefolk in the residence halls."

"Gentle? Who's 'gentle?'" She put her weight into a punch, confident he wouldn't even notice the difference.

Indeed, Spencer caught Vanessa's fist in a firm hand, then used his grip to sit her down on the edge of the loading dock, settling right down beside her. Yes, there were dumpsters, but it was Vanessa – not like he had to worry about being romantic. It was also private, and quiet, though. Intimate. The presence of the dreadway gaping behind them barely registered with Spencer at her side. They sat, hip to hip, arms touching softly. Weirder still, he said nothing, waited for her to continue where he'd interrupted. Nobody who knew Vanessa ever expected she had more to say after opening up, and anybody but Spencer would be right. With Spencer, talking was so easy.

"But yeah, let's see, after that Vickie made a joke that she was afraid her residents would all fall in love with her, but Janis pushed back." For once a Janis rebuttal had been fair and useful, calling her out for making light of other people letting themselves be vulnerable. "So Vickie pivoted and said she hoped she didn't have to try to break up a fight between the boys on your floor."

“Is it more ironic that the boys were all girls, or that the fight wound up being way worse than any guys I’ve ever seen in a scrap?”

“Second one, definitely.” Vanessa leaned against his shoulder. He was so solid, and she was so small, he didn’t budge at all. Savannah better be so, so good to this boy once they finished rounds. She wished they were the sort of friends who could talk about boy stuff together. Not just to get to hear juicy details, but so she could help make sure he was completely taken care of.

Vanessa tried not to fall too much more in love as she went on. “Let’s see. Then Janis tried something less awful and said she was afraid of her residents being slobs and bringing cockroaches onto her floor, which was fine, except then she regrouped and said she hoped she didn’t get any who didn’t speak English.”

Spencer sighed. “Oh, Janis.”

She hadn’t forgotten Spencer saying she’d somehow helped him, but he didn’t seem eager for her to let him get to his point. “And you, you said you were afraid your style wouldn’t work with the women on your floor. Shows what you know, the supposed expert.”

“Oh man, I did say that, didn’t I. How innocent you were, you sweet summer Spencer. Trust me, though, it’s still pretty scary up there some days.” His head leaned on her head. “But do you remember what *you* said?”

Vanessa couldn’t shrug, couldn’t shake her head, without risking him withdrawing. Smell be damned, she would sit here with him all night. His body wash was beneath it anyway. She concentrated on that, hoping when she got back to her room and made herself blackout orgasm over this that she’d only remember the good part of the odor.

“I don’t,” she admitted. “‘Everything.’ That’s what I would have said if I were being honest.”

He laughed. “That’s exactly what you said.”

“Good, good. Here I worried I’d forgotten to lead with my anxiety for once. So how exactly did that inspire you?”

A car pulled into Higgins’ modest lot, parking right near where Spencer’s own vehicle was parked. Four girls got out, looked around guiltily. Both RAs sat up in unison.

“Because if the girl downstairs is being brave about *everything*, then I can be brave about my petty problems, too.”

Vanessa wanted to press herself back against him, to reassure him that she didn’t think his problems were petty, to invite him to come to her room if he was still up after Savannah finished sucking his cock and keep talking. Bring her with, if he wanted.

Instead, she saw the driver of the vehicle pop the trunk, then fish out a backpack that was decidedly rectangular.

She knew what he was about to say. “*Keep an eye on the loading dock, and I’ll go deal with this.*” But he was right. She could be brave, if she needed to be. She could deal with this. So she told herself as her heart began to hammer in her chest.

Vanessa hopped down from the loading dock and unclipped her walkie from her belt. “Primary to secondaries. Could you meet me in the back lot?” One of them was already here, but they seemed to want them to talk like cops on these things, so she made use of what jargon she had.

She held up a hand to forestall Spencer as Savannah’s voice replied. “On my way. Everything OK?”

She was already walking to the scene of the confrontation, where she’d tell four girls each twice her size that she was going to take their booze and get them in trouble. *Don’t throw up*, she told herself. Out loud, she held the talkie to her mouth and said, “Yep. Spencer’s finishing closing the center building, but there’s a few ladies trying to have a bit too good of a time.”

The lot was dark, but Spencer’s proud smile lit her path. She handled it badly, and might have tucked tail and let them go with a warning if not for Savannah’s presence at her side. Vanessa stood her ground and handled it, though. She handled it.

At their next staff meeting Savannah and Spencer jointly nominated her for the brick, their award for the week’s MVP. The vote was unanimous.

“I can’t believe he’s dating *both* of them.” Carmen savagely bit her potato wedge in half. “How is that even fair? I mean, Savannah I get. But Vickie too? Nothing against her or anything, you know I love Vickie, but seriously, Vickie?”

Vanessa carefully prepared a bite of her salad. “I don’t know. I think Vickie’s very attractive. There’s an intensity to her that I think he would find appealing.”

Carmen’s glare softened but didn’t abate. “I guess if you’re going to hook up with multiple women, you may as well pick two really different types. Meanwhile here my dumb ass is, all ‘duh, hey big bro.’ Because that’s what every guy dreams of, their shrimp kid sister. This is what you get for watching porn. Everybody’s sister doing their laundry, getting a nice anonymous fuck from behind when they get stuck, and it starts to feel less crazy after a while, you know?”

“I haven’t really watched much porn. Just with my ex-boyfriend. Is there a lot of that? Incest?”

Carmen snickered. “Forgot who I was talking to for a second. Um, ya, there’s just a teensy bit of incest porn out there. It’s not as bad as it sounds. They’re only actors after all, and even the characters are only step-related. But it can be pretty hot.”

Vanessa adjusted the portions on her fork. 10% less tahini, and a cherry tomato this time. “Why is that hot?”

Carmen shrugged, speaking around more tomato. Not many things slowed her down. “Because it’s wrong, you know? It’s about people who know they shouldn’t, but they’re so horny for each other they can’t help themselves.”

Vanessa shook her head. “Glad I don’t have a brother.”

“Doesn’t have to be bro-sis. Can be daughter hot for daddy, mommy teaches son, or mommy teaches son how to fuck daughter, or all the gay variations. Besides, before you get all judgy, imagine your mom married Spencer’s dad.”

“Both of our parents are still married.”

Carmen whipped a potato wedge at her. It went down her top. Vanessa fished it out of her bra and threw it right back. How had she let herself spend two years of college thinking there was no point to making friends? Like just because it was temporary, there was no reason to stick her neck out and try to meet people. “Don’t be so literal all the time, Vanessa, god! You know what I mean. Just imagine, you come home from the... office?”

“Not a business major.”

“Jungle.”

“Autoimmune disorder. Can’t get the necessary vaccinations.”

“Dog park?”

“Cat person.”

“Laboratory.”

“Not when you emphasize the wrong syllable like that.”

“Dominatrix sex dungeon...?”

Vanessa finally failed to suppress a grin. Carmen had started this game back in training, teasing Vanessa for being so reserved about herself and guessing at the details. It had pried more information about her into the limelight than anyone else at Lakeview had in two years of living here. “As an employee or a client?”

“Employee, obviously.”

“Proceed.”

“So you’re literally coming home from your a busy shift at your day job, clamping the nipples of rich dudes and tweezing their privates—”

“That’s a thing?!”

“Sure, why not. Anyway, you get home, and there’s your step-brother, Spencer, standing shirtless in front of the house, chopping wood with a big sweaty axe.”

“How does an axe get sweaty?”

“And he’s like ‘hi there, my beautiful blonde sister. I was just here providing for our mutual family. Apologies for being shirtless with my muscles glistening with sweat and smelling like peppermint Old Spice. Oh, and I see you noticed my huge veiny pole

poking out into my jeans.’ And you’re telling me you wouldn’t tell him to take it out and bend you over this chopping block?”

Vanessa rode that cherry tomato high on her next bite. “Is this what happens in your porn?”

“The sisters are seldom blonde, but pretty much.”

Vanessa finished chewing, then interrupted Carmen’s elaboration on other pornographic plot notes. “I wouldn’t.”

“Wouldn’t... what? Bang your step-Spencer?”

“No. I wouldn’t ‘bang him’ even if he wasn’t my brother. Which he isn’t, which I’m not.”

“Bullshit. You think you’re sly, but I see that wandering eye of yours. You think if you make yourself small enough we won’t notice.”

Vanessa had indeed lived a good portion of her life by that code, and it had generally produced the desired results. “That’s not what I mean. Yes, I’m attracted to him. Yes, we get along well. He’s not meant for someone like me, though.”

“I don’t know about you, chica, but when I’m getting my hee ho ha hum on, I’m not thinking about who the man on the other end of that D is meant for.”

“I wouldn’t be either. I’m only saying, he’s... unrestrained. Sexually.”

“I knew you meant it sexually. But he’s only a little less restrained than you. That guy’s like the Bob Ross of RAs. ‘Let’s do a little diversity program over here. Yeah, that’s nice. Oops, flashed my wiener to my floor, but let’s just touch that up with some nice kinky shower head shrubbery.’” Carmen frowned. “OK, maybe he’s not *totally* wholesome.”

“He’s Adonis.” Vanessa eyed him across the way, nodding. He and Savannah were giggling at each other, their faces so close it was like they were making out in the middle of the food court. “I couldn’t handle that much. I know that sounds cheesy, but I couldn’t. But he makes women happy. Look at her. She doesn’t care about Vickie. And you’ve seen how Vickie’s been dressing lately, always skirts and dresses, always something that makes her easily accessible. My sense is that he accesses her pretty frequently.”

“She has been in a pretty killer mood lately. She was even being nice to Janis the other night on rounds. I heard it myself or I wouldn’t have believed it. Laughing together, like they were friends almost.”

“And it’s not only those two. You know at least some of those rumors about his residents have some truth to them. The homesick girl. His neighbor. His other neighbor. The girls you wrote up for that party. His floor governor. His ex-girlfriend may be back in the picture.”

“Dang, Vanessa. Stalk much?”

“I just listen is all. Half of it I heard, or inferred, from him.” She got the sense Spencer didn’t have anybody to vent to about being the object of lust for his whole floor. She just tried to be a good listener, like they’d taught her during training.

“So then, if he’s such a man-slut, why are you acting like you don’t have a shot? You’re a little baby kitten all fuzzy and tiny and adorable. And I am about ninety percent sure you have a pussy, even.”

“I told you, I don’t want a shot.”

“Eighty-five.”

“But if you like him, you should tell him. He might surprise you.”

“What are you, his pimp?”

Vanessa studied her salad once more. Rather, she looked like she was studying her salad. Really, she was thinking back to last night. She’d caught the two girls who lived in her old room, Angel and Leigh, heading out to a frat party. After ten o’clock rounds, she’d gone back up to Spencer’s floor. It was a Friday night, pretty quiet at that hour. He’d had Vickie over, she knew, since Vickie was her rounds partner. Vanessa had snuck into her old room and pressed her ear to the shared wall, listening to Vickie moan and beg and boss him around.

“Lick Vickie. Vickie needs the licky licky. Oh fuck, you... you’re... Oh fuck Vickie likes that. Vickie might have to reward her slutty little man-friend. Do you want a reward? Do you want to be Vickie’s good boy?”

Vanessa wanted him to. The noises she made while he worked her body, they were even hotter than the ones Savannah had made the weekend before, when Leigh and Angel were visiting home for the weekend. (She recognized Angel’s car now, and by evening, they were inseparable. Easy to track.) She only wished she’d been on duty that night when he’d come down Savannah’s throat over the radio, but somehow karma had selected Janis for that. Janis was probably masturbating like a beast to that memory, whatever she said.

He made them all so happy. And they made her horny out of her goddamn mind. Sometimes, she almost hoped he slept with every last consenting girl on that floor.

And Carmen too, of course. She was a friend.

“Calm down? *Me* calm down? That kid tells me I’m not allowed in a room in my own goddamn house, but you’re right. I’m the problem. Jesus!”

“You’re practically frothing at the mouth, dear. She’s a grown woman now! She’s always been on the private side.”

“Private? Little bitch tells me to get the hell out. Can you believe that? So glad we’re kissing your mother’s ass to pay for her damn college if this is what she’s out there learning.”

Vanessa felt she had been restrained, not using the f-word instead. Still, she’d done it. She’d drawn a line, and she’d enforced it. She’d choked down her fear for just long enough. If he entered her room uninvited ever again, he’d have two man caves and no daughters. That was that.

During RA training, they’d done a teambuilding exercise where everybody had to look up quotes or poems or song lyrics or whatever that reminded them of one another. She’d been really embarrassed at the time – nobody had ever done anything even a little bit like that before; Myles hadn’t even gotten her a birthday card – and most of them had looked at shy, quiet Vanessa and found something that expressed those qualities. *Still waters run deep* had been the best of those, from Carmen.

Spencer, however, didn’t even need to look one up. He’d even done Vanessa’s first. He’d grinned ear to ear, lunging for a marker and scribbling on a note card until it was all down.

Maybe you came to college because you wanted to save the world, but I want you to know that it’s okay if you only save one person, and it’s okay if that person is you.

That notecard was tucked inside her pillowcase on the top bunk, where she slept so she could be a few feet closer to him. She fell asleep with it every night. Maybe he’d been on to something – maybe she could save her rather pathetic self. Maybe she already had.

It made her want to see if she could save anybody else. That was probably crazy, though.

“They can’t stay daddy’s little girls forever, Andrew.”

“Yeah, well, we’ll see about that.”

No, they wouldn’t. She knew what it was like to feel safe now. She’d never let anyone make her feel unsafe in her own home ever again. And she’d make sure the same went for her niece as well. That made two.

Ramona held Vanessa’s slight body like she was a fragile, precious doll as they cried.

“That was so, so brave of you. I’m so proud of you, darling. I can’t imagine.”

Vanessa sniffled. “Thank you.”

“Soon – today – I’m going to make sure you get every resource and aid I can put at your disposal. It’s your choice, but I strongly, strongly encourage you to see a counselor.”

“Thanks, but I don’t think I need counseling. I’m OK.”

Ramona exerted a gentle pressure on the back of her neck, pulling Vanessa forward until her lips pressed softly onto her forehead. “That’s your choice, but know that I’m going to push back. You did the right thing, telling me. I’m honored, truly.”

“Um, thanks. Or you’re welcome?” Vanessa laughed an ugly, weepy laugh. “Sorry, I don’t... Sorry.”

“You don’t need to apologize to me.” Ramona took a few minutes helping her wipe her face, compose herself, calm down. Her dad was a creep. He’d never touched her, but he’d humiliated her and violated her privacy time and time again over the years. It hadn’t been until taking this job – a job, of all things! – that she’d been trained about being a resource for women who had been abused. It was just how things had always been for her, so she’d never really appreciated that families weren’t supposed to behave in such ways. Or if it really was as wrong as it felt, she sure as hell never wanted anyone to find out. She’d never told anyone before. She didn’t really want to talk about it again. She said as much, and Ramona nodded.

“All right. Then, for now, let’s, I guess, go back to normal one-on-one mode.” Normally Vanessa sat alone on Ramona’s couch, and Ramona in her chair. Ramona kept to the couch, but scooted back enough to allow her a little space. “So, other than that, how was your fall break?”

Vanessa laughed in spite of herself. “I’m glad to be back here at Higgins.”

“Good. You know, if it’s all right, I actually had something I wanted to talk to you about today if that’s OK.”

“Oh, sure.” She sat up straighter, crossed her legs. It sounded a little worrisome. “Is something wrong?”

“No, not wrong. Unexpected, surprising, but not wrong.”

She frowned. “On my floor?”

Ramona folded her hands in her lap placidly. “Ordinarily, I evaluate staff members once a semester. It helps identify areas of concern and develop plans of behavior to address them. Additionally, it points out strengths and makes sure they don’t go disregarded.”

Vanessa heard only the first portion. “Are there areas of concern? I’m trying to do—”

Ramona shook her head and extended an arm, which was all it took to quell her plea. “I’ll be honest with you, Vanessa. When I hired you, I was desperate, and I took what I could get. When you told me you didn’t think you’d made the alternate list... I

had a lot on my plate last summer. When I had time to look into it... well... I'm honestly not sure you did. Mistakes do get made."

Vanessa's heart sank. She knew it would come out eventually. "Oh."

"Still, we were halfway through RA training by then, and even aside from the logistical nightmare it would create in Higgins, I wasn't about to 'correct the mistake,' so to speak, without at least giving you a fair shake.

"I've been watching you closely this semester. There have been some red flags, which I've kept diligent notes on." She hopped over to her desk chair and spun, picking up the clipboard she'd set down when Vanessa replied to *How was your break?* by dropping that emotional bomb on her. Clipped inside it were a stack of papers. It was not a thin stack. "Sometimes, evaluation can't wait until the end of the semester."

"I swear, I'm trying to—"

Ramona held up a finger. "You're doing a good job, Vanessa." She smiled. "My apologies for not coming out and saying so immediately, but I couldn't help myself – I am a sucker for dramatic tension. Please don't be cross with me."

Vanessa blinked, startled by the abruptness of it. "But..."

"No. No buts. You are doing a good job. That's it."

"I... But I'm not. I'm definitely not."

"What makes you say that?"

Vanessa had so many things she wanted to say. Unfortunately, she said them, a litany of self-recrimination. Conflicts she'd shied away from. Little things she'd let slide. Her October educational program had bombed – only two girls had showed up, and when Vanessa ran to the bathroom, she returned to find they'd left along with \$80 of pizza. Thankfully she had enough of a filter in place not to blab about the loss of self-control that had culminated in her eavesdropping in her old dorm room to listen to Spencer hook up with her friends/coworkers. Still, the rest of it was bad enough.

"Vanessa, listen to me. I want to say another thing to you. It isn't kind, but I think you need to hear it." She leaned closer. "You're not a *great* RA. Now the only reason I say that is because I want you to know I'm being straight with you. If this were solely an effort to inflate your ego or some bullshit attempt at a pick-me-up, I could phone in some raving about your merits and achievements. The truth is, you are a *good* RA. But I remember you told me how overwhelmed you felt back during our first one-on-one after Welcome Week. You felt unequal to the task, and frankly, at the time, I felt the same. But I have watched you grow like a dandelion, from a fluffy little seed into a beautiful blonde flower."

"I have?"

Ramona went through those papers in her hands. "Let's see. Here, this is an email following up on a work order. Advocating for your residents. Or here, you confronted four students trying to smuggle in two cases of beer in a dark parking lot *by*

yourself. Until Savannah arrived anyway. Teaming up with Carmen to plan a program, delegating the door-knocking to her and taking on the signage and coordination. Recognizing each of your strengths and weaknesses. Or here, my notes from my meeting with Gabbie and Alyssa. We worked out a new agreement for them, and while yes, it had to rise to my level, when I met with them, they both told me that what I'd told them was pretty much exactly what you told them. Be more respectful of the other's boundaries, even if they aren't your boundaries."

"Things only got that bad between them because I hid from it, though."

"Until you didn't." Ramona smiled. "Vanessa, dear, we almost had a resident die last weekend up on Spencer's floor. But we didn't, and part of that is because when Higgins' primary heard there was a medical emergency, she knew exactly who to call, what to share, and how to coordinate between the EMTs, staff, and that poor girl. If you hadn't been your calm, focused, deliberate self, who knows what might have happened that night. Maybe you're a life-saver and maybe you're an assistant life-saver, but either way, you should feel very proud of yourself for how you handled it."

"Oh. I mean, I just made calls, radioed people. It was no big deal."

"Tell that to the girl who nearly bled out on the bathroom floor. And don't even get me started on what all Spencer has to say about you. I know you two are friends, and I think he's kept from telling you you're his favorite coworker to keep from embarrassing you. And you know I wouldn't make that claim, considering his prior relationships with Savannah and Vickie, unless it were true."

He'd said that...?! Vanessa licked her lips. "I heard they broke up."

"Yes, well, for now. Who knows. The way women are drawn to that young man, I'm frankly exhausted trying to monitor the boy's social activities."

"Yeah, I heard about that girl. The one with the implants." Vanessa would never snitch on Spencer, but he'd already told her that Ramona was aware. "Is he going to be fired?"

"I hope not," Ramona said softly. "For now, though, you have a lot going on in that soft, sweet heart of yours, so try to give Spencer a wide berth until you're both in a better place, hm?"

"Why? We're just friends. That's it."

Ramona nodded. "Spencer enjoys the company of women, and right now, he's confused and he's hurting and there's a lot of scrutiny and pressure on him. Things will calm down, but for now, I want you to worry about Vanessa. OK?"

She took convincing – a lot of convincing – but Vanessa at last agreed. She couldn't imagine Spencer slumming with someone like her, but he was kind of a horndog, as Janis liked to point out. The last thing Vanessa would want to see happen was for something she did to make things worse for him.

Vanessa was, to her great surprise, the farthest thing from in trouble. Before the meeting was over, she hadn't let Ramona talk her into seeing a counselor, but she did promise to come back next week with ideas for what she might be able to lead a training session on during winter training. The woman was forceful on the subject of steering clear of Spencer for now. Why she was so nervous about Spencer hooking up with the likes of Vanessa Steger, she had no idea, but she promised to give him space while he struggled through what sounded like an extraordinarily stressful situation. The girl with the concussion, everyone mad because of his faux pas with the boob job girl, his floor governor calling for his head. She felt so bad for him.

She couldn't help but think about what Spencer do, if it were her.

"I'll turn it down."

Vanessa shook her head. "No, it's fine. I actually really like this song."

The freshman smiled briefly at the compliment. "Um, then... Is something wrong?"

"No, not at all. I just wanted to talk to you."

Immediately, the girl's eyes darted in the direction of room 310, the RA's room. Where was Mason now? she wondered. She'd been a pretty decent RA, all things considered. Still, no denying that Higgins 3's current RA was a major upgrade.

"About what." The girl folded her arms beneath a pair of breasts that were absolute giants on her tiny frame, even in the bulky sweatshirt. Vanessa had worried about the roommate being here, but no mistaking that chest.

"About... those." Vanessa inclined her head towards those fleshly globes. "And everything."

"Spencer's a big boy. He shouldn't need to send one of his legion of girlfriends to make his apologies for him."

The door swung toward her face, but Vanessa planted a foot. This was something they'd been explicitly told during training to never do. It was confrontational, rude, pushy. Vanessa would hate it if someone had done it to her. Having just dealt with her own open door issues at home, it made her stomach lurch to do it.

This was bigger than discomfort, though.

"Please. I'm not here on his behalf. He doesn't know I'm here – and he won't, unless we keep talking like this in the hallway."

The girl plainly didn't like it, but like most residents, they presumed far more of RA authority than reality bore out. RAs made mall cops look like marines. "Fine. But make it quick."

Vanessa entered this strange girl's room. She remembered the face of the girls who'd lived here last year, but had never learned their names. "Do you mind if I...?"

"Oh sure, make yourself at home. Can I nuke you some tea...? Foot massage?"

Vanessa sat. After a moment, so did her host. "I'm Vanessa. I'm the RA—"

"Higgins 2, I know. You wrote up two of my friends."

"Oh." *Don't panic*, Vanessa reminded herself. *Be brave. For him.* "Are they OK?"

"I guess." That meant yes, but it was an admission the girl plainly didn't like making. She offered no more than that.

"Do you prefer Lexi, or Lex?"

"People call me both. I don't care."

"Lexi, I'm—"

"You know, actually, let's go with Lex."

Vanessa took a deep breath. The girl was so angry. She wasn't used to angry people. Now she'd shut herself in a room with someone who had every reason to be pissed off at Spencer, and at her by proxy. "OK, Lex. I wondered if we could talk about what happened. How you're doing."

"Why?"

Vanessa frowned. "Why...?"

"Yeah, what's it to you? Did Spencer send you? Or that manager lady?"

"I told you, nobody made me come."

"Maybe somebody should." Lex smirked. "You look tightly wound," she expanded.

Vanessa was not good at wordplay. She wasn't convinced Lex was either, but most people were much better at banter than her. In second grade they'd taken a field trip to the arboretum and Adriana Samuels had seen Vanessa admiring some birds and said loudly, "Look everybody! Vanessa's studying how to build a Vah-*nest*-a!" It was the dumbest, weakest taunt she'd ever heard, but she'd had no response, and had to sit next to the teacher on the bus ride back to school because she couldn't stop crying. It still almost made her cry when she thought of it, which was at least a few times a year.

"I am. I'm actually really nervous right now."

"Well feel free to fuck right off then. Door's over there."

Vanessa wilted. That was pretty darn blunt. She was most of the way to the door before she reminded herself why she'd come. As it so happened, it was the same moment Lex remembered herself as well.

"I'm sorry," said Lex. "I'm just... I'm sorry. You can stay, say your spiel. I didn't mean to be a bitch."

Vanessa took a place on the edge of the bed again. "Thank you. And you don't need to apologize. I won't pretend I haven't heard some of what you've been through. It sounds awful."

Lex at last took a seat, hugging her legs to her very ample chest at the other end of her bed. “Which part? Wasting a fortune on these stupid slutty udders, my parents hating me, realizing I did it for some stupid guy who’s dipping his wick in anything hot and wet he can find, or having him giggle like a twelve-year-old when I told him what I just told you? Oh, or the goddamn *Iliad* playing over it? The tits that launched a thousand fits.”

Vanessa nodded. “Did you come up with that just now?”

“Heh. Nah, been using that one a bit, workshopping it.”

“It’s very clever. I’m terrible at that sort of thing.”

“Thanks.”

“It sounds like it’s been really stressful.”

“To put it mildly. It’s pretty fucked up, walking around with these things bouncing around, reminding me with every step that half the girls on this floor hate me for Spencer maybe getting fired soon, and the other half hate me because they think I played a cheat code to get his attention.”

“I don’t think they all hate you,” Vanessa said softly. Disagreeing with someone – out loud! – did not come easily to her. “Some, probably, but only because they really like Spencer and are worried about losing him. I know you two used to get along, so maybe you know what that feels like.”

Lex frowned, but nodded.

“But I also know there wouldn’t be all this fighting and arguing over it if they didn’t care about you. Not showing it the way you want them to, but they’re concerned, I think. I was mad when I heard about it, and Spencer’s one of my best friends.”

“So you did come to try to get me to forgive him, then.”

“No! No, I promise. I could tell you all about how awful and stupid he feels for what he did, but that’s seriously not why I’m here. I’m here because he taught me how to be a good RA, even though right now, he screwed up so badly he can’t help you. So I wanted to help you.”

“Like, as a favor? So you can be coworker number three that he’s nailing?”

Vanessa summoned her nerves. She wanted to run, get as far away from this incredibly intense discussion as she could and let people just do whatever they wanted with her having no part in it. Only six months ago, a Vanessa had lived three doors down who would have rather died than confront someone over something sensitive like this.

This Vanessa lived downstairs now, though. In the RA room. 210, right beneath Spencer.

Deep breath.

“I don’t want to sleep with him. Even if I did, I’m not his type. He likes girls like you.”

“Idiot freaks?”

Vanessa laughed at the absurd self-assessment. “Beautiful, attractive girls with perfect bodies, with spirit and fire and cleverness. I’ve known you for five minutes and I can see you’ve got that and then some. Plus – and I apologize for knowing your business without you telling me again, but you know how dorm life is – but um... Aren’t you the ‘tits out’ girl?”

Slowly, a grin blossomed on Lex’s face. “He told you about that?”

“Yeah.”

Lex lowered her knees, taking a less defensive posture. “I feel so stupid about that. I mean, yeah, back home, I’d lay around my room in my underwear a lot. I like to be comfy, my parents’ apartment doesn’t have AC, and nobody cared. I didn’t figure I’d keep doing it, but then I get here and there’s all these insanely hot girls everywhere, and my roommate’s like the hottest one of all and she’s all throwing her perfect everything in my face, taking cheap shots. I know I don’t look it any more, but trust me, if we’d met three weeks ago, I’d have made you look like Kate Upton.”

Vanessa did not know who Kate Upton was, but she deduced the intended point from context. “I doubt that.”

“Anyway, trust me, I got it out of my system. I don’t know what I was thinking getting these things, like I’d come back to school like ‘hey Spencer, check out my ridiculous fake titties’ like he’d just swoon and be unable to resist himself. Which I guess he was, but like, ugh. Asshole. They’re still not fully healed. The scars itch like crazy. I literally have to wear mittens when I sleep so I don’t unconsciously try to scratch at the bandages and tear them open.”

Vanessa’s eyes bulged at the thought. “Oh my god! Oh my god. Yeah, please don’t do that.”

“Believe me, I won’t.” Lex sighed. “So, what, you want me to march down there and accept his apology?”

“No. I mean, if you want to, sure. Honestly, I’m not a hundred percent sure what I wanted to accomplish coming down here.” This was untrue, but she’d been spending enough time around Vickie and Carmen to learn a few things about how to express herself. “Did you know I lived on this floor last year?”

“Really? Huh. Small world...?”

“Yeah, down next to the RA room, where that girl who got attacked during Welcome Week lives. Leia?”

“Leigh. But she’s definitely a princess.”

“There was a different RA then. No shower fights over her.”

Lex giggled. “That was something, all right.”

“I’ll bet. But yeah, I lived here last year, and on Higgins basement when I was a freshman. And I was just thinking when I knocked on the door how I didn’t know the

girls' names who lived here last year. But this year, I feel like I know half the building. More every week. Today, you."

"Huh. OK." Lex was plainly not following, nor especially caring that she wasn't. She was being polite-ish now though, a quality which Lex had little experience inspiring in others.

"I've always been really shy, you know? I barely even talked to my own roommate. I didn't talk to people in classes. I just felt really alone sometimes. Sometimes when I was going through some really hard stuff."

"Stuff? Like what?"

Lex's mind flitted to the stuff. "Men who didn't treat me the way I deserve to be treated. You can relate, I'm sure."

What she'd left unsaid spoke volumes. "Yeah. Yeah, I can."

"And I kept thinking about it, and I can't do anything to fix my friend's huge mess for him, and I can't turn back time so you can give another thought to your surgery. But I thought, when I was feeling so small, and lonely, and ugly, wouldn't it have been nice when I was busy building this wall between me and the world, if somebody would have poked it down and tried to be my friend. I guess I was just too caught up in my own fear, and shame."

"Afraid? Of what?" Lex asked softly.

"Just about everything. Being alone, being with people, not being good enough, not being bad enough. And you're crazy if you think I never thought about doing exactly what you did. And you look beautiful, for what it's worth. I hope that's not unwelcome."

The girl smiled softly.

"But yeah, my family doctor has been hounding me to put on weight since I was in middle school. I don't take in enough calories, and I'm a vegetarian with vegan leanings and I screwed up and wasn't getting the right nutrients to give me a proper puberty. I sort of thought if I did, and I grew boobs and hips and a butt, that people I didn't want noticing me would notice me more. It was easier to hide and hope than to actually try."

Vanessa pushed out a breath. "I don't know. I guess I thought maybe we'd have some things to talk about, maybe."

Lex studied her, unsure what to make of all that. She certainly hadn't woken up that morning expecting a stranger to force her way into her home and unload vague hints of her own big problems and such overt empathy for Lex's.

She allowed a thin smile. "Did you seriously knock on my door to ask me if I needed a friend?"

Vanessa hadn't ever nailed down exactly what she'd hoped to get out of this. She just wanted to help somebody, and she'd found somebody to help. She considered a

moment. "I think I knocked to tell you I want to be your friend." Was that the same thing? The distinction felt significant, but communication was not her forte.

"Do you have a car?"

Vanessa shook her head. "No."

"Shit. Some friend you are." Lex smiled. "I was gonna say we should get some good Chinese food. The shit at the food court is always all dried out, so I thought maybe off campus."

"I don't mind walking. If you want."

They both needed a moment to get ready, then they met up in front of the center building. Lex was sporting a tight top now, and *damn*. "Not bad, huh? Bit much, but... eh. Sometimes it's fun to be a bit much."

"I wouldn't know," said Vanessa. "My chest will have to live vicariously through yours."

As they set out, Lex gave her a thorough looking over. "You're not totally flat, you know. You'd still fit in on Higgins 3."

Vanessa smiled. "Thanks. I actually put on eight pounds so far this semester. I know it isn't much, but it's a start."

"Happy Halloween," Vanessa said as she arrived at the center desk.

Savannah laughed in delight at her friend's costume. "Oh my god, happy Halloween. You look amazing. I'm so jealous."

Even out of context, such a compliment from the likes of Savannah Gray made Vanessa stand a little taller. Less short, anyway. "Thank you. Busy night?"

"A little. Some weird little turd came in to use the computer lab earlier. They were in costume but I was pretty sure it was a guy, so not one of ours, but I wasn't sure and the last thing I wanted to do was embarrass somebody." There was a brief awkward moment as they acknowledged that Vanessa was the sort of girl who could easily be mistaken for a boy if she covered her face and hair, which her costume nearly did.

"Anyway," Savannah went on, "they got me. Waited until I wasn't looking, snuck right up under the transaction window there, and..." She leaned out and dragged a capped pen on the brick beneath it. "*Scrrrrrrraaaaatch. Scrrrrrrrrraaaaatch.* I finally got up to check it out, and they jumped up and scared the shit out of me, ran off laughing."

"Oh geez! I'd have peed myself."

"Who says I didn't?" Savannah wrinkled her nose. "Ah well. One night a year. Anyway, I'm almost ready to close. Just had a group of girls come in to get change for

the vending machine – guess their trick or treating didn't yield enough candy – so I have to adjust the count on the drawer. But then we're good."

Vanessa offered to close the computer lab, and soon the two were good to go. Only one thing left to do.

Dreadway time.

The girls headed downstairs, pausing at the entrance to the hall. Those damnable red lights faded in and out, revealing only the sheer length of the darkness. It being Halloween didn't help.

"Flashlights, or do we go full Halloween?" Vanessa asked. She was joking, but like always, her voice didn't make that obvious.

"Oh hell, let's do it." Savannah stood at her side, rubbing her arms at an unseen chill. She called out, "If somebody's down there thinking it's going to be funny to jump out and scare us, it's not!"

The only answer was her own echo.

"It's going to be OK," said Vanessa. "You can stay here if you want. I'll go."

"No. Are you serious? Spencer doesn't even go down there by himself."

Vanessa took a step. After a moment, Savannah followed.

"It's the same hall as during the day," her colleague recited to herself as they started slowly down the hallway. Carmen preferred to sprint down and back, even though this was widely considered an invitation to the murder-rapists lurking in the dreadway to decapitate her simply by holding their machetes out at neck level. Cautious was clearly the optimal pace, and tonight she stuck to it. That maybe-boy who'd jump-scared Savannah could be down here, or someone like him. Even as a mere prank, it would be traumatizing.

Poor Savannah. Vanessa took her hand and gave it a squeeze. She should distract her, give her something else to focus on as they crept forward.

"Savannah?"

"Yeah?" Was she crying? She sounded like she was crying.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Yeah. But speak up. I love your sweet little voice, but right now..."

Vanessa forced a little more air through her pipes. "Why did you two break up?"

Savannah stopped abruptly. Vanessa and her tiny legs had wound up half a step behind, and her shoulder collided with the statuesque woman. "What? That came out of nowhere."

"I've been wondering for a while. You don't have to answer, though. It's OK."

It was so dark the women couldn't have seen their own fingers if they held their arms out at length. Neither of them had mustered the courage to move again. "The truth is, I wanted to for a long time. I think deep down I've always known we're not right for each other."

Vanessa realized quickly that Savannah was not referring to the same breakup that she had been.

“He loves me. I know he does. And he’s good to me. He wants me to be happy, but it’s like... Hmm. Like he doesn’t know what happiness looks like? Like it’s some box he needs to check off, ‘made girlfriend happy, check.’ ‘Am provider, check.’ ‘Big truck, check.’ Like these things he thinks men need to do to be men, so he does them.”

Vanessa took a step. They were even, now.

“And don’t get me wrong. He’s a good guy. And he’s very, mmm, yeah. But – OK, there was this one time last summer where we were just goofing around in the pool, and he says – like a joke – how relieved he is we got back together, so finally the guys will stop giving him crap about losing me.”

Savannah took a step. “And Price was only kidding. I know that. He didn’t mean anything by it. But it’s how he is, you know? Like this window into how he really thinks. He does care about me, but he also sees me as another status symbol, same as his truck.”

Vanessa stepped again, tightened her grip. “So why do you keep taking him back?”

“I don’t know. It’s complicated. I guess he checks some boxes for me, too. ‘Stable, check.’ ‘Makes parents happy, check.’ ‘Don’t have to put myself out there and wade through the legions of jerkwads to find a good guy, check.’ God, I sound like such a Hallmark chick.”

“Savannah, you *are* the Hallmark chick.”

“Feel like the Hallmark horror chick right now,” she muttered, but Vanessa received a squeeze in kind.

“But didn’t you find a good guy?”

Savannah sniffed. “Oh, do you mean AAAAAAAAAAUGH SHIT SHIT FUCK SHIT FUCK FUCK SHIT AAAAAAIIEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!” Savannah sprinted back to the start of the dreadway near the stairs, leaving Vanessa alone in the dark.

“What happened?!” she cried out to the girl frantically clawing at her face in the narrow strip of light. Her ears were still recovering from that shriek.

Savannah slowly regained control of herself. She was definitely crying now. “Sorry. Something touched my face. It was, um, a spider web. I think.”

Vanessa was glad her smug smile was invisible to her friend. She raised her voice, though the acoustics down here didn’t really need it. There was nowhere for sound to escape, just like there was nowhere for them to escape. God, she hated the dreadway.

“You’re OK. But... you were saying? About Spencer? Is he one of those jerkwads?”

Savannah was leaning on her knees, catching her breath, composing herself. She didn’t look up at the mention of that name, but her expression shifted subtly. “He’s not a jerk, wad or otherwise.”

“But you still broke up with him for Price.”

“Price had nothing to do with it. Price is there so I don’t let myself go back to him again. I think if I dumped him for Spencer, again, he might drive down here and seriously go ballistic.”

Vanessa stiffened. “On you...?!”

“Huh? No! No no no. He would never. But Price is the sort of guy who would pound a total stranger if he found out they were hurting his girl. So yeah, Spencer... he’s fair game.”

Vanessa reflected on what it said about her that her first instinct upon hearing that was to contemplate pounding a total stranger if he abused her Spencer. Ridiculous, but feelings often were. “Is that why you dumped him, then? To protect him from a pissed off ex?”

Savannah straightened. “You know, this is like having a conversation with my conscience – or maybe just my libido – with you lurking out there in the dark. OK. I’m coming.” Haltingly, she took a step back into the dark, and then another, and then was only a silhouette against the stairwell light far behind her.

“I broke up with Spencer because I think he’s unhealthy for me,” Savannah’s voice came through the darkness. “No. I *know* he’s unhealthy for me.”

“How so?”

Vanessa could hear Savannah’s flawless face go through different expressions as she sorted out the words. “Because everything was way too *good*.”

“I don’t understand. You don’t want things to be good..?”

“OK. Um, to be a little TMI about it...” Savannah was still only halfway there. “Our chemistry was next level. The feel of his hands on my body. The taste of him in my mouth. The way he could just *look* at me and my body would start to...”

“Get wet, you mean?” Too many talks with Vickie was giving Vanessa a pottymouth, she worried.

“Um, well... Yeah. But I mean, if we’re goin there... Not wet. *Soaked*. He literally didn’t have to do anything. Heck, I didn’t want him to. I just wanted to, mmmm, *savor* him. Like once I was, um, going down on him? Like I didn’t ever want to stop. Like I had him completely to myself, hardness and softness and firmness in all the perfect proportions.”

Savannah sighed, then some sort of snorting sound. “Listen to me. And that’s what I mean! I don’t... *do* that. But like I get in a room with him, and I can’t help myself. My whole mind is twisted into this, this... pleasure quest. I get horny and slutty and needy, and I *never* get horny or slutty or needy.”

Vanessa’s hand was on its own pleasure quest inside her bulky costume as she listened to the most beautiful woman in the world talk about her lust for the most beautiful man in the world. What she wouldn’t give to be a fly on the wall. To watch them, just once.

“But if you both make each other that way, then... isn't that a good thing? Not that I'd know, but it sounds like a good thing.”

Savannah had nearly caught up to her. “But that's the problem. I got horny-slutty-needy for Spencer, and Spencer got that way for half the girls in Higgins.”

“So it's because of Vickie, then?” And who knows how many others.

“No. No I know, but it's really not. See, the real problem is, I didn't care. I *should* care. But I was too into him to mind. Honestly, sometimes we'd be hanging out, and I'd be sucking his cock – belated French apology – and I'd be thinking about Vickie, and those residents of his, and thinking how ha, he wants *me*, right now all this is *mine*. And then he'd come for me, and I'd come for him – and by the way I cannot stress enough that I do *not* talk like this – and it would only make me want to keep going, more, mmmm, more, and, and, and I'd go home and I'd think of him and wonder why I wasn't still up there, knowing I could go back up and make him all mine because the slutty sonofabitch loves me, even if he focuses on one thing at a time about as well as a squirrel on cocaine, and I can't be with a cocaine squirrel even if it's the best thing I've ever had. God, I miss his cum. His smile.”

Savannah was near enough now that Vanessa could feel her warmth. Was she touching herself too? Her ears focused. Her hand stilled. She held her breath. There it was. The same sounds Vanessa made when she touched herself down there.

She reached out with her own sticky wet fingers and groped about in the darkness until she found Savannah's arm. It froze, but there was a brief moment when she'd felt her forearm wriggling, tensing.

“Vanessa? Why is your hand...?”

“The same reason yours is.”

“Oh shit. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to! You just got me thinking about him, and–”

“It's OK. He makes me feel horny and slutty and needy sometimes, too. You can keep going, if you want. I won't tell.”

Savannah sniffled. “Are, um, you going to keep going?”

Vanessa released her arm. “Tell me about how it feels to be his cocksucker.”

“He told you about that...?!”

“No. You just did.” Vanessa leaned the tail of her costume against the wall and slid down to the concrete floor. “And be as explicit as you like.”

Savannah slid down the same way Vanessa had. There was a little grunt as she wriggled out of her pants and underwear. “His cock tastes hamburgers, and man sweat. That, mm, probably sounds nasty, but I like it.”

“We run together. I know what you mean about the sweat. I like how he smells.”

“Sometimes I'd put my fingers inside myself, get them, like, glazed? And then I'd tease them around his shaft and suck it clean. It was like tasting us having sex.”

“Can... Can I...?” Vanessa’s heart nearly stopped. She could never have said this in the light.

Suddenly a pair of slimy fingers touched her cheek. “You’re so bad, Vanessa!” Savannah giggled as she blindly sought out her friend’s lips, then slid her fingers inside. Then her fingers were being sucked clean, and there was no more giggling. Just a little moan, and the sounds of her left hand taking over.

“I like to do it in my underwear,” Savannah said, teasing her moistened digits in and out of Vanessa’s mouth. “I like how he looks at me when I undress. He just stares, like I’m, I’m, like I’m a painting, like he’s memorizing me. Like he loves me. But I can’t take off my panties because he’d find out how much it turns me on. I get, um, pretty... messy.”

Vanessa removed the fingers from her mouth long enough to reply, “I can tell.”

Savannah re-coated her fingers, then slid them back in. “I still think about it. Like, Price will be going down on me, and he’s good and all, but all I’m thinking about is being Spencer’s, mm, slutty horny little cocksucker.”

Vanessa thought back to the sounds she’d heard emanating from his lounge earlier that night. A Halloween party, but there had been... moaning. Lots of moaning. Vanessa hadn’t dared open the door, hadn’t wanted to risk spoiling their fun, but she’d tarried outside long enough to get a good idea of what was happening in there.

In the absence of Savannah, he’d tried to replace her by fucking his entire floor. Maybe it would be enough.

Vanessa sort of hoped it wouldn’t. It was all too close to her deepest, dirtiest fantasies.

“Savannah?”

She had to wait for a moan to subside before receiving an answer. “Yeah? Am I being too loud?”

“No, no, not at all. I was just thinking, um...” *Be brave.* “If you wanted, I could, um, do yours, if you wanted to do mine. Is that weird? Oh crap that’s so weird. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to—”

Suddenly it was her turn to have a pussy-dampened hand on her forearm. A gentle pressure pulled her fingers out of her crotch, and after a moment in the cool air of the dreadway, it found a warm new home in Savannah’s. Then there were two fingers inside of her again, but not hers.

“Imagine it’s his cock,” Savannah whispered. Her arms were so long to be able to manage this. “Imagine that it’s him inside you. Fucking you.”

“I can’t,” Vanessa whimpered. “He can’t.”

“Come on, you’re beautiful. He absolutely would if you asked him to, I bet.”

Vanessa shook her head, not that anyone could see. Not in the dark, not in her costume. “No. I can’t imagine he’s fucking me because I’m imagining him fucking *you*.”

Savannah's guttural howl echoed up and down the loading dock. "You are making me want to do some very, very bad things, Vanessa," she whimpered.

"Do them. Do them all."

Suddenly she was being kissed. By a girl? Not that any of the men she'd kissed had wound up doing much for her. Still it ought to bother her, except it was *this* girl, her friend, the woman of the dreams of the man of her dreams. Their fingers continued slowly, neither in any rush to be done. The dreadway was now just the comforting darkness concealing the depths of their depravity from themselves, each other, and the world.

Vanessa forced Spencer's playmate down to the floor, following her down. Savannah giggled as Vanessa's helmet tickled her, so she took it off and shut her up. Her turn to put slimy fingers in a girl's mouth. "That's it. That's it, my beautiful, wonderful little cocksucker. Suck that cock. Suck it."

Savannah panted between slurps in her earnest attempt at fellatio. Had Spencer ever done this? Thrown Savannah on her back and mounted her face, fucked it like a pussy? He did it all the time in Vanessa's imagination. She distractedly fingered the girl. It was helpful – she probably wouldn't come without it – but her words were the real aphrodisiac.

"Don't stop. Don't you stop, cocksucker. Suck. Suck me off. Suck and suck and suck until I'm done with you."

"Mmng, please don't be done with me. I miss you. I miss this. I miss you. Don't stop. Don't be done. Let me mmnf..." Vanessa's hand swap completed, cutting her off and giving her a fresh taste of her own leaky pussy.

Vanessa bent down and whispered in her ear. This was exactly like her fantasies. Except instead of Spencer, her, and instead of a private beach resort, this grungy terrifying past and future crime scene. "You're a horny, slutty, needy little cocksucker. I bet if you got on your knees, stripped down to your bra and panties and asked him really nice, he'd let you suck his cock again."

"Please! Oh please, oh please, oh please, I'll never stop again, I'll never stop, never, please," she whispered.

"Promise you'll be good to him."

"You're, oh god, you're so..."

"*Promise.*"

"I'll be good," Savannah capitulated as their fingers met in and around her pussy. "So good. Good little, ungh, right there don't stop, please don't stop, I'll... I'll..."

Vanessa aimed for that spot inside her own pussy that always made her explode all over her sheets. Savannah stiffened, her back arching as she cried out. "*I'll be a good little cocksucker! OH FUCK!* Please, please, keep going, right like, right, right like that,

right there, oh god, I'll suck your cock so *good* Spencer, just *don't stop*, never, neverrrrrrrrrroohmyfucking*GAW-HAW-HAWD!*"

Vanessa waited until her friend and coworker and personal hero stopped screeching and spasming around her fingers. The intensity of her orgasm almost brightened the dreadway for a moment. Then they held each other for a while. Savannah said she didn't know what came over her. Vanessa said the same. They were both lying, and they both knew they were both lying.

"I, um, had fun."

"Me too. Who knew my friend Vanessa was a secret sexophile."

Vanessa giggled. "I'm not! It's your fault for being so freaking hot."

Savannah nodded, still in the dark, unseen. "Guilty. Though you better not pretend like you aren't, too. I felt all that."

Vanessa didn't cop to it. At last, the girls rose, tugged clothes and costumes back into place, and completed their stroll through the dreadway as if it were just another hall in Higgins. At the far end, Vanessa jiggled the handle to make sure the lock was in place. As she did so, though, she saw a familiar face in the parking lot, walking right towards them. The only man in the world who she could have seen emerge from the darkness in the dead of night in this of all places without making her scream in terror. Instead, she felt warm, and safe.

Savannah peered through the slit of a window. "What the hell...?"

But Vanessa had already seen someone behind him, his floor governor. Her arms were loaded with big balls of wadded up paper. His hands both held a number of trash bags by the drawstring. They must be cleaning up after their party, not wanting to overflow their trash room. Like a good RA.

"I should go." Savannah shook her head. "I don't know what I'm going to say to him, but I think you pushed me good and hard off the fence. Confusing."

"Yeah. Think about it. You two are so, so good together. And hey, do you mind letting me out? I want to say hi. Don't worry – I won't say anything." Vanessa laughed. Laughter, *here!* "Who would believe me if I did?"

Savannah looked down the dark hallway, but she was inspired by her friend's example and refused to let her fear show. "Yeah, go ahead. I'll be OK. Maybe yeah, leave out the makeout, but you better tell everybody I did the dreadway by myself."

"You're getting the brick for this."

Savannah pulled her in and hugged her tightly, planting a kiss on Vanessa's feathery helmet. Outside, a hollow metallic bang announced that Spencer had reached the dumpsters. "Thank you for this. Nobody makes me feel good about myself like you, you know that? Really. I love you."

Vanessa hugged back as tightly as she knew how. It wasn't much, but she would learn. "Um, thanks. And, um, yeah. I... yeah."

“You love me. You don’t have to say it. Now go on.”

Spencer’s yell of startlement cut short when he recognized Savannah and her costumed companion. “Oh my god, you two scared the shit out of me!”

Savannah arched an eyebrow. “What’s so scary? It’s just a trash bin behind a building.” With a smirk, she shut the door behind Vanessa.

“Hey, Vanessa.”

Vanessa’s head snapped back in surprise. “How’d you know it was me?”

He reached up his hands. She understood what he meant after a moment and trusted her weight – including the extra eight pounds – into his hands. He hefted her gently down to the ground, where Tori was stuffing her load into a dumpster. That was quite the costume. Vanessa couldn’t imagine having the guts to be outside wearing so little.

“First off, you forget who you’re talking to. I always know who’s on duty. Second off, I mean, look at you. A swan. Who else could it be?”

Vanessa didn’t think she’d ever smiled so big in her life. “I thought you said you didn’t remember our interview.”

“It was our first day of training! I didn’t want Janis to be upset I remembered your answer but forgot hers.” He glanced up to the topmost level of Higgins. The RA rooms lined up vertically. There was hers, and above it Spencer’s, and above that Janis’s. The light was on. Probably praying for salvation from the ghosts and goblins or something. “Of course, that was before I got to know her, so...”

“Spencer, you said if I helped, you’d... you’d let me...” Tori’s eyes darted accusingly at the tiny girl in her tiny bird costume. It was actually a goose costume, but she’d put her craft skills to use and made the distinction clear.

“In a minute, Tori. You look great, though, Vanessa. Did you wear that because of...?”

She nodded. “Yeah. At the time, I was too frightened to talk, but I remember you had that followup question. And I wanted you to know, it was a great question.”

He beamed, and the earth whirled and the sun returned and shone down only for her. “Right?”

“I’d never thought about myself like that before. I don’t think I ever really tried to think about myself and what was good about me, why I was good enough for something. I think that question is the best question anybody’s ever asked me.”

“Spencerrrr...! I’m so *horrrrrnyyyy*...!” whined Tori. “I don’t care if she watches, just put it in me!”

“Oh my *god* Tori, I know it’s hard but you’ve got to keep it together better than *that!*” he snapped. Vanessa agreed. Crushing on Spencer, sure, but begging for cock behind the dumpsters in the parking lot was a bit much.

“Go ahead,” Vanessa said.

Spencer winced. “I... I’m sorry. She and I, we’re still... working things out. You really do look great, and thank you so much for saying that. That was so amazing of you. Do you want to get lunch tomorrow?”

“I’d like that.”

“Great. I’ll text you. I, ah, guess we better...” He looked over to where Tori was mauling her big brown tits in her slutty costume.

“Spencer, wait.” Had she just ordered someone to do something? A man? *This* man?

He waited, though. Automatically. “Yeah?”

“I meant go ahead, as in...” She gestured to Tori. “She said she didn’t mind if I watched. Do you, um, mind?”

Spencer’s eyes and smile widened in dazzlingly equitable proportion, but then he shook his head, grinning sheepishly. “I guess if I’m doing this, I’m doing this, uh. So... sure, what the hell. How could I mind my swan? But I have one condition.”

“OK.”

Tori adapted surprisingly well to the presence of a woman standing behind her, bucking her hips into the back of her head to regulate the pace and intensity of her scummy behind-the-dumpster blowjob. She didn’t have any choice, though. It was the only place she could stand where her lips could reach his. Besides, Tori had nearly gotten him fired. Vanessa was glad she’d come around, but she deserved some comeuppance for her little stunt.

“I think it’s really hot that you’re sleeping with them,” she said as she rammed Tori’s skull down around his shaft. The girl sputtered, gagged, but gradually accepted his cock down her throat. God, she was so lucky. “I wanted you to know that.”

He grunted, shuddered, came down Tori’s throat. “I’m not sure there’s anything hotter than you telling me what you think is hot, Vanessa. Not gonna lie, I’ve spent some time wondering what makes you tick.”

“Lunch tomorrow? I’ll talk your ear off.”

END, PART SEVEN