

Life For Fantasy

By : **Ashley Marie**

Alice Colosant was your average, fifteen-year-old sophomore girl. Adorable boyfriend, decent grades, crazy friends that got her in trouble, and that one person who drove her to the edge continuously. One night, as she's wandering the neighborhood for her missing dog, she falls victim to a drunk driver. Ending up in the hospital, she falls into a deep coma where the world is completely different from her own. Finding herself in different surroundings, Alice struggles to find the difference between reality and dream. But as she begins to get used to the new world, her life is slowly starts to come to an end and she is forced to choose, will she escape her undisturbed slumber? Or will she trade Life for Fantasy?



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Chapter 1: Disconnecting Connections

The numbers that decorated my Geometry teachers voice and the sound of zippers being opened and closed filled my mind as I slowly stirred from my slight slumber. I peered up at the Hispanic educator. He looked tired and worn from the loud teenage students whose desks sat in neat rows at the beginning of the class period, but now laid in disarray around the entire classroom. Their owners were crowded by the front door, loud and frivolous as always, and I slowly raised myself up from my desk, looking drearily around at my classmates. Our teacher spoke directly to one of the students as I packed up my bag, but I didn't care. It was none of my business. As I finished zipping up my pack the loud bell, horn rather, rang and I pulled myself out of my seat, nonchalantly taking my iPod out of my pocket and sticking the ear buds in as I flipped through the song list. Black Mamba by The Academy Is... was the first thing that came to my mind as I scrolled through them all, and I pressed the 'Play' button, letting the drums soak me in and wake me up as I turned up the volume and climbed out of the portable. Waving a goodbye to Mr. Geraldo, I continued down the ramp, my short, yet decently proportioned body swaying this way and that through the maze of multiple ethnic students who all stood towering over me.

"Hey," A familiar voice rang, carrying on the 'eey' a bit longer than necessary, from behind me, and I turned to a large Hispanic boy who walked quickly up to me. I smiled at him, his overly thick body making up just about two and a half, perhaps three of me. His hair was cut short, and his glasses glared slightly as he turned his head in the Florida sunlight. The rosary that hung around his neck with the Mother Mary on it made a sense of irony climb up inside me as my hazel eyes met it. Juan holy? I laughed internally as I smiled at him.

"What's up? You skippin' today?" I asked him as I pulled out an earphone so I could actually hear him. I brushed a piece of light brown hair with bright blonde highlights away from my face as I talked to him, scratching my neck ever so lightly with my fingernails as the newly cut hair irritated the back of it. After almost two weeks I still wasn't used to the no-longer-long locks. It used to be so long, but here it was, curling an inch and a half or so below my jaw line. A drastic change compared to the breast length waves I had before.

"Nah, just walkin' with you until I find my other friends," He stated as we walked before looking at me with big brown eyes "Why, you want me to?" At his smile I couldn't help but laugh.

"It don't matter to me. 'though I think you'd get *better grades* if you went to class." I replied, emphasizing the words "better grades" so that he caught the meaning. See, I'm one of those friends that try to help her friends make better grades. Not that it works but hey, can't say I didn't try. He re-adjusted himself as we slowly approached the edge of the parking lot closest to the cafeteria and he rolled his eyes and looked down at my four feet eleven inches body.

"Stop looking at me like that!" He cried and I furrowed my brow.

"Like what?" I asked him, stopping and fixing my back pack.

"You're giving me the 'eye'" He boldly stated and I just looked at him like he was crazy.

"I honestly have no idea what you're talkin' about." I replied and he shook his head before looking up and seeing a group of guys who he greeted full heartedly. I shook my head and waved goodbye to the crazy Junior as I continued under the awning that attached to the gym. As I did I placed the missing headphone in my ear, noting that Send Her My Love by Journey was playing and I stopped dead in the middle of the shaded area to change it. I loved the song, but I really wasn't in the mood to listen to that kind of music. When You Love a Woman by Journey started blasting in my ears and I groaned. What? Did my Nano 4th addition adore

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Journey's love songs or something? I pressed the 'next' button, still planted, and the next was, of course You're the One. This time though it was by the Oak Ridge Boys. But it was still a love song, and frankly if it wasn't loud, up-beat, and slightly angry, I didn't want to listen to it! In frustration I shook the black portable music player, and as it shuffled it ended up on Error Operator by Taking Back Sunday. I sighed and rolled my eyes. Whatever, I could hardly hear the lyrics over the music anyway, so I let it play, slowly getting lost in the steel guitar as I lifted my tan, heart shaped, face. My eyes went wide as I did. There he was. Dario Cervantes. Man, and he was looking just as beautiful today as always. Dario was, in my opinion, a Colombian god. Broad shoulders, slightly on the larger side giving him the appearance of a football player, dark brown and feathered hair that just barely missed his shoulders by about an inch, and a soft face that I had memorized in my mind. He smiled at me, and I gave him a small smile back, trying not to melt or freak out about that smile as he'd been obviously avoiding me for the past three weeks. We'd had this whole on-off sort of thing since August, and I'd had a pretty crazy life since then. Just this past month, about a week before spring break I'd sent him an email, around three weeks or so after me and my boyfriend, Michel Henley, started dating, telling him how I felt about him. Yes, I was crazy for the kid, I was spoken for, but I mean, the guy was perfect. His grades were perfect, he was sporty, very focused, family oriented, sweet, polite, a bit of a masochist, and a very passionate kisser. This whole on-off thing was seriously driving me insane though, and I needed to send him that letter or else my friends would have to lock me in a straight jacket and send me off the funny farm. I told him if he wanted to avoid me, he could, if he didn't want to talk to me, he didn't have to, if he didn't want to reply to the email, he didn't have to. And he didn't. It was heart breaking, but I was specifically ordered by my best friend, Edie, not to think about it while I was on Spring break in California with my mom and other family. So I didn't, and honestly, him avoiding me was really helping with the whole 'get over you' ordeal. Of course when he felt like being bi-polar and throwing me those smiles that could send even the hardest girl melting to the floor, I was screwed. He walked past me, tapping my arm with his own soft one, and my heart skipped a beat. *"Damn it..."* I thought to myself as I clenched my jaw and took a breath. *"Don't look back, don't look back. Remember Michel"* I repeated over and over to myself as I approached the cafeteria and the outside tables. My normal group of people sat down on each of the four sides, well, their bags did at least. Three of our group were actually physically there, surprisingly, Ashleigh, Erin, and Starlet. Kaylin stood in line, chatting it up with Phillip as they waited to get lunch from the outside window, and I waved at them as I walked over to my side of the table, next to Kaylin's stuff.

"Baby!" Ash cried, jumping out of her seat and pouncing on me, and my eyes went wide as she did. Her dark brown, layered hair bounced around her as her bright green and brown eyes lit up with excitement. She was slender and tall, not too tall, but still noticeably taller than myself. Her skin was a shade lighter than mine, and her face was a bit sharper. She called me her 'baby sister' and it's kind of over bearing sometimes, but hey, I should know by now. My best friend, Edie, didn't like her one bit, and Ash shared the same feelings, and I'd just stand there going "uh... What do I do now?" Lucky for me though she had fourth lunch, and this was sixth.

"Hey, Ash," I laughed awkwardly, hugging her back but also pushing her off a bit as I slid my bag off of my shoulders. Immediately it felt like twenty pounds had been lifted off of my back. I can't tell you how good it felt to be free of that heavy bag. I had not only my main big binder, but my math binder, my history binder, my geometry book, and my jacket. It was a lot heavier than it sounds. I looked over at Starlet who was once again talking about another guy who was trying to get to her and everything, and I rolled my eyes without her seeing. I loved the girlie to death, but she was wild. I didn't let the thought get to me as the five foot three blonde smiled at me and I smiled back. "Y'all want to go inside and get something to eat?" I asked them, and they nodded with a loud "yeah!" in unison, which got them into a fit of hysterics along with myself, and we stumbled into the lunch room to the 'A La Carte' line that was just at the entrance.

Not thinking about food, I looked around the cement room that was set up to be used as a storm shelter in bad weather, when my eyes caught site of a familiar head or light red hair. A smile crossed my lips and I looked at the girls "I'll be right back," I said, tapping their arms and looking back at Michel. My face must have gotten a

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bit of a glow in it as I saw him, because Ash rolled her eyes and Starlet started making bow chika wow wow noises. I shoved them both before sneakily jogging over to him. Of course though, the skinny five feet seven inches soccer player saw me just as I did. I stopped, made a mocking pout and he tilted his head with a smirk and a "really now?" kind of look. I laughed lightly, smirking, and giving him a hug. "Hey you," I smiled looking up "I didn't see you earlier," He shrugged in response.

"I went to the truck with Tanner and Justin." Said the freckled sixteen year old, and I rolled my eyes with a small laugh. Of course, the infamous truck. It was like those boys spent their entire lives in there. It was pretty old, but painted a shiny gold color, so it looked alright. It was definitely a big sign on the road that screamed "this is my first car!" What they did in that car was none of my business, meaning I didn't *want* to know what they did. It was something I didn't need to know. I shook my head and looked up at him, smiling at him and looking at his blue eyes. I had to admit, he had the some of the most beautiful blue eyes I'd ever seen. They were all one color, a very soft blue that reminded me of this flower from India that my step-mom tried to grow in our lawn, I think it was called a Blue Barleria or something else with two 'B's.

"Of course you did," I laughed, moving a piece of shoulder length red hair from his nose as he watched it swing into disarray. "I'm going to go get some food and sit outside, I'll come in when I'm done," I smiled, and he nodded giving me an 'ok' before softening his eyes and leaning down to give me a peck on the lips. I smiled as he did so and jogged off to meet up with the girls. They were still two people behind, so I stood next to the line, telling them to dial in my account number to buy me some breadsticks and marinara sauce when the doors across from us opened. I looked up, not really caring just having a short attention span when my eyes grew wide. In walked my ex boyfriend, Stephen. Not that I'd call him a boyfriend, we dated for about week my Freshman year, just before summer break, but we both realized that the only thing we really did was make out before sixth period so we ended it the day after our one week anniversary. I didn't honestly care, I wasn't too attached to him. He was decently attractive, a football player last year but not good enough or too lazy to sign up to play again this year, but actually really skinny and tall. He stood at about six feet three inches, maybe four, I honestly didn't know, and he somewhat reminded me of the jolly green giant. His skin was a light peach with light brown eyes, and dark brown buzz cut hair. He was so nice last year, very polite, a bit of a romantic, and very forward, but he'd changed over the summer. He'd started hanging out with my next door neighbor and become this mean wannabe gangster. He could be nice sometimes, but all in all he'd turned into a jerk those two months since I'd seen him. Right next to him, I realized in horror, was his polar opposite, Dario.

Chapter 2: Catching Eyes and Making Ways

"*What the hell is he doing here?*" I thought frantically "*And why in Gods name is he with Stephen?*" My mind was digging through it's internal files searching for the answers to these questions like someone would search for a really important piece of information that would kill them if they didn't discover its hiding place.

"*Stephen lives in our neighborhood, and Dario knows him, I already knew that, but why is he in this lunch? He's got fifth lunch. Not sixth. What is he doing here?!*" My eyes were wide as he passed the line, and I jumped behind Starlet who'd just gotten her food.

"What're doing?" She demanded, her light blue eyes, furrowed in a 'what the hell?' kind of expression and I made sure she was right in front of me, out of the Colombian god's point of view.

"He's here." I said in a low voice, and her expression didn't change. She just stared at me with confusion, and I tried to make her see with my facial expressions, but she still didn't get it. "You know..." Of course, her face got an angry confused look on it, and I lowered my voice "Dario..." Her eyes grew wide and she looked behind her.

"What? Where? Which one is he?" I forgot that she'd never seen him before, but I wasn't about to point him out in the middle of the lunchroom.

"Don't look!" I hissed, ducking down a bit and she glared at me before turning around.

"Hey, Dar-" With an appalled expression I jumped on her and covered her mouth from behind. Typical Starlet, loud and forward and to the point. Perhaps too much so.

"What the hell are you doing?" I cried to her as Ash looked at us.

"Well which one is he?" She demanded and I looked over in his direction, then at Ash. I didn't really want Ash to know who he was. Not that he'd done anything except for not replying to the email, which honestly was ok since I told him he didn't have to, but she'd still fly off the handle if I pointed him out. She'd walk up to him scream "Why did you do that to my little sister, you fucking ass hole!" And make a big scene of it all. She was a drama queen, no matter how much she wanted to deny it.

"Who're you guys talking about?" Ash asked us, handing me my bread sticks and I shook my head.

"No one," I said to her, then looked at Starlet "I'll show you later." I stated, and She obviously got why I didn't want to tell her at this moment, because she just said 'ok' and the three of us walked out of the cafeteria. We spent the rest of the lunch period talking about random things, Phillip and Starlet turning them dirty every few minutes, and me and Erin screaming "Fail!" Every time Ash threw her empty bottle at the trash can and missing completely. Kaylin just sat there, looking at us strangely as she didn't get anything that we were saying, at least in the vulgar department. She was fourteen, about a year and a half younger than myself, but she was the closest thing to innocent as one could get. The red picnic table was filled with laughter and shoves and I soon forgot about Dario. About ten minutes after I finished eating I looked at Starlet "Hey, you want to go inside? I gotta go to the bathroom and want to annoy that red-headed boyfriend of mine," I smirked, hoping she'd receive the hidden message that actually said: Come with me inside so I can point out Dario for you and get re-assured with Michel. She wrapped her jacket around her waist, standing up, and we walked into the lunch room again. I looked around, scanning the room for Dario. I didn't see him. "*Thank god,*" I thought internally. "I don't see him." I said to her and she gave me that impatient/angry look of hers.

"So you dragged me in here to look for someone who's not even here?" She demanded, and I shrugged.

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"Sorry, dude. He must have gone back to his class. Might have forgotten something like his bag or whatever." *"But that can't be it..."* I suddenly thought, *"He had his bag when I saw him earlier though... Stop thinking about it! It's none of my business."* I growled to myself before walking up to Michel's table and leaving Starlet to hit the girls room by herself. He didn't see me, so I smiled and came up behind him, covering his eyes and placing my face against the left side of his head with a smile.

"Uh oh," Michel smiled, placing his hands over mine and pulling them down around him, turning his face as I kissed the cheek area between his lips and eyes.

"Hey, babe," He said, wrapping his long arms around my waist and pulling me into a tight hug. I kissed the top of his hair, then sat in the free seat beside him, knocking my knee with his and he turned to look at me, swinging his hand down on the knee with a smile then turning back to continue talking to his friend. I sighed and laid my head on his shoulder every few minutes or so, meriting a kiss just above my bangs, or running my fingers through his fiery red hair, making his voice sleepy and making him put his head down on my arms to fall asleep. A few minutes before the bell rang Michel and I headed outside to grab my stuff, and when it did, we smiled at one another, lacing our fingers together and heading off to our seventh period Chemistry class. Lucky me was in a Junior class along with about four other sophomores, so Michel and I had the same class.

The two of us un-gracefully made our way to the hallway that held our class, the only one in the school that hardly had any students in it, ever, and I dropped my stuff as we waited for our best friends, who just so happened to be dating as well. Smiling I spun him and pushed him against the wall, staring at his neck before kissing it then burying my face in his chest. We both giggled lightly as he wrapped his arms around me tightly and walked forward, making "raahhh" sound affects.

"What was that?" I asked him, furrowing my brow and laughing. "A Michel noise?"

"Mhm," He responded growling and nuzzling my neck as I laughed again. He looked up, letting on arm drift from my body and turning sideways to look towards the commons area. "Where's that fag, Justin?" He asked me, and I rolled my eyes. Justin and Michel were best friends, and therefore called each other horrible, horrible names. I shrugged and went on my toes, looking for Justin's girlfriend.

"I dunno," I replied, then spotted a skinny blonde walking our way with a huge black jacket on. "But I see his girlfriend." I smiled, looking at Edie. She smiled back broadly, making a little heart sign with her hands and I pulled away from Michel as she came upon us so I could wrap her in a hug. "Honey Bunches!" I cried.

"Wifey!" She replied, hugging me and laughing before dropping her bag against the wall. Edie stood at five feet one inch, an inch and a half taller than myself, but she was about half of me. She was slender and had a beautiful body. It wasn't as shapely as mine, but this girl was so skinny and pretty that she could be a model. She had the perfect stomach for it. Sure I was a bit jealous, but hey, I still looked damn good in a bathing suit, so I was alright. Her hair was drastically wavy with bright blonde on top and black on the bottoms. Dark brown roots were threatening her hair, screaming 're-dye me!' but it actually looked good. Her skin was very fair, and her facial structure sharp. Her eyes were a startling silver blue color, and stood out today as she wore silver and blue eye shadow, a soft blue shirt, and her silver skinny jeans with black and pink converse. She wasn't the most 'matchy' person on earth, but she sure knew how to make a statement. In the good kind of way.

"Where's your boy toy?" I asked her and she shrugged.

"I dunno, I just meet up with him here." Not a minute after she said that though, a tall, skinny kid approached, draping his arms around her shoulders and his hands across her eyes, pulling her into his chest. With a gasp she smiled.

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"Ah! I smell an art boy!" She said and turned around his arms just as the long haired brunette leaned down to kiss her on the lips. They were like, absolutely perfect for each other. You know how it was like the Quarter back and the Head Cheerleader? Well these were the more messed up looking pair, the pair that wasn't afraid to get their hands dirty, and the pair that the cheer and football squad purposely avoided out of fear. Once again the two of them had traded jackets, so here was this seventeen-year-old Junior boy wearing a sixteen-year-old sophomore girls Pete Wentz jacket. It was a funny site, considering he was wearing black and neon green boy trip pants with a big purple bat stretched out over this tight jacket. His skin was more on the grayish tan side, although still drastically lighter than my own, and the long brown hair covered one of the pair of big brown eyes. For some reason or another his eyes reminded me of a puppy. I had no idea why. They just did.

Justin whispered something inaudible to Edie and she bit her lip before kissing him again and turning so she was leaning against his chest. "I'm having a party at my house tonight, you guys coming?" Justin asked us as he ran his hands through Adri's hair, and I looked up at Michel.

"I'm there," Michel replied and I shrugged as I thought about it.

"I might be, you know my parents, they might go crazy if I'm not there to help them with the kids." I stated and Edie nodded. "Do you think you could give me a ride if I can go? We can just say I'm staying at your house. Do you think your mom would go along with it?" I asked her, and she shrugged.

"I'd have to ask her, but I'll call you when she gets home." She said, then looked up at Justin. "I'd better go before Monsieur Karanja marks me as tardy and calls my mom again." She kissed him on the lips, threw me and Michel a hug before grabbing her stuff and marching off to her class across the building. With that, we all headed to Seventh Chemistry, and made it in there just as the bell rang.

Chapter 3: Restless Nights

It was about four or five o'clock when my phone rang, blasting the Asian jingle and vibrating in my pocket, telling me that Edie was on the other line. "Eeey, Edie!" I said, pulling the phone out of my jean pockets and walking from my living room to my bedroom. I walked over to the office chair that sat right next to my desk and bed and plopped into it, placing my feet against the gold railing that separated the deep crimson paint on the bottom half of my wall and the yellow that rested on the top. "So what'd your mom say?" I asked her and she sighed.

"I can't. I got grounded, again!" She cried angrily. Furrowing my brow as I leaned back, I ran a hand through my hair.

"What'd you do this time?" I asked, pulling my hand down and staring at my nails. They were all misshapen with red nail polish flaking off, and with a disgusted look I leaned down and picked up the nail file that laid, unsurprisingly, on my floor. As I listened to her story I shaped each nail to a rounded tip, buffering it with the blue side, then shining it with the white side.

"My mom and dad were freaking out because I didn't go to first period on Thursday. I went to the truck with Justin. It's like, if they want me to pass out and have to go to the hospital then fine! I'll go to first! Stupid. I swear."

"Ugh, that sucks, dude. Yeah, I really don't feel like going anyway. I mean like, I'd love to go hang with Michel, but not at a party, honestly. Not to mention I'm trying to stay *out* of trouble. I've just gotten him to trust me even a little bit, I'm trying to work it up to a point where I can bring Mitch home." I stated before grabbing the nail polish remover from my desk.

"So you're seriously thinking about introducing him to your parents?" She asked, a bit of disbelief echoing in her voice.

"Yeah, I mean, so long as he's not, you know, out there. And I mean, when it comes to guys I'm sure my dad trusts me a bit to choose right. Well, considering he doesn't really have a choice." I laughed lightly, dabbing the nail polish remover over a cotton ball and draping the soaked ball over my fingers to remove the paint. "Oh! Talking about guys, you're *never* guess what happened today before sixth." I said, stopping mid nail-wipe.

"Oh god. Let's see, does it have something to do with... Dario?" She asked, and I knew she was smirking with a lifted brow. The way her voice rose and got that mischievous tone to it, it was hard not to imagine her leaning back against a chair not so different than my own with that infamous facial expression.

"How'd you know?" I asked her, false sarcasm dripping off of my lips like melting ice cream.

"Well..." She began, and laughter escaped the both of us before I re-counted my experiences with the Colombian god.

"Before lunch I ran into him, right?" I began, grabbing the bright neon green nail polish and dipping in the brush.

"mhm"

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"Well, surprisingly it was one of his bipolar days. I mean, he looked at me and smiled and said 'hey' like nothing had ever happened, like I'd never sent him an email pouring out my heart to the kid! I mean seriously! How retarded is he?" I demanded. Originally I would have felt bad, but what happened on the bus that afternoon made me disgusted with him.

"Ugh, god." She responded, and I nodded as I began painting them. A loud scoff/laugh thing escaped me as I continued.

"But you know what happened on the bus?" I asked her the rhetorical question. Of course she didn't know.

"What?"

"Looks like Dario got himself a girlfriend. Or is 'dating' someone at the moment, and his friends *despise* her!" I laughed full heartedly before cursing as green paint dripped over my skin.

"You ok?" She asked, obviously about the sudden cursing.

"Yeah, I'm fine, messed up my nail polish" I responded, holding my phone with my shoulder against my ear as I dug my finger against the skin to clean off the messed up nail.

"Oh, ok. So who's this girl?" She asked "Do we know her?"

"I don't, she's a freshman. I dunno if you do. Her name's Mackenzie."

"Wait, *freshman* Mackenzie?" She asked in a kind of disgusted and shocked kind of way

"mhm, His friends were all yelling 'do her then ditch her, wait, don't even do that! You might get an STD and die!' It was hysterical." I laughed as I blew on my left hand that now had bright green nails. "Do you know her?"

"Unfortunately! Ugh, he goes from *you* to *her*? What the hell?" She asked, and I nodded, laughing again.

"Oh my god, she is a whore!" I cried in fits of laughter. "I've just lost all respect for that guy, oh my god," I repeated, trying not to fall out of my chair. That was funny. "I could totally see him walking up to me to say 'hi' and me just laughing and walking away!"

"Know what else I could see you doing?" She asked, and I leaned back against my seat, staring at my non-painted hand.

"What?"

"You stroking his face and going 'sweetie, you had me' then walking away," With that more laughter escaped me.

"I should do that!" I half hissed half laughed, and she giggled along with me.

"Ugh, I've spent my entire sophomore year chasing after someone who was only into *that*? I thought he was smarter than most guys, there go all those pretty little space dreams of his!" I recalled all that he told me, the college, the space program dreams, all of them could go down the drain because of that girl.

"A junior and a freshman? That's honestly really weird, just too old!" She began and I blew on my hand again.

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"Now don't say that, older guys are hot." I stated, starting to paint my right hand, and already beginning to fail epically. "Last year I was flirting with several juniors, and you know what happened over the summer." I stopped, and stared at the nails, wondering what on earth I was thinking when I painted them that color. Last time they were even close to being that bright it was in August, when I received my second kiss ever from an eighteen-year-old guy in an elevator. I was fourteen. Summer flights are always the greatest. It lasted three days, and that's when we left. I wasn't too upset about it though, guys come and go as they please, and I do the same. I don't try to get emotionally attached to someone I know I'll never be with.

"Eh, too old for me," She responded, and voices echoed on her end of the line. "Hang on," She said suddenly, "I already did my homework, Mom!" She screamed. There was more yelling that I couldn't understand. "No, Justin's not coming over today! I already told you that!" More indistinct arguing, then Edie's angry sigh escaped as a door slammed. "God damn it. I swear to fuckin' god, such a fuckin' dumb ass." She growled then sighed again. "I got to go, I'll talk to you later, kay?" She asked and I nodded.

"oohh course!" I replied, blowing on the finally finished right hand of mine. "Byes" I finally said, and she responded with a very hasty goodbye before we both hung up simultaneously. The drama never ended, from school to home and back again. Even in our dreams we were trying to figure out half of the messes we'd gotten ourselves into. It was psychotic.

Five hours seemed to pass that Friday night, and I was flipping through the channels on my bedroom TV when my dad yelled for me. In an instant I rose to my feet and jogged to the living room. "Yeah, daddy?" I asked him, and he turned to me from the computer screen. "Did you feed Maggie today?" He asked, and I turned to the large glass door that led to the back yard.

"Not tonight." I stated, and without him saying a word I immediately walked over to the pantry, drew her food out with a plastic cup, and opened the glass door. Just as I did though, an odd sight caught my eye. "Where's the dog?" I asked suddenly. Her leash was unhooked from its clip, and she was no where to be seen.

"Isn't she back there?" He asked, and I shook my head.

"If she was I wouldn't be asking where she was. Maggie!" I called her name loudly, over and over again, and I rolled my eyes. "She's not here."

"She'll be back," He said, not worrying about the fact that she could possibly get hit by a car or hurt in any other way. With a groan I rolled my eyes again, walking towards the front door.

"I'm going to go look for her, I'll be back in about ten minutes or so." I said, opening our big red door and walking out as my dad waved a hand in the air, dismissing it with an I-don't-care kind of way. So here I was, walking around at nine forty five at night looking for an eight year old beagle who acted like she was about six months old. "Maggie!" I cried, over again, wondering and cursing under my breath about where she could possibly be as I jogged toward my bus stop. "Magpie! Maggie baby!" I dragged on the 'e' parts in long notes as I approached the main road that led to my community in my neighborhood, still crying out her name. As I approached the area between the community playground and the first neighborhood, I found her sniffing the gate around that separated that pool and play area from the main road. With a relieved yet slightly ticked off expression on my face I leaned over, placing my hands on my knees and panting. Man. It'd been forever since I jogged that far. Half a mile? Used to be no problem when I did a mile every other day in middle school, but no, our PE teacher here decided to have us stretch every day instead of actual exercise. When I stood up straight, my knee began to ache horribly. "Ah shit. Not again. Stupid freakin' knee," I thought to myself. I had a really weak right knee, never got it checked out, it would just randomly start flaring up at times. "Come here, girl, come on, home. Go. Come on." I began, patting my thighs and whistling, or trying to at least. Looking up from her busy sniffing she raised her ears and looked like she was smiling at me as she wagged her tail. "Come on," I said again, approaching her. She wagged her tail faster. "Come on, go home, let's go

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home." As I came within ten feet of her, she bolted. This was her favorite game. Cursing under my breath, I jogged after her, but stopped after a few steps due to the knee. "Maggie! Get over here!" I yelled, she just stood there, wagging her tail again after darting across the street. For a moment she dropped her tail, but as I took a step forward, she ran off once again down the street. "Maggie!" I screamed this time, anger flaring up as I took off after her. A horrible mistake. I made it to the left side of the road, when pain shot up my leg, and my knee gave way. Crying out as that terrible feeling caught hold of me, I collapsed in the middle of the road. Tears stung my eyes as I bit my lip to keep from cursing at the dog and whoever unhooked that damn leash. Probably my three year old brother, Erin, or one of his friends. Kita came to mind, my neighbors six year old niece. She was always doing what we told her not to, she probably went back there to play with her and let her off, and was too scared to tell us that she was gone because she didn't want to get caught. I growled evil little words towards her and tried to get up. No such luck. Taking a breath I laid down in the middle of the road. I wasn't too worried about cars coming, usually anyone who lived in this neighborhood was already home, or wasn't going to be here until around two, so the thought of being hit by some truck was pretty far fetched for a few hours.

As I laid there, Maggie suddenly ran up to me. Sniffing and whimpering as she softly lowered her body next to mine, snuggling then nudging me up. Furrowing my brow I looked at her, lifting my head and filling with confusion. "What's wrong, baby?" More whimpering escaped her jaw as she stood again, nudging me with her nose as if to beg "get up, mommy, get up." I wondered exactly what was wrong when I suddenly heard it. Screeching tires, loud, booming music, and bright white and yellow headlights hit my eyes. "No," I thought, rushing to my feet, just to welcome that same rush of pain again and kissing the asphalt as I had just moments before. They were going to stop. They had to stop. I still didn't want to be in the way though as they rushed towards us. Trying to stand again, I threw myself towards the other end, not making it and just ending up back on the ground. Maggie hopped in front of me, growling as the fur on her back raised. No. This car would move, but if it didn't, I wasn't letting my dog die too. With a cry, I grabbed the animal and practically threw her to the sidewalk, just as the car lights attacked me. With a blood curdling scream I shut my eyes as the impact occurred.

"Alice? Oh god, no." Warm arms wrapped around me, holding me as warm wet stuff covered my body. "Somebody call the police!" The familiar Spanish voice demanded, rocking me back and forth, holding me tighter against a large, warm body. "Wake up, Stay with us, come on, damn it."

"Izsheotay?" a slurred voice I'd never heard before asked, and I heard the warm body snap at it.

"Just get the cops here!" His voice cracked. I opened my eyes just barely, not sure that I was hearing the correct thing. But I was. Dario was holding me, his arms on my back and shoulders, propping me up against his lap. Horror and guilt filled his face as he continued to yell at them to call the police.

"Dario?" I asked softly, still not believe it. Pain shot up me though, it hurt to talk, I tried to move, to adjust myself, and that hurt even more. I cringed and gasped let out a groan of pain. He immediately looked down at me, brown eyes wide with concern.

"Alice! Oh god, don't move, ok? Just um," He sat there, and I could feel his heart racing as he pulled me tighter against him. He seemed like he couldn't find anything to say. Like he didn't know what to say. "You're going to be ok, Alice, I promise," He said, his voice choking again. I nodded, hurting but going numb and closed my eyes, saying very softly as I laid my head against his arm and chest.

"I know..." I said, not exactly knowing what would happen, but not believing that I would actually die, and everything went black as all feeling began to fade away.

Chapter 4: Hiding Tears in Pouring Rain

Bright lights. People talking. Frightened but blurred out faces surrounded me as those bright lights zoomed above me. *"Did you do this to her!"* I heard an angry adult voice yell. Daddy. I could hear my dad yelling at someone, but who?

"I... I didn't mean to sir, I wasn't driving. Oh god, is she going to be alright?" Dario's voice. My pocket vibrated, Asian jingle playing, and a female form pulled it out, answering it with a choked voice.

"Edie, it's Monique, Alice's can't get to the phone right now..." Silence for a few moments. Anyone who was any one would know something was wrong, except me at the moment. Why was she so scared? *"She's in the hospital. She was..."* More sobs escaped her voice before she was able to speak again *"She was hit by a car."* A face loomed over me, I couldn't tell who's it was.

"Don't worry, Miss Colosant, you're going to be just fine." It had a bit of a Chicago accent to it, with a mix of Italian. Who was this person, and why were they trying to convince me that I was going to be fine? I knew I was going to be. Large gray doors towered in front of me and we trampled through them

My hazel eyes snapped open, and I covered my face with my hand as I sat up. *"What a horrible dream,"* I thought to myself as I closed my eyes again, resting my head on my raised knees and taking deep breaths to calm my racing heart. Running my hands across my face and through my hair, I opened my eyes once again, just to jump in a startled fashion against the back board of the bed when they caught sight of my surroundings *"What the..."* I began, heart racing again as I scanned the room. This was not my bedroom, light yellow walls, lace curtains, and old forties furniture that looked brand new, was not my antique, Victorian style room. Looking down at the yellow sheets, I peered down at my attire. These were not my clothes! I was in a white flannel night gown the clung to my shoulder blades without any sleeves, and that ended a bit below my knees. I know that when I was out there searching for Maggie, I was wearing blue jeans and a green tee shirt. Not this. Not a white nightgown! It was just too much to bear, and I screamed. As soon as I did though, the door burst open, and I jumped, screaming again as a tall, Caucasian man with slicked back blonde hair and scanning blue eyes ran into the room. He was well dressed, like he was going to work, except his suit, like the room, looked as if it were from the forties, and I would have admitted that he was decently good-looking if I hadn't been freaking out. The thirty-something-year-old blonde looked at me with sky colored eyes before speaking.

"Are you alright?" He asked, coming towards the bed as I pulled the sheets up against me. He reached for me, and I leapt from the bed.

"Don't touch me!" I screamed, standing in a defensive position, ready for fight or flight if he made any movements toward me. "Just... just stay where you are!" I grabbed the closest thing to me, a cream vase as it was and held it defensively in the air. The man raised his hands in the air and looked at me.

"It's ok, miss," Just as soon as he did, however, a young brunette woman rushed in next to him, bright blue eyes wide as she looked from me to him.

"Jeff, what have you done to this young girl? You've scared her out of her wits! It's alright, dear, no one's going to hurt you," She said, trying to calm me down. "Please, put the vase down."

"Where am I? Who are you?" I demanded eagerly, ready for either an answer or to throw the porcelain flower container at one of their heads. Preferably the mans, considering I could probably break free from the woman easily if she were to try to attack me.

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"My name is Penny Jones, and this," she motioned to Jeff, "is my husband, Jeffery. You're in our house, we found you on the side of the road. It was raining, you were drenched, and we couldn't just leave you there." She said gently, trying to get me to calm down once more.

"Where're my clothes?" I asked, eyes narrowing and not setting down the vase. She looked over at the window, and I backed up towards it, reaching out for whatever might be hanging from it. I turned my head towards it and pulled up a soft yellow dress. It, along with the rest of the room and my "saviors" looked as if it were from the forties. I set the vase down, taking it in both hands and staring at it with wide eyes. I wasn't wearing this, I wasn't in a dress. I closed my eyes, taking all this in. I didn't remember falling asleep last night, I didn't remember anything except for the calming voice of the Chicago Italian. My heart raced as I tried to soak it in. I'd seen enough Sci-Fi films to know what this could actually be. "What year is it?" I asked, wanting them, begging them mentally to say 2009.

"It's 1946," She stated, and my eyes shot open as I looked at them in disbelief. "Why?" She asked me and my throat dried up. I needed something to save me from being sent to the mad house if I snapped. They said they found me on the side of the road? It was raining? My story was perhaps the easiest, yet hardest thing to come up with.

"Who am I?" I asked her, looking like a lost puppy as I held the damp dress against my chest. As I did, they looked at each other, then back at me in disbelief.

"You don't know?" Jeffery asked, and I shook my head, heart clenching up and throat burning as tears threatened. I wanted to go home, and if they were lying I could just say that a sudden shock of amnesia hit me when they take me to the police. My eyes began to water as my voice cracked.

"Jeffery!" Penny hissed, hitting him on the arm before rushing to me and taking my hands in her slim ones. "You really don't know, do you?" She asked me kindly, and I shook my head. "No," A tear began to threaten to fall and I wiped it off as my body shook. There was no way I could be here in the forties.

"Oh dear," Penny said, and wrapped me in a tight hug, letting me wipe my tears against her white jacket. "It's ok, we'll take care of you, I promise," She said gently, stroking my hair and looking up at Jeff, who stood there nodding his bright blonde head.

Not long after that we left for the police station, and I realized to my horror that the Jones couple who'd found me weren't lying. It was 1946, the war had just ended, and I sure as hell was here. The police searched for my records, but when I told them that I had no idea what my name was, where I was from, or what I was doing here, they simply shrugged it off, telling the Jones to send me to an orphanage. In terror I begged them not to, telling them that I wanted to go to school, that I wanted to have a family, and played that whole "please let me stay with you" role. They fell for it like a child with candy. I felt bad for playing them like that, but desperate times called for desperate measures. With another hug, Penny and Jeff decided to keep me with them, at least until I could find a job myself. They seemed eager to take me in though, continuously stating how they wanted a child, but didn't want to have to go through the awkward years of childhood and such. So they happily took me "home," and they fed me, then sent me to bed, my tears and the events of the day exhausting my tiny body.

"Goodnight, love," Penny said, speaking to me as if I were her three year old daughter. It annoyed the living daylight out of me, but I looked up at her with big puppy eyes before I spoke.

"I don't remember my name," I said, my voice choking as I *did* remember my name, I just didn't think that I'd ever see the people who meant the most to me ever say it again. Just as I said it, Jeff came in and sat on the

edge of the bed, patting my ankle.

"It's ok. Just get some sleep, alright? We'll see if you remember anything else in the morning." He smiled and winked, then moved up and kissed me on the forehead. A motion that broke my heart because his lips on my head felt so much like my Michel's. At the thought of him my heart broke, and tears began to fall. "Oh no! Please don't cry!" He stated, bright eyes wide as he lifted my chin. "No crying, come on, please? Give us a smile, I bet you've got a *brilliant* smile!" He wiped away a tear as I looked up at him, and I smiled weakly. He smiled back "See, there we go. Come on, babe, let's let the girl get some sleep" He said, turning to Penny before standing up and taking her arm. She smiled back, kissing my head as well. "Good night" He stated, with another smile, then looked at Penny, who didn't seem to want to leave. She smiled back and left, shooting a glare at Jeffery before she walked out the door. Originally I would have wondered what was going on between the young, married couple, but tonight, the exhaustion was literally killing me, and as soon as I laid my head on the pillow, I passed out. No time for tears as the dreams rushed through my head.

"Michel, stop! She can't hear you!" Edie's voice rang through my head, and my heart skipped a beat. *"You're going to make it worse if you keep shaking her!"*

"Wake up Alice! Damn it, wake up!" His voice was choked, something I'd never heard before in my adorable-red-headed-boyfriends voice.

"Michel... It's no use." This time Edie's voice seemed to be breaking, as if she too were holding back tears. *"She's not going to wake up,"* a whimper came from her tone.

"Please, babe, I need you. I love you so much, I don't know what I'm going to do without you. Please..." A sniffing noise escaped him *"Please wake up."* I could almost feel his arms around my body. I could almost smell him, a mix of dirt, sweat, and smoke. I missed him so much, and I would never see him again. *"I love you,"* He said again, and my heart broke as the warmth that seemed to be his body, his chest against mine, left me, and I sat up, reaching for him.

"No, Michel, come back, come back to me! Please! I love you too! I need you, don't go!" I cried out, hoping, waiting, begging, for him to embrace me once again. Soft, shaking, lips seemed to touch mine for a brief moment, then a cool hand brushed some hair away from my face before those same lips pressed upon my forehead. He was leaving. *"Wait, come back! No, don't go! Michel!"* I screamed his name, bolting up from the bed and looking into the darkness. Eyes wide I looked around the dark room. Just another dream. Shaking, I pulled my knees against my chest and buried my face between them. "Michel..." I could hardly get it out before my eyes had rivers of tears running from them. I was never going to see him again, was I? The tears continued to fall, and I ended up crying myself to sleep after all.

Chapter 5: And So The World Goes On

"Time to get up, sweetie, come on, breakfast is ready," A soft cooing voice rang as a warm hand brushed through my hair. Smiling, I lifted my hand to hers thinking it was my moms, which was really weird considering that my mom lived across the country from myself. Not to mention that my mom didn't just sit there and run her fingers through my hair to wake me up in the morning. But it was comforting, warm, and calming as I turned over onto my side so she could better lace her fingers in my locks.

"Mmm..." I sighed, keeping my eyes closed and wishing that the woman sitting beside me was in fact, the blonde thirty six year old. She ran her hand through my hair again, gently brushing my temples with her fingers as she once again spoke softly to wake me.

"It's pancakes, bacon, and eggs, homemade" she responded and I merely pulled the sheets up to my forehead. "It's home made, I promise, not store bought." She continued, and I groaned, not wanting to get up at all. "I know you're awake, come on," She laughed lightly, shaking me gently and urging me to rise. With another groan I finally opened my eyes, thinking that it was my mom pushing me softly against my arm.

"Alright, alright, I'm up," I looked at her and sighed, her brown hair several shades darker than the woman's who raised me, and her eyes blue instead of that amber color that often changed to grayish hazel green. Thinking about how long it'd been since I'd seen my mom, my throat started to clutch up again. Spring break, March, was the last time I'd hugged her. Sure, a few days ago I'd told her I loved her, but still, did she really know? Did anyone I was related to know that I loved them? I shook the thought out as I looked around, eyes making it to the vanity mirror. "Oh god, is that me?" I asked, wide eyed as I stared at my reflection. Short hair was all puffed up, mixed in blonde swimming in the brown waves, that looked all too dry to be mine. With a deep breath I looked at Penny once again. "Do you have a brush I can borrow?" I asked her, trying to give a weak smile as I pulled myself out of the yellow sheets. She smiled broadly and jumped up from the bed and grabbed the comb on the vanity as I approached it. She handed it to me with a smile and I stared at my reflection. I looked dead inside with swollen eye lids from crying, and chapped lips. I quickly wiped away all the remains of those horrid tears, and wiped all the nasty stuff off of my lips, licking and biting them softly to give color and health to them. Next was my hair. Taking the brush from her I pulled it through the messy mane and tried to smooth it down. All of a sudden Penny let out a little laugh.

"There's no need to get all gussied up right now, it's only going to be you, me and Jeff today," She smiled and I turned to her, not exactly sure what to say. Making myself pretty gave me some sort of control over my life, and I did it out of habit, not because people were going to see me and taunt me, no. I did it because I felt that if I didn't, I'd lose my sanity. Sure, it was strange, but then again it was me, and that explained it all. I smiled back and nodded, reluctantly sliding the brush back onto the table as I did so.

"Homemade?" I asked her, referring to the breakfast she said she'd made, smiling as best as I could. She piped up and smiled brightly, nodding and ushering me out of my room and to the kitchen where Jeffery sat, munching away at a pile of bacon on his plate. He also smiled brightly, and I got a feeling like these two were the weirdest people in the world as he patted the seat next to him.

"Good morning, Sunshine! Come and sit down and eat! Pen made us an amazing breakfast!" He looked over at his young wife and she positively glowed. I nodded and sat down, thanking her a bit before grabbing a pancake, some eggs, and a piece of bacon. "So do you remember anything?" He asked me and I shook my head.

"Unfortunately. I mean, I know the basics, like math, English, and all that other stuff, but family, friends, names, faces, all are just a cloud to me." The lie easily slid off my tongue, and I did feel bad for lying to them,

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but unless I wanted to be shipped off to an insane asylum, I really had no choice.

"Not even your name?" Penny asked me from where she sat along the round table, and I shook my head once again before taking a sip of water.

"No..." I said softly, and took a sip of water, not making eye contact with them.

"Hey, Sunshine, it's ok," Jeff put his hand on mine and I looked over at him. He was so friendly, but, there was something more about him, Penny too. They just seemed *too* happy. I shrugged it off though, they were kind to me, and I didn't need to question that. "We'll just have to find out a name for you," He beamed and I looked over at him, tilting my head, then looking at Penny, who lit up.

"How about Marie? Or Margaret? Or Susan? Janine?" She asked me, looking like a very excited school girl. I stared at her, then suddenly she calmed down, looking down at her hands. My gaze turned to Jeff, who'd been looking at her as well before looking back at me smiling.

"You look to me as more as a Brenda more than anything." He said, his voice cool and happy as I looked down at my hands, not wanting any of those names. Some people said that I looked like a Chelsea, but that name would bug me wherever I went. It wasn't my favorite name, I had some friends with that name too, and even though they weren't here, I didn't want to sound like I dreamed to be them. A new name caught my mind however, and I stared at the glass of water in my hands, eyes wide. It was the name my parents would have called me if I'd been a boy, even though it could have been both a girl or a boys name. My dad didn't want that though, he wanted me to have a typical girls name.

"Devin," I looked up as if I were shocked. "Devin Marie." I said as if that was my first and middle name. "I want that to be my name." I looked over at them, and they just sat there, staring.

"Are you sure you'd rather not have Marie Devin?" Penny asked me, and I shook my head.

"No, Devin Marie, it sounds better, and for some reason or another it just sort of..." I let my voice drift off as my eyes got a slight dreamy look to them. I thought about my parents and I looked down at my hands, which now laid in my lap. "Feels right." Marie was my middle name, along with my cousin, Courtney's, so I still had my family in there somewhere. It was my mom's dads choice to have my middle name be Marie, so there I sat, a bit of my mom, and a bit of my dad in both my first and middle names. My last name, however, would be whatever Jeff and Penny saw fit. I didn't want to seem like I was too sure of anything at the moment.

"Devin's a bit of a boys name-" Jeff began, and I looked at him with that 'sad bunny face' of mine, and he seemed to soften. "But that's alright, we'll go down to the court house to get everything sorted after we finish breakfast, alright?" He asked me, and I nodded with a smile.

"What about a last name?" Penny asked, and I shrugged.

"I don't know," Jeff's face lit up with excitement as I replied depressingly.

"How about you share ours? It's common, and we've always wanted a daughter of our own," He smiled broadly, and I did too, even if it was a little creepy.

"Are you sure?" I asked, looking from him to his wife.

"Of course we're sure!" Penny cried, wrapping me in a large and over bearing hug. I giggled lightly and hugged them back. We were going to be the creepily perfect family, I could already tell.

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After breakfast, we went to the court house, and I was officially adopted by the couple. Jeff had to leave for work right afterward, so it was just Penny and I at the apartment until around six o'clock. Penny was thoroughly excited that I was her new daughter, and I couldn't believe what happened in a matter of two days. "How were you guys able to adopt me so fast?" I asked her as she prepared some lunch.

"Jeff works for the state and has helped a lot of the orphanages, so when he called this morning they let him," She laughed lightly "One less child there..." She looked over at me. "Well, teenager." Her smile was loving and I returned it.

"So what're our plans for the day?" I asked her as she handed me a ham sandwich and a glass of milk. I took a sip and watched her as she sat across from me, waiting for her response.

"Well... I was thinking that we should go shopping," She smirked, and I lit up.

"Really?" I asked, eyes shining as I sat up straight.

"Yeah, I mean, we can't have you only wearing that every day, and my clothes won't fit you at all! They're too small on the bust and hips, yet too big on the stomach and length! We're going to have to get you sized," She laughed. I laughed too, turning a deep shade of crimson. "Not to mention we have to get new things for your room! Like a new dresser, a desk, definitely more sheets," She began to count out what I needed on her fingers and I just looked down, half listening to what she said and half getting lost in my own thoughts.

"Two days and I'm their daughter. Am I never going to get home? Perhaps this is a good thing though... I can start over, after all, how hard can that be?" I smiled up at her, pretending I heard every single word that she said.

Chapter 6: Treading Unknown Seas

The next few days were filled with shopping and well, more shopping. It was quite hectic and really exhausting. I'd never shopped for an entire closet in just a matter of days, not to mention furniture, girly supplies, and random decorations. It was all a bit tiring. By the end of the week, my room was painted a light pink, surprisingly, with white matching furniture that had roses carved into each piece. I had a nice and large, full, four poster bed with roses and vines engraved all over the head board. Those same plants wrapped around and were carved in to the posts that led straight to the top of the bed, where white netting hung all around me in a princess fashion. I could tie it back if I wanted, or I could let it fall freely, so that if the lights were on, all I could see outside those curtains would be the dark shapes in my room. The bed sat in the middle of the room, therefore it was surrounded with the furniture.

The far right wall supported a large window, with newly set up lace curtains, and a little white bench carved into it, so one could stare out into the day, watching the people scramble for their things, or to gaze out at the starry sky when a night of trouble caught hold of the person occupying the room. Between the window and the back wall, a large desk played host to the remaining area. Books littered the shelves, and a decorative type writer sat in the corner of it, while colored pencils and paper were already strewn across it's surface with sketches of random anime characters that I saw fit to draw. They were mainly based off of the friends that I missed, and the home I would never see again. It too had roses and vines engraved at the top, but only at the top. A large rose however hug a tad bit below in the middle, and I gazed at the perfection of it before letting my eyes drift to the left side of the window. That side held a large dresser with a mirror that stretched just as far as the dresser did. The mirror was, of course, held by a uniquely decorated frame which matched the rest of my furniture, yes, the vines and roses as well. In the six drawers laid an large array of clothing. The top two held bras, underwear, socks, and, although it was still spring, Penny convinced me to buy a swim suit. Leggings went along with them, as well as stockings and under shirts. The second drawer on the right side held my pants, jeans, kaki's, Capri's, you name it, in all assortment of colors. My favorite though, had to be the red plaid pair that I so hopefully convinced her to purchase. If I were to ever go back home, these were what I was going to be wearing. The drawer directly next to it held the matching shirts, all high collar, and all very lady like. Below that one lay my skirts, most of them ended just above my knee, or just below it, and like the rest of my clothes, they were in all assortment of colors. The last drawer held my pajamas, things I didn't mind if they got wrinkly or not. White dresses with high collars and no sleeves, folded up pants and matching flannel shirts, all for the sake of comfort.

Directly in front of the bed sat my closet, a decently sized one whose doors folded in and out to open and close. On the doors sat tall, full length mirrors that one could examine themselves when preparing for something or somewhere to go. Beyond those doors however hung a mighty amount of dresses, which I loved dearly. Some had collars, some didn't, some of them had sleeves, and others didn't. Some of them were long and elegant, others were sundresses and daily wear. Below them sat a tremendous amount of shoes, all with matching outfits, and most of them heels or pumps. There were a few flats incorporated in the mix, but considering my height, Penny and I tried to spend as little time in the flats section as possible when we were shopping for shoes.

Tucked neatly in the corner of the front wall and the left wall, a decently sized vanity sat waiting for me. It too was white as well as engraved with roses, just like the other items in the room. At the moment, it's counter was littered with different shades of lipstick, eyeliner, gloss, and eye shadow, along with perfume bottles and powder puffs that went along with the tan cover up that I used to conceal the nasty facial issues that came with being a teenage girl. The mirror was rounded, with little roses engraved around the top of it, and a small drawer laid just in front of the piano seat. Inside the drawer there was more make up, just testers, and behind the mirror, which opened like a door, held a pearl necklace. *"It was given to me by my mother,"* Penny had said to me when she gave it to me *"She told me to pass it on to my daughter, but since I can't have any, I want*

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you to have it." And that was when I found out about Penny's condition. She couldn't have any children due to the fact that she was beat as a child. Maybe that was why she was so happy-go-lucky all the time. It helped her forget those painful memories.

Beside my bed, a large bedside table stood, separating the bed from the door, and it held more pajamas, along with a diary and a bible in its drawers. A large lamp sat on its counter along with a note pad that Penny had written on as she made a checklist of what I needed. Everything on the list was crossed off, and I was now using the pad as a coaster for my water.

I laid back against my sheets, thoroughly worn out from the days shopping, and completely and utterly surprised that Jeffery let us get all this. I thought about it when he helped us pick out the furniture. He wanted to be a dad. I could tell, and maybe that was why he reached out to me so much. But he still did have that "too happy" vibe about him. There was definitely something underneath that cool exterior. I shrugged it off though as I climbed out of the pink and white sheets and headed to the closet. I stared at my reflection for a moment, soaking in the girl in curlers who was staring right back at me. She was wearing a white night gown with spaghetti straps, and the dress fell a little past her knees. A little ribbon and bow folded over where her breasts were and she just stared right back at me before disappearing as I opened the closet doors. I walked in and looked at the dresses, touching each one as if they were a delicate piece of clothing that would tear if I didn't treat them like porcelain. This was a retro-lovers dream come true. At that thought, my eyes began to water. *"Edie would love this,"* Tears threatened my eyes and I let my body drop to the floor. Folding myself up I leaned against one of the closet doors, letting my lids close and taking a few deep breaths as two tears strolled down my face from each eye. I quickly wiped them away and stood, closing my eyes again and shutting the doors. Sleep, that's what I needed. I brushed aside a loose strand of hair and climbed into bed, turning off the light and closing my eyes, hoping to get a restful sleep. There was a knock at my door, however, and I opened my eyes before sitting up and looking at it. "Come in." I called, turning on the light, and it opened, revealing the tall blonde man who made everything in this room possible.

"Hey, Sunshine," He smiled, coming up to the bed and sitting next to me. I drew my knees up to my chest, hugging them and smiled back.

"Hey, Jeff," I replied, "What's up?" I tilted my head to the side, getting that 'puppy' look as my friends called it, unintentionally.

"Well, I was thinking that maybe tomorrow," He began, putting his long arms behind him and leaning back. "We could go the local high school, get you enrolled, seeing as you'll be staying with us you're going to need a proper education." Another broad smile crossed his lips "And it'd be good for you to interact with others your age, heavens know you've been around nobody but us adults the past week," He laughed, and I stared at him, wide eyed as my arms fell to my sides. In a moment I was upon him, wrapping him in a large hug as tears stung my eyes. He laughed and hugged me back tightly.

"Thank you," was all I said, choking on the words. He nuzzled my neck lightly, which slightly confused me, but I didn't care.

"You're welcome." Was his response before he pulled away. "Now get some sleep, we're going to have a big day tomorrow." He smiled, lifting the sheets so I could climb under them. I did and smiled up at him as I pulled the covers to my shoulders. "Sleep well," He said, kissing the top of my head and I nodded in response as he untied the curtains, letting the lace fall separate the two of us as he turned off the lamp and walked out of the room.

"School," I thought. *"Wow, this ought to be epic."* My mind played out different scenarios that might occur and I smiled as I thought about it all. Sure, I was nervous, but I could start over. I could start my life over.

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With an anticipated sigh I closed my eyes, letting myself succumb to sleep. Although it wasn't as restful as I had expected.

"Mr. Colosant?" A voice asked in the darkness.

"Is she awake?"

"No, sir. I'm sorry, but... but she's getting her color back," The unfamiliar voice offered, but there was silence on the other end. I knew my dad wouldn't say anything. A rough, but warm, hand felt like it was cupping my cheek. *"I'll leave you alone..."* The voice said again, finally, and the sound of a door opening and closing rang through my mind.

"Oh baby girl," I heard him whisper, running his hand over my forehead and hairline like he does whenever we're having those whole father daughter moments. *"I'm so sorry, I should have stopped you. I shouldn't have let you go out there. Damn it, Alice, I told you she'd come back in the morning, why didn't you listen?"* His voice was stern, but it didn't stay like that as I felt him pull me up against him and felt a warm, wet substance drop against my neck. Was he crying?

"Oh Daddy," I wanted to say, I wanted him to stop crying. I'd never seen him cry before. He was too strong to cry, he wasn't scared of anything. My dad was the bravest guy on Earth, so why in the world was he randomly crying now? What had happened?

Those questions haunted me all through the night until the sun rose and tickled my face. With a groan I sat up, lifting a hand to my head where the curlers were tightly planted. I sighed and stood, walking over to the dresser and taking them out, one by one. The curls bounced tightly around my head, and I wondered whether or not I should brush them through. Curls weren't usually my thing. I usually straightened my hair or let it run free in waves, whenever I did curl it, it was long and with steam curlers or scrunched up with a ton of hair spray. I stared at my reflection in the mirror, unsure what to do when there was a knock on my door. "It's me," Penny's voice rang, and I looked over my shoulder at the door.

"Come in," I called, and turned back to the girl who was staring back at me in the mirror. Penny slipped in, careful not to let anyone poke their head in, not that we were worried about that, it was just a girl's way of saying how skinny she was as she snuck in. She turned and looked at me and gave me a confused smile.

"You're not even dressed yet?" She asked, walking over to my closet and looking for a dress for me to wear.

"Um, I don't know how to do my hair," I said, blushing a tad, and she laughed.

"Here, let me help," She smiled, walking out of the closet and over to the vanity where I was standing. She motioned for me to sit, and I did so as she stared at my hair in concentration. "What to do what to do," She repeated, then suddenly, her face lit up and she grabbed the rounded brush that laid on the dresser. Taking my short hair in her hands, she gently brushed the sides in, and since they were already tight, they ended up just at my jaw line. My bangs she swept to the side, covering my brow still, but held back gently with a bobby pin. "There," She smiled, putting her hands around the tops of my arms and placing her head next to mine, staring at our reflections in the mirror. "Perfect, now, time for your make up!" She smiled, obviously loving this as she grabbed the tan cover up. She seemed to enjoy it when I played mannequin, so I sat there, eyes closed as she worked her magic upon my face.

The entire time she did my make up, she was in a fit of giggles, she obviously must have felt like a teenage girl once again, and who was I to deny that from her? I was her make-shift daughter, and this was every mother's dream, to play dress up with a life sized doll. When she was finished I opened my eyes and gazed at

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my doppelganger. My lips were painted a deep pink, as they were already naturally pink, with a slight gloss over them, and my face held a light pink blush, not that anyone could tell because of my natural tan complexion, but it made my face sparkle. My lashes were curled up, and brown lines were traced around my lids, which were also decorated a soft pink, with a tad bit of a whitish color in there. I looked at her reflection in the mirror with a smile and laughed. "So I'm guessing I'm wearing pink then?" I asked her, giggling, and she laughed.

"I guess so!" She said, walking to my closet to look amongst the many hangers as I pulled out a pair of matching undergarments. As I withdrew them from the drawers, I stared. They were so different from that of which I was used to. They rode high up on the hip, far higher than my normal underwear, yet they were also drawn up to my belly button. The bra was basically the same, except it wasn't really even rounded, and didn't push up on the breasts. Internally I noted the fact, and figured that must be the reason older women have such baggy chests. The hip wear, however, had a tad bit of a sexy side to it with hanging clips that one would attach stocking to. Of course though this wasn't that sexy or uncommon here in the forties, but in modern day, these were rarely found but loved by all men. I laughed mentally, a small smile crossing my face as I looked at them. "Here we go!" She cried as I examined the white, frilly, underwear. "This'll make a great impression on the principle." I turned and watched her lay out the clothing on the edge of the bed and tilted my head at her selection. It was pretty much an over coat that buttoned up from the bottomed to the top, with a string that wrapped around and tightly held the dress around the hips. It was a light pink plaid, mostly white, and she'd picked out a pair of white heels to match. It was adorable! With a smile I watched as she walked to the door. "Just come out when you're ready, ok?" I nodded, and she left the room. After the door was shut firmly, I pried my night gown off, letting the curls bounce around my face as they were delicately flopped up from the neckline. I stripped myself of the nights wear and slipped on the new bra and panties just before I walked back over to the drawer, forgetting to withdraw the stockings from the drawer. After removing them, I slid the skin-colored items up my calves and thighs, hooking them to the undergarments that so delicately clung to my waist. For some reason or another, I felt like taking my time, and turned to the gown on the bed, tracing a finger over the overlapping squares and slowly un-buttoning each individual button. I lifted it, draping the dress over my arm and turning towards the large mirrors, examining myself.

"What Michel would pay to see me like this..." My heart clutched up again, and tears threatened, but I shook my head, trying to clear myself of those memories. Michel, my loving, adorable, sweet, idiotic, Michel. My throat burned and I leaned against my bed, sniffing lightly. I couldn't cry, it'd make a river down my face. But I wanted him, I needed him. I needed his arms around me, I needed his lips on mine, I needed his warm breath against my neck whispering those three little words "I love you." I rubbed my hands against my face and looked up at my reflection. The girl staring back at me looked perfect, flawless from head to toe, every aspect of her screaming "innocence" with her soft make up and small yet full lips. But her eyes, her eyes were haunted. I shook that thought from my mind and refused to look myself in the eye as I slid the dress over my arms. Refused to think as I buttoned up every button. Refused to remember as I tied a bow on my hip and slipped the white heels on my feet, buckling them around my ankles, and ignoring the sound of the clicking across the hard wood floor as I made my way through and out the door.

"Are you nervous?" Jeff asked me, and I looked up at the rearview mirror of the green, 1960 Frontenac at his reflection.

"Um, only a little bit," I smiled, looking down like a little girl.

"Oh don't be! It'll be fun for you, there are plenty of young, smart, kids just like you there, and you'll love it. I promise." Penny grinned, turning to look at me.

"It's like it's her first day, it's just registration for her, she won't start for a few more days," Jeff corrected her, and Penny rolled her eyes. Before turning to her.

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"It might as well be! The students will see her for the first time! First impressions are the most important, and plus," She smirked, looking at me. "For some people it could be love at first sight," She let out a wink and a laugh and my eyes grew wide as I laughed, looking down and blushing. Jeff shot her a stern look.

"Penny," Was all she said, and she shot him an annoyed glance before we pulled up to the school. It was huge, far bigger than my original high school. The bricks were deep red, and some boarders around the edges were a light gray, almost white. I stared, not in awe, but curiosity. "So here we are," Jeff stated, looking back at me and smiling. "You ready?" He asked, and I turned, nodding lightly as I pulled on the handle. The three of us climbed out of the car and walked towards a building with the sign "Office" above it in large, white letters. Jeff held the large red door open for me and Penny, and with an encouraging smile she took my arm as Edie would every now and again, to show me that she was there. I looked at it, eyes wide as the memories flooded me, and for a moment I pretended that it was her. We bravely walked into the carpeted room and straight up to a woman with curly blonde hair.

"Sign in there," She said, motioning to the paper and not even looking up. "Just go to your third period class," She stated, and Jeff put his hand on the counter.

"Devin's not late, we're here to register her." The blonde looked up, her blue eyes hitting Jeffery's face and she seemed taken for a moment as she caught a hold of his smile. She seemed to be dazzled, which, when I turned to look at him, wasn't hard to be if that smile was focused on you. It confused me that he'd do that in front of Penny, maybe he didn't mean to? Still, Penny tightened her grip on my arm.

"Oh, you're the Jones', we've been expecting you," The blonde replied, pointing to the office to the right, never taking those heavily lidded eyes off of Jeff.

"Come on, girls," he smiled, turning to us and extending his arms to us. Penny let go of mine and grasped onto his protectively, and I glared at the woman, who simply ignored my attempts as we left her.

The councilor was very large man, surprisingly so. He looked as if he'd just been released from prison, it was quite frightening. I couldn't get a hold of his height, but the size of his body made me believe that he was at least six feet two, three? I wasn't ever easily intimidated by people, even large people, but this guy... He could throw me like a paper ball... with more accuracy. His name was Mr. Malloy, and as I thought, he had been in prison. Except he was a guard, not an inmate.

We figured out what classes I was going to take, after much protest by myself, I was able to score just about the same classes as I had before. English, Geometry, World History, PE, and Chemistry. I purposely left out French, as it wasn't required, and instead got drama, one of my favorite classes. I was registered as a sixteen year old sophomore, which made me smile, I was back to school. We walked out of the office about forty minutes later, and two Italian boys stood at the front by the blonde. One of them had short black hair, the other shoulder length curly hair. The smell of cigarette smoke radiated off them, and of course my gaze caught theirs.

"The Lambardi boys, Geovanni, we thought we got rid of you," the blonde stated, smiling flirtatiously as she twirled her hair around a red painted fingernail. The larger of the two boys leaned against the counter, sharing the same smile as she did.

"You forget, Bella, it's *Giovanni*, and you can't get rid of me, Brianna, I haunt your dreams." He whispered, and the skinnier boy, with long, curly, black hair, rolled his dark brown eyes, turning away from him and meeting my eyes. They went wide and I smiled welcomingly, yet he just stared. I lowered my gaze, not feeling any friendliness coming from the Italian boy. Jeff and Penny led me out of the school yard, and I immediately felt relief swell through me as we walked off of the grounds. The air was clear, and fresh here.

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No uncertain waters to tread on. At least, not today.

My dads voice rang, slightly cracking, surprise crossed over me. What does he mean, awake?

Chapter 7: Say Hello To the Hounds

"Devin, Devin, sweet heart, it's time to wake up," Someone was gently pushing on my arms, trying to pull me out of a deep slumber. With a groan I turned over onto my sides, covering my eyes. I really didn't want to get up, I was so tired, and it was so much easier to just lie in the warm blankets and go back to sleep. "Come on," Then the female voice said those magic words. "You're going to be late for school." With that I bolted up, pulling the sheets down and rushing up. I looked over at Penny, who just stared at me and I looked down at myself. I'd chosen to sleep in the nude that night, and unfortunately I hadn't grabbed my cover. I squealed and grabbed a blanket, blushing a deep shade of red.

"I... I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to... Sorry," I just repeated over and over again, this was a horrible way to start the day. She turned around, laughing and walking to the door.

"It's fine, don't worry about it," She smiled, turning the door knob. "Just get changed, we're going to leave in about thirty minutes. I've made some toast when you're ready," she said, and I nodded, still red. After she walked out of the room, I laughed lightly, letting the sheet drift from my body. I picked it up and set it on the bed, not bothering to make it as I walked over to my drawers. Today there would be no dress, today would be a skirt, with a collared shirt and noticeable leggings. Searching through them, I quickly picked out a light orange pencil skirt and a white, sleeveless, button up shirt with a drastic collar. My skin colored stockings felt like silk against my legs, and I slipped on some black heels with a curved toe. Looking in my mirror I examined myself, loving the outfit but hating the missing make up and curler covered hair before walking over to my vanity, gently applying some soft cover up, a little bit of pink lipstick and gloss, black eyeliner, and curling my already long and black eyelashes. I undid my curlers, setting them on the dresser next to the vanity before running my fingers through my bangs and grabbing a black pin, locking them in place. I bit my lip, not trusting it, and grabbed the can of hairspray. Usually this stuff would be in the bathroom, but I did my hair and such in my bedroom, my appearance was my life, if anyone saw how miserable I really was, it'd suck a whole lot. I sprayed, locking it even more. With a satisfied last look in the long mirrors on my closet I nodded and walked out, flashing a dazzling smile at Jeff and Penny. "Good morning," I said, tilting my curly head to the side. Jeff was in a gray suit, a dark blue tie bringing out the blue of his eyes, and his yellow blonde hair was slicked back, giving him a dangerous, yet sophisticated look. Quite attractive, but in that intimidating kind of way. Penny was washing dishes, tall, high rising blue jeans on her waist with a tucked in plaid shirt. As I walked in, Jeff stood up straight, eyes bulging as I walked into the room.

"Look at you! You look amazing, they don't stand a chance," He smiled, and I giggled, looking down at myself then looking back up.

"I feel like Louis Lane!" I beamed, and Penny dried her hands, furrowing her brow.

"Who?" She asked, and I shook my head, remembering that Superman wasn't famous quite yet.

"Nobody," I laughed and she shrugged.

"So are you ready to go?" Jeff asked, walking towards me, and Penny smiled, handing me a wrapped up piece of toast and bacon.

"Not without your breakfast!" She cried, wrapping her hands around mine and beaming again. "Oh, you look so pretty! I remember my first days at Churchill High," A slight dreamy look caught her eye, then she laughed, shaking her head. "Well I'm not going to bother you with my stories, you've got to get going," She smiled, turning me and pushing me towards the door. Jeff laughed, placing his hand on my back and leading me out as we waved goodbye to his pretty little wife. We took the elevator down the four stories, Jeff holding

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my shoulder bag all the way as I stared at the flashing numbers. He led me out to the car, opening the passenger side door for me and driving me to Churchill. With a smile I climbed out, looking at him and smiling.

"Thanks for the ride, Jeff," I said, looking at him, then turning back to the school.

"You're welcome, Dev, I'll be here about two thirty, ok?" He said, and I nodded.

"Sounds good to me,"

"Good luck, see you after school."

"Thanks, you too, have fun at work," I laughed sarcastically, and he did too.

"Knock 'em dead, sweet heart," He said, using a pet name that my dad used every once in a while. My heart caught in my throat. No, I would not cry. I smiled and nodded, closing the door and adjusting my brown book back on my shoulder before taking a deep breath. I released it and looked up at the school doors where tons of kids hung around, and a certain group caught my eye as they stood near the left door. All of them were speaking Italian, not that I knew what they were saying, and among them stood the younger boy from the office. My eyes grew wide as I spotted him, then let my gaze lower as I climbed up the school steps, holding my breath as I walked past him. I could feel his gaze on me, along with the rest of them. It was annoying, not intimidating, just annoying. I wanted to, for a bit, turn around and scream at them, asking what their problems were, but I refused the urge. First impressions were the most important, and I wasn't going to appear as the emotional little white girl. With my head held high and look of cocky confidence spread over my face, I walked into the halls. My eyes grew wide, all of the students had their own clicks. Tan kids were with other tan kids, brown with brown, white with white, and so forth. It was weird. I muttered the class room number under my breath, looking at each door and wondering where it could be. I stayed close to the lockers on the right side, there weren't many people over there, and I wanted to stay out of peoples way as I stared at my agenda. Suddenly a large hand slammed against one maroon locker, and I jumped, looking up at the sudden disturbance.

"I haven't see you before," A tall, broad shouldered boy spoke as my hazel eyes met his green pair. "You new?" He asked, and I smiled politely.

"Um, yeah," I laughed lightly, looking down at my shoes before looking back up. "Is it that obvious?" He laughed as well, leaning against the lockers.

"Just a little bit," He smirked, looking down at me, and I knew right away by his clothes and his air what he was. A jock. I didn't categorize people, but it was just so obvious! I tried giving him the benefit of the doubt though. He looked back down at me, his tall form being at least a foot or more taller than myself.

"Well, can you help the new girl out?" I asked him, leaning against the metal wall. "I need to find rooms 126, 165, 154, and 183." I stated and he took my paper, lighting up immediately.

"We, newbie, have second, fifth, and lunch together," He smiled. "Come on, I'll show you." He said, and I nodded, adjusting my bag. As I did he took my bag from me. I looked at him, eyes wide.

"A girl as small and pretty as you shouldn't be carrying this," he smirked, winking, and I smiled.

"It's fine, I've got it," I wasn't here to flirt. In my mind I was still with Michel. I reached for my bag, but he pulled it out of my reach. "Please," I said, starting to feel uncomfortable. "I want to carry it." My voice was

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starting to get stern, and I looked at him, but he avoided my gaze as he messed with me. "Come on, give it here," I said, stiffening up and glaring. The football player looked down at me, getting a false sorry look on his face.

"Oh, come on, little girl, I'm only having a bit of fun, you can appreciate that," He smirked, coming down to eye level with me.

"You'll learn that when I ask you to do something, I don't like to have *fun* with it." I growled. "Now give me my bag." My voice turned to a growl, and I clenched my teeth.

"Give me a kiss." He said, looking at me. My glare grew worse as I adjusted myself. I reached for the bag once again.

"Just give it here," I groaned, as he raised it high in the air, out of my reach. Just then someone came up from behind me, and an accented voice spoke from over my head.

"Give me the bag, Martin." It said, and I turned around, eyes going wide as the skinny Italian boy glared. His dark brown eyes could kill as they made contact with the bright green. Martin stood up straight, menacing.

"Mind your own business, WOP" He growled, and I just looked from one guy to another, eyes wide.

"I... I don't want any trouble boys," I started, not wanting any trouble, but when my ears caught the last part of Martin's statement, I froze angrily. "Excuse me? What did you just say? You don't just go around calling people that. Who the hell do you think you are?" I demanded, and without thinking, I shoved him. I believed in equality amongst human beings, and for him to say something like that, well, it was inappropriate. To hell with the fact that he was three times my size.

"It's ok, *Bambina*," The boy said, looking down at me to calm me down.

"No, it's not ok!" I yelled, this really bugged me, and I wasn't about to let it go.

"God damn, Newbie, get out of the way," Martin growled, grabbing my arm and pushing me roughly to the side to get to the Lambardi boy from the office. I cried out as anyone would if they were shoved to the side, and all of a sudden a fist caught hold of Martins jaw. I gasped as I watched the boys, hazel eyes wide with surprise and fear as they wrestled.

"*Oh god what have I done?*" I asked myself, rushing towards them, but someone grabbed me by the shoulders, holding me tight around the arms to keep me from getting in the middle of it. "Let go!" I yelled, struggling against them as teachers ran up to separate the two boys. As they pried them apart they obviously handled the Italian boy rougher than Martin, but he managed to pull away for a brief moment to pick up my bag. Walking over with a deep red cheek he extended it to me, looking at the mail plate on the strap of it.

"Here, Devin," He said, and I looked up at him, mouth slightly agape as he handed me my bag. Catching myself staring as I got lost in his voice, I shook my head, looking down a bit before looking back up.

"You didn't have to do that, I would have gotten it back eventually." I said quietly, and he shrugged, not smiling still.

"I wanted to show you not all guys in this school are complete cazzo's." He merely said before being grabbed by a teacher and led to the front of the school. I stared after him, lips parted and bag clutched tightly in my hands in shock. I looked back over at Martin, who was yelling at a teacher. His eye was starting to get a

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purpley color, and his lip was bleeding. I looked back down the hall, then back at him, an unbelieving smirk on my face as I shook my head and found my way to my first period English class.

Third period sent me directly to creative writing, and it brought a smile to my face. I got to write, I could write about anything and everything. Edie, Justin, Michel, Mommy, Daddy, Dario, everyone could be a character, everyone could be in it. I could pour my heart out as a journal, and no one would know. I walked into the class room and smiled kindly at the teacher as I walked up to his desk, a young man, who looked at me kindly. "Hello, are you Devin?" He asked me, slightly confused, and I nodded. "I expected a boy, oh well, it doesn't matter," He smiled, signing my agenda and looking around the class. "There's a seat over there by Alessandro's seat," He said, and I just stared at him blankly, not knowing who Alessandro was. He looked back up at me. "You don't mind, do you? Or would you feel more comfortable sitting next to Chris?" he asked, and I just continued looking at him, confused.

"I um, don't know who you're talking about," I laughed lightly, pulling my bangs back as they'd fallen free from the pin.

"Oh! It's the seat in the back, I hope you don't mind," He smiled, motioning to a the desk in the back by the window. I laughed and smiled.

"No, it's completely fine!" I said excitedly, taking my agenda and walking to the window. This was the perfect spot for a writer. I could daydream out the window, images bouncing in my mind as I let it wander. It was going to be great. Setting my bag down by the leg of the desk, I sat down, looking out the large glass that stretched out over the school yard. The light was just perfect, it was almost like God was shining down on all of us. It was beautiful.

"I didn't take you for *un scrittore*," That voice from earlier spoke, and I looked up at him, confused.

"Un what?" I asked the Italian boy, who I was surprised was even here considering that he'd just gotten into a fight. If that had happened at my high school they would have been suspended from three to ten days each.

"A writer," Alessandro said, translating for me as he sat down in the desk next to mine. "Or did they just place you in this class because they didn't know what to do with you?" He set his stuff down and stared at me intently, I just leaned against the wall, facing him and looking at him strangely.

"No, I chose this class. I love to write. And what about you? You like to write or did they do that to you?" I asked him, tilting my head slightly. He leaned back against the metal bar that held the desk and chair together and shrugged.

"It's an easy grade and it's my last year. I want to pass." He said, not really caring about it. "I suck though, so it's not like it matters. Carmelo only cares that you try. You could write about killing yourself or bombing the white house, he'd and he still give you an A." I let out a long 'ooh' and turned my head against the wall, looking up at the window. We sat there in quiet for a little while, but he ended the silence. "I never got a *Grazie*, by the way, Bambina," He said, leaning forward on his seat. I looked at him, wondering what kind of thank you he wanted.

"Um, thanks." I said curiously, and he sighed. Shaking his head.

"You don't seem very thankful," He stated obviously, and I rolled my eyes.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked him, lifting a brow and looking at him.

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"I want you to say it like I just beat the crap out of the guy who stole your bag," He laughed, and I smiled, shaking my head. When I stopped, I looked at him gently.

"Thanks for getting my bag back, you really didn't need to hit him though, he was going to give it back eventually." I laughed, and he lifted his brow.

"And you didn't have to go off on him calling me a WOP," My face blushed a light red color as he spoke and I shrugged.

"He had no right to. He was a fucking ass hole and you just don't go around calling people that. It's fucking retarded." I said, swearing as the subject caught my nerves again. "Fucking dumb ass," I muttered under my breath, growling a bit. His eyes grew a bit.

"Look who's got a mouth on her!" He said, and I laughed. "Bambina isn't as innocent as she looks," I laughed and shook my head.

"Where I'm from you've got to..." I stopped in mid sentence. Everyone thought I suffered amnesia, and I turned my body away from him, not letting his gaze meet mine. "Never mind." I muttered, and he lifted a brow.

"Where is that, exactly?" He asked, and I looked at him.

"I um, don't remember." I lied, and he tilted his head.

"You're lying."

"No, Penny and Jeff found me in the street, I don't remember what happened,"

"Miss Jones, Mister Lombardi, I know you're new and trying to get acquainted with your fellow classmates, but I'd appreciate it if you'd stop talking in the middle of my class. Save it for passing period." Mr. Carmelo stated, and I sunk in my seat, turning another shade of red. I mumbled a 'yes sir' and moved my bag. Alessandro nodded, then as the teacher continued talking, ignoring us once again, he leaned toward me.

"What lunch do you have?" He whispered, and I looked at him

"Fifth, why?"

"Same, we'll talk later," At that, my stomach churned. He knew I was lying. How, I couldn't figure out how, but he did. "Meet me by the big palm tree," I just stared at him, I didn't really have a choice now, did I?

"Um, Alessandro," I began, very wary of it all. I was scared a bit, if it got out that I wasn't telling the truth, that I wasn't an amnesia victim, then I'd be sent away, and that was the last thing I wanted.

"Miss Jones, Mister Lombardi! I'm going to have to separate you two if you don't be quiet!" The teacher yelled again and I sunk in my chair again. We muttered our apologies and I opened my notebook, doodling a bit.

"Remember," Alessandro said, "The palm," and I just looked at him, rolling my eyes before looking back down at the papers that were connected by a ring of metal bars.

Chapter 8: This Place Will Never Lose Its Shine

The Martin boy was in fourth, just like Alessandro was in third. It baffled me as I discovered his first name was Eric. I ignored it, and him, although I could feel his glare from across the room. Geometry was surprisingly easy, all of the things we were learning I learned in the middle of the school year already, so I dedicated this class period to sleep. Wondrous, amazing, sleep. I sat next to a red-headed girl who frighteningly look a ton like Edie. She was skinny as a stick with the same fair skin and gray blue eyes that spelt out trouble. The first time I saw her I just stared, until she asked me what was wrong and I just responded with a nothing. Her name was Adriana Mallory, and as I discovered, she was the big-ex-jail-guards daughter. It was shocking that this frail looking young girl could be his offspring. She was sixteen as well (except for the fact that I was truly a few months shy of sixteen), and her birthday was the same day as Edie's. It was like $d\ddot{i}:\frac{1}{2}j\ddot{i}:\frac{1}{2}vu$, and it cut my heart in two. Before geometry was out I'd decided it that, instead of sleep, it was my gossiping hour, and this new Edie was my informant. We walked out, giggling like we'd known each other for years, and we parted with tight hugs as she headed to her French class, and I headed to lunch. A feeling of dread caught over me as I caught sight of the large palm, Alessandro wasn't there just quite yet, and I sighed with relief as I approached the inside of the cafeteria. I headed into the line, keeping my head down as I looked at the food. There wasn't much to eat, but today was this pulled BBQ beef sandwich or something, and I placed it on the pink tray along with a small bowl of Mac and cheese, and an apple juice. There was some commotion beside me as I waited in line, but I ignored it and stayed put, waiting to make it to pay for the food. A feeling of someone's face by my shoulder crept over my body and I turned as it spoke.

"Hey there, newbie." I jumped a tad and moved as far from Eric as I could. "Wow, hey, don't worry, I'm not going to hurt you." He smiled mischievously. "Although I think you owe me an apology," His statement brought an 'oh really' look to my face.

"Excuse me? I owe *you* an apology? I wasn't the one who was stealing the others bag!" I retorted.

"Oh, come on, Devin, let me take you out Friday night," he was leaning against the bars, trying to put on a flirtatious charm. I'd seen his other side, and I wasn't going to fall for that stupid little trick. It was the oldest in the book.

"Yeah, no," My response was clear as day, and could slice through bricks. He ignored it though, and continued to nag.

"Devin," He swung in front of me, and I stopped, staring up at him as he tried to be silky smooth about it all. "Come on," he cooed. "It'll be fun, think of it as an apology for getting my face punched this morning. You, me, a dark movie theatre," He began and I froze, my facial expression growing icy as my voice did.

"You are seriously clueless, aren't you?" I growled, leaning to the side and placing a hand on my hip. "You honestly can't see when a girl isn't into you, can you? Let me guess, you're a football player, attractive, young, sporty, not used to being rejected," He smiled at all of this, not catching on to the air around him. "But an imbecile and an idiotic jack ass. You're spoiled by your parents and you only pass because you can play a sport well." He stopped, glaring at me as I hit a nerve. I smirked. "Looks like I got right on, so why don't you take that little bit of knowledge I just handed you and go on home to mommy." I smiled, mischief crawling all over my cold voice. At this moment the sign 'Approach With Caution' should be placed over my head. He stepped closer toward me, trying to size me up, and I just lifted a brow at him as my hazel eyes met those bright green pair.

"Listen, you little bitch," He growled, "I don't know who you are or where you came from, and from what I've heard, neither do you, so I wouldn't go on about mommy's and daddy's when you don't have any. Not to

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mention the fact that if you did they probably left you to die and obviously don't care enough to look for you, so if I were you I'd shut that pretty little mouth of yours before you say something you might regret." I lifted a challenging black brow at all of this.

"Oh?" The question came out in a whisper as I pulled my face up as far as I could. "Like what?" The question was rhetorical. He didn't need to answer it, and thanks to someone who seemed to be everywhere I was, he wouldn't get the chance to.

"*Bambina*," A hand rested on my shoulder, and I shrugged it off roughly, my pet peeve coming in and I went to glare, but when I realized who it was, my eyes went wide, and I guess I blushed a bit, even with Eric standing right there in front of us. He looked at me strangely, and I apologized.

"Uh, shoulder thing... pet peeve." Was all I managed to get out before Alessandro looked at Eric.

"Are we going to have another problem?" He asked, lifting a remarkably elegant eyebrow. I kind of just stood there, watching that eyebrow. How could a guy who's gone through puberty have such a delicate eyebrow? I shook the thought from my mind as his eyes pierced Eric's.

"I was only having a little chat, nothing wrong with that," Eric said, backing off a bit before looking down at me with a smirk. "I'll catch you later, newbie," He winked, knocking my chin up a bit. I slapped his hand away and went to run after him, but long fingers wrapped around my right arm, keeping me back.

"He's not worth it, *Bella Bambina*. Let him go," Alessandro said, looking past me at the football player who merely met up with his friends, slapping them on the backs and laughing. I rolled my eyes with a groan and looked back at my food, which, through this whole thing, still seemed to be warm. Which was really weird, but then again it was cafeteria food. What did I expect? A Su chef? Placing a hand on my back he gently pushed me towards the register, where plenty of students had seemingly magically disappear from, and I paid for the food before being ushered to that large palm tree. Exactly where I *didn't* want to be. Leaning against the tree he slid to the ground soundlessly, pulling his hand through the dark curls that hung around his shoulders. I just kind of stood there, staring at him, food in hands and bag on shoulder. He looked back up at me, confused as he pulled out a peach from his bag. "Well, are you going to sit or just stand there?" He asked, and I nodded, sinking to my knees on the grass. "So tell me, *Deveen*," He said, dragging on the 'in' parts as 'een' as he looked over at me. "Where are you from again?" He asked, smiling at me as I carefully crossed my legs. I shook my head.

"I don't know, I told you." I responded, opening my juice container and taking a sip. "I can't remember a thing besides waking up at Jeff and Penny's house," He looked over at me, opening his pack and pulling out a sandwich and a juice of his own.

"Jeff and Penny?" He asked, his dark brown eyes peering into mine, questioning.

"The couple who found me." I finished, not thinking about being lady like at all as I grumbled and about the skirt that clung so tightly to the curves of my lower body. "I hate skirts, unless they're all flowy and maneuverable. I mean they're cute, but hard to freakin sit in." I moaned, just randomly speaking as I usually did, and he shook his head.

"No changing the subject, *Bella*." He corrected and I just looked at him.

"Don't you have any friends to hang out with this period instead of drilling the new girl on a life she don't even remember?" That southern slang seemed to slip in as I spoke, not that I grew up in the south, no, the blame goes to growing up with grandparents, dad, and a step mom, all from the great state of Alabama.

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"Si but they left for the day," He merely stated, shrugging and taking another sip of his drink. "And besides," His voice echoed with laughter. "You seem to be trouble, bambina, I can't just let you run free and get into that." I rolled my eyes at him and looked down at my food. Lifting the plastic container of Mac and cheese, I took the plastic half spoon half fork thing and stuck it in one of the cheesy noodles.

"I can take care of myself," I growled. "I don't need anyone to *keep me out of trouble*," He laughed at me.

"Some would say I am trouble," He said, smiling slyly, and I rolled my eyes.

"Listen, dude, I didn't come here to flirt or any of that other good stuff, understand? I just want to graduate high school and get the hell out of Florida." I stated matter-of-factly.

"Oh? Where do you want to go?" He asked me and I leaned back on one of my arms.

"I'm hoping Rome. I know it's like, uber expensive, but it's so amazing. The history, the culture, everything, you know what I mean?" I asked, getting a slightly dreamy look in my eyes.

"My family's from there," He said, sitting forward. "My parents moved here after my brother was born," He smiled, and I seemed to light up.

"Really?" I asked, and he nodded. "Have you been?"

"No," He said sadly. "We haven't got the money to go back," He took another sip of his drink and I looked at my food. I really wasn't that hungry I noticed, and pushed the tray away from me.

"Oh, that sucks." I stated, and he nodded.

"So where are you from?" He smiled. "Thought you escaped, didn't you?" I sighed.

"I told you, I don't remember."

"You're lying. Don't lie to me."

"Why can't you just accept the fact that I don't know who I am?" I demanded, sitting up and looking at him angrily, my voice cracking a bit as it seized up. "Don't you think it's hard not knowing who I am? Starting my life all over again? I had a life before this! I could have had best friends who were always there for me! I could have had a boyfriend who loved me!" Tears stung my eyes and I shook my head, standing up. "You know what? Just forget it." I said, grabbing my bag. "I'll see you later." I turned around and walked away.

"Devin!" He cried after me, but I walked quickly, not giving him the chance to catch up to me. I didn't know where I was going to go. I didn't know what I was going to do when I got there. All I knew was that I needed to get away from him. He was untying my knots before they'd even gotten settled. Him and that damn Italian accent.

The rest of the day played out smoothly, Adriana and I had seventh together, so I talked to her about Alessandro, and she grew wary. "He's been around the block a lot, Devin. And he's *Italian*, he could be part of the mafia or something." She said, her eyes growing wide. I just furrowed my brow at her.

"Just because he's Italian doesn't mean he's part of the Mafia." I laughed and she shrugged.

"You never know! I wouldn't trust him, Dev. He's not the safest guy to hang out with!"

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"And that Eric Martin guy is?" I asked, and she shook her head.

"Eric's different,"

"How so? Only difference I see is that he's ruder, cocky, and white."

"Well," Before she could finish, the bell rang, and we all filed out of Geometry, talking about the homework instead of a certain brown boy. Upon walking out, I saw him, smoking a cigarette with a few other Italians and some Hispanic kids. I avoided eye contact, although I could *feel* those deep brown eyes upon me as I nodded and smiled at other kids that I met in my classes. I hugged Adri goodbye as Jeff pulled up, Penny in the front seat with him. I smiled, saying hello to them and climbing in the backseat.

"So how was your first day? Anything exciting happen?" Penny urged, turning in her seat as Jeff looked at me through the rear view mirror. I looked out the window and looked over at Alessandro, meeting his gaze as we pulled away.

"Nope, just a normal day at school," I responded, then looked in front of me, driving off into the afternoon.

Chapter 9: Careful, Little Girl

"What the hell are you doing here?" Edie screamed. *"You did this to her! Get the fuck out of here!"*

"It wasn't my fault, I wasn't driving," Dario replied, voice shaking a bit, obviously not used to a girl as fair skinned as porcelain and three or four times smaller than himself turning into the devil herself.

"Not your fault my ass! You have you god damn license why the fuck weren't you driving?" She screamed again.

"Edie, calm down," Michel began, but Edie turned on him.

*"I will not calm down! One of my best friends is in a fucking coma because of this jack ass! What I'm wondering is why you aren't doing this instead of me!"*Dario stuttered.

"I'm, I'm sorry,"

*"No shit you're sorry, Sherlock! Now get the hell out of here!"*She roared, turning on her boyfriend. I could feel her glare even if I couldn't see it. The opening of a door sank through my mind as Dario began to leave, conscience tugging at him, and I could see the face he was making in my mind. Regret, I'd seen it so many times before. I wanted to hug him and whisper that it was ok. That I was ok. Why did I continue to have dreams like this? Nothing was wrong with me. *"I said out!"* She screamed, and there was a loud slamming of the door when I bolted awake. In a cold sweat I looked around, heart racing as I gazed through the curtains that hid me from the rest of my room.

"Edie,"

"Shut up, Justin!"

"Edie," I whispered her name softly as her voice rang in my mind. Hugging my knees to my chest, I cried into them, this was so much. Too much. I wept. I wept for Edie. I wept for my little brother Erin. I wept for my dad. I wept for my mom. I wept for Michel. And I wept for Dario, who I secretly knew I was still in love with. I couldn't take it any more. I jumped up from my bed and swung the lace-like things out of my way as leapt to my window. "Edie," I said again. Where was she? She had to be somewhere. Looking out my window, I saw nothing but the street below and the buildings around me. I rushed to the kitchen, frantically looking around. "Edie!" I hissed, "Edie!" Nobody. Running to the front door, I opened it, hoping that Dario stayed by the door, hoping to see him, if nobody else. He for some reason made me feel... free, defiant, exotic. Looking around, I saw no one. "Dario!" I cried, looking around. "Dario! I'm awake, it's Alice, Dario!" I looked around, once again, no one. "Dario!" I fell to my knees half way down the stairs, clinging to the railing as tears poured down my cheeks.

"Devin!" Someone yelled, but I didn't turn. My name was Alice Colosant. Not Devin Jones. "Devin, what happened?" Warm hands wrapped around me, but I stood up, shrugging them off.

"Don't touch me!" I cried, looking, but not actually seeing Jeffery who sat there, looking up at me.

"What's going on?" He asked me, concern in his voice, and I fell into his arms, sobbing into his shoulder. "Shhh, shhh," he cooed running his hands through my sweat soaked hair. I rubbed my face into his shoulder, trying to rub my face dry. "Who's Dario?" He asked me, and I shook my head. I couldn't blow my cover. I couldn't.

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"I don't know," I wept through the lie, tears flowing faster. "I don't know!"

"It's ok, it's ok," he said gently, continuing to run his hands through my hair. "Shhh, sweetheart. It's ok, come on, let's get you back upstairs." He finished, helping me up. I clung to his arm as we made our way back up the stairs and to the apartment. I wondered why no one else was out side, but I didn't care. I wanted Dario. I wanted Edie. I wanted someone who understood me, who knew me better than anyone else. He made me a warm cup of tea, but all I wanted to do was go to bed. If I stayed up to talk, I would spill it all.

The next day, I pretended that nothing happened. I was smiley. I was bright. I was charming. But most of all, I was Devin Jones. I let it go. That day was better the day before, perhaps it was because I was using my acting skills? Alessandro still believed that I was lying, but he was the only one, and I tried not to let it get to me. I discovered I could let my life out in my writings, and relaxed. It was easy for me, my life story was coming out of my pen, it was incredible. The teacher was impressed, but I refused to let him read it aloud. No one but he and I would know what I'd been through. At lunch, I escaped to the library, reading and writing more than I was instructed to, then disappeared before that infamous Italian could follow suit. Unfortunately that fairy^{1/2}zade lasted only for about a week. I was perfect during the days, but my nights were haunted with the faces of my friends and family, and the day I looked my worst, the library was closed. I'd been going to this school for about, like I'd said, a week now. I'd started the Monday of last week, and I found myself hating the day all over again. With a groan I made my way over to the lunch line, keeping my head down as I piled on the spaghetti like noodles and sauce onto my Styrofoam plate. After I paid, I looked around for an empty table, standing there all awkward like with people passing me and joining their friends. Oh how I wished the new Edie, Adriana, was there. Spotting an old tree that no one seemed to be occupying, I approached it, sitting in the shade near the school fence, and taking slow bites of my lunch. When I finished, I pushed the plate aside, content with throwing it away after I took a short nap. I cuddled into the cool bark of the tree and shut my eyes, at that moment forgetting about the nightmare because I was just so damn tired. I was soon engulfed in a dreamless sleep, for the most part. I saw faces, but they were just smiling at me, frozen in time and I sat there happily, gazing at the familiar faces like a little lost puppy would. Happy that they were there.

"Bambina, unless you're planning on skipping and getting caught, I'd get up if I were you," A voice called to me, but I ignored it. I was busy staring happily at the faces. "Bambina," The voice grew closer to my face, and I groaned, shrugging it off, my face all crunched up. Edie and Michel's expressions seemed to swirl, along with Dario's and my little brothers. "Time to wake up, Bella," The voice said again, and I shot up as the faces disappeared.

"No!" I cried, hyperventilating as did so. My eyes were wide, with deep circles underneath them. As they gazed around for my friends and family, they fell upon Alessandro, who was sprawled out in front of me, laughing lightly. Scrunching up my face again, I glared at him. "What?" I demanded angrily, and he shook his head.

"Nothing." He replied, standing up. He walked over to me and extended a hand with a dazzling smile, but I ignored it as I looked up at him.

"I can get up myself, thank you very much!" I yelled, holding onto the tree for support as I pulled myself up. My vision went black though as I did, and I fell against the bark, holding tightly to the limbs to keep from toppling to the ground.

"Oddio!" He cried in Italian, grabbing my arm to stand me up straight.

"I'm fine!" I said groggily, trying to shrug him off. "I just haven't gotten a lot of sleep lately, I'm fine," A yawn escaped my lips as I ran a hand through my now disheveled hair.

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"Let's get you to the nurse," He said nervously, but I shook my head.

"I'm good, just, hand me my bag, k?" I asked him, keeping my eyes closed and a hand on my head. He shook his head however.

"We're going to the nurse."

"I'm fine!" I yelled, jerking my head sharply to look at him, which was a horrible idea. My vision went away again, and my legs gave way. He caught me just in time, however, and helped me up. "Ok," I said, slurring my words a bit. "To the nurse," I pointed forward with my fingers, and he laughed, shaking his head before helping me to the nurses office.

"What did you do, Alessandro?" I could hear the nurse yell as she rushed over to us.

"I didn't do anything! She was passed out near the oak and I woke her up so she wouldn't be late to class!"

"Oh I highly doubt that!" She snapped, helping me sit down on one of the beds.

"I'm fine, just 'aven't got much sleep's all," I slurred, so ready to just collapse against the bed. "He ain't done jack."

"And I'm a one legged dog," She replied sarcastically, pulling out a thing with a light attached to it. Holding my eyebrow up she checked my eyes.

"Why do all of you think that it was me who did something?" Alessandro yelled, then stopped. "Never mind, I forgot how fuckin' racist this god damn school is." He growled and without looking the nurse replied.

"Robert!" She yelled, and in walked the guidance counselor, grabbing him by the arms. I shook my head.

"He didn't do anything! God, what the hell is going on? I swear, I haven't been getting much sleep lately and Alessandro found me! Is it that hard to believe?" I demanded angrily. God I was tired. I was *not* going to put up with this shit right now. At that, the nurse and Mr. Mallory just looked at me before letting go of Alessandro. He pushed Mr. Mallory away who pushed him right back. I looked sleepily at the both of them. "Alessandro, go to class, or wherever it is that you go, I'll... I'll see you later," I yawned, and he looked at me for a moment before shouldering the large, ex prison guard/counselor, on his way out. When he left, the nurse turned to me, and I smiled goofily. "I'm going to sleep now," I said, and collapsed on the bed, drifting off into a dreamless sleep.

Jeffery and Penny came and picked me up not long afterward, talking to the nurse who instructed them to take me to the doctor for sleep. So we left, then quickly made it to the doctors office who had an opening that day. So we're sitting there, me feeling a bit better as I crossed my plaid covered legs over on the medical table. "So what keeps you awake?" He asked me, and I shook my head.

"Nightmares," I yawned, and he nodded his head before turning to Jeffery.

"I'll prescribe this right here," he said, pointing to the sheet of paper, and Jeff nodded before Penny wrapped me in a big hug.

"I'm fine, I'm fine," I grumbled sleepily, hopping off the paper and landing on my brown pumps. We left not long after that, picking up my prescription and heading home. When we finally got there, Jeff explained what it did, how it helped me sleep and would just keep me refreshed and stuff, so with a quick shower and meal, I

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went to bed with two of those sleeping pills in my system. I slept dreamlessly again, waking up that morning completely and utterly refreshed and ready for the day ahead.

"Are you sure you're alright to go to school?" Penny worried, and I smiled brightly.

"I'm sure," Was my response before taking a banana and peeling it.

"You ready?" Jeff asked me, tilting his blonde head to the side, eyes shining, and I nodded. We walked down to the car, and he dropped me off, smiling all the while. "I'm really glad you're ok, we were really worried about you." He said softly, and I smiled.

"I'm fine, I'm tough, It'll take more than just a bit of missed sleep to get to me," I stated broadly as I began to get out of the car.

"I know you are, take it easy at school, ok?" I nodded, stepping out, but he grabbed my hand, stopping me mid-leaving. His gaze grew dark. "And stay away from that Italian boy, do you understand? He and his whole group of friends are trouble." I furrowed my brow.

"What do you mean?" I asked, and he shook his head.

"Just do it, please," he said, concern echoing his voice, and I nodded.

"Sure, whatever you say," My lie was sweet and smooth. I promised Alessandro that I'd see him later. I was going to see him whether Jeffery or anyone else wanted me to or not. Seeming to believe me, he let go of my hand and drove off. I watched with a sudden determination before looking around. Now, where was that Italian boy?

Chapter 10: Let the Rumors Fly

My hazel green eyes scanned the crowd, clouded with a strange want to find Alessandro. Where could he be? Light brown with highlighted curls tickled my face, wind lightly blowing and pushing the loose strands over my eyelashes and making me rub my mascara and eyeliner covered eyes as the hair irritated them. "*No, Giovanni,*" I heard accompanied with an irritated sigh coming from my left. Looking over with a hand on my hip and my brown carrier bag over my shoulder, I lifted my hand to my eyes, shading them from the bright sunlight that blinded me. He stood there, leaning against a shiny red car. I stared at it, breath taken for a moment as I just glanced at the vehicle. It was a 1964 Chevy Impala. How did I know that? My brother had a Hot Wheels copy of it that I stole because it was just too pretty to let him play with. This version of the Impala was a convertible, with a white top and a shiny red body. As the top was down, I could see the interior, and it was a desirable deep red that took my breath away. In the drivers seat, the short haired older Italian brother sat, leaning back over the seat with his dark tan arms wrapped behind his neck, black sunglasses glistening as his white teeth shone brightly, even against the bright sunlight. "*Se distruggi la mia macchina, ti uccido,*" Alessandro said to him, leaning over the edge with a menacing glance.

"*Non ti preoccupare, il mio piccolo fratello, non guido questo pezzo di merda se qualcuno mi paga.*" Said Giovanni with a laugh, and Alessandro hit him upside the head.

"Don't talk about Adrian like that!" He yelled angrily, "You should be thankful I let you even *touch* him while Cesare's in the shop. I swear, you fuck up my car I'm going to kill you!" He yelled, and Giovanni lunged at him, hitting him back. I laughed lightly, covering my mouth and lifting my shaped brows. Boys. I shook my head and continued to watch, leaning against the stone half walls, waiting for him to look my way.

"Don't fucking hit me!" Giovanni replied angrily. "If you hit me again I'll wreck this little piece of shit!" He yelled, and I watched, eyes wide as I shook my head.

"Yeah, you do that mama will beat you so hard you won't be able to move!" Alessandro snapped.

"I don't give a shit, don't you fucking hit me again!" His brother yelled before revving up the engine. "I'll see you later, Ale," He said before randomly speeding off.

"Cazzo! Don't do that, you're going to wear out the fucking tires!" The younger brother cried, and I laughed again, rolling my eyes and opening my bag, going through it to look like I was searching for something. I watched him, however, from the corner of my eyes as he leaned against one of the other stone walls, pulling out a cigarette and lighting it. With a breath I approached him, smirking lightly.

"Eh! Alessandro," I cried "Why does everyone keep telling me to stay away from you?" My question was blunt and I tilted my head as I asked it. His dark brown eyes looked up into mine, and he took a long drag before letting it out along with clouds of light gray smoke.

"I told you before. People think I'm trouble." I placed a hand on my hip, leaning on it gently as I lifted a dark eyebrow at him.

"Well what does that mean?" I asked. He shrugged.

"I don't know. I'm Italian, so I guess everyone thinks I'm caught up in the Mafia or something." He said, rolling his eyes sarcastically with a tinge of resentment trickling in it.

"Are you kidding me?" I asked, leaning against the wall. He shook his head, taking another drag.

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"People are so fucking racist. But what do you expect?" he shrugged, and I nodded.

"Well, if it makes you feel any better I didn't jump to the mafia as soon as I saw you and your brother," I laughed.

"What did you think?" He asked, tilting his head so curly black hair fell around his face, his dark brown eyes inquiring.

"I figured you were normal, whatever the hell that is," I stated, folding my eyes and looking at the floor with a furrowed brow. "Never figured you as 'dangerous' though." I shrugged, looking back up at him. His smile turned wicked.

"I'm more dangerous than you believe, Bella Bambina," He smirked, Italian playing off his lips as I rolled my eyes.

"Whatever," I said, then changed the subject. Talking about danger and mixing me in there was a horrible, horrible idea. "So what were you and your brother yelling about?" I asked, and he let out a frustrated sigh.

"The fucker blew out his engine and had to send it to the repair shop. He's obsessed with anything fast. It really pisses me off because he'll start racing Adrian and I'll have to beat the crap out of him." He said, and I stifled a laugh. Giovanni's arms were about the size of my head, and although Alessandro was built, I doubted he could take him on.

"Adrian?" I asked, and he nodded.

"My car." My jaw dropped.

"Your car?" I asked in disbelief. "It's beautiful, an Impala '64, right?" I asked, and he tilted his head to me.

"Very good," he remarked, and I felt the color going to my face as I shrugged.

"I like cars, that one's one of my favorites." I smiled, looking off into the direction that his brother had driven Adrian to.

"I'll have to take you for a ride one day then," He smiled, and my face lit up.

"Really?" I asked, excitement traceable in my voice.

"Sure, why not?" he shrugged, and without thinking I jumped on him in a hug.

"Thank you!" I cried, wrapping my arms around his neck, and he seemed to freeze before wrapping his long, muscular arms around my waist.

"Bambina," he whispered, "the bell is about to ring, and I highly doubt you want to be seen hugging me." I pulled away, although red I just furrowed my brow at him.

"They can kiss my ass for all I care." I stated, and he shook his head just as the bell rang.

"You're something different, where's your first?" He asked, looking towards the school as I pulled my bag onto my shoulder.

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"English, 126," I said, and smirked flirtatiously. "What, Roman man going to walk me to my class?" I asked, lifting a brow at him jokingly.

"Sure," he smiled, and I laughed.

"Alrighty then," And with that we walked down the halls, this tall Italian boy in tan trousers and a white tee-shirt walking this short, tan, white girl in a white sun dress with red cherries on it, red lip stick, and bright red heels. It was a sight to see. We approached my class, eyes on us, and I smirked. "Thanks for walking with me Alessandro," I said.

"No problem, Bambina," He smiled back, "And call me Ale, if we're friends now," his laughter filled the air and my smirk broadened.

"Alright then, *Ale*," I said, opening my arms and going on my toes, lifting myself up and wrapping my arms around his neck. He seemed to tense up again.

"People are staring," He whispered into my ear, and mischief crawled into my voice.

"Then let's give them a show," I smirked, then turned my head to kiss his cheek. Fate had different plans however, and he turned to look at me with a confused gaze, just to meet my lips with his. As soon as they did, my eyes went wide and my face turned just as red as my lipstick when I pulled away, covering my mouth, appalled at what just happened. Well, I wasn't exactly appalled, just in shock. People stood and stared at us, both of our eyes wide as all get when Adriana ran up to me, looking at him with terror.

"Come on, Devin," She hissed, trying to pull me into the classroom, "Come on." I stood there though, hands over lips when I finally snapped back into reality.

"Um, uh, I'll um, see you um," I stuttered, trying to find the words. "Later," I said quickly and darted into the classroom. My heart was going a million miles an hour as I thought at my desk. *"See what happens when you try and be a smart ass? Alice what the hell were you thinking? Jesus Christ... this is the forties, this is bad with a capital B! What about Michel? You can't just forget about him! Wait, why am I thinking about Michel, I didn't even mean to kiss him, it was an accident. There was no feelings behind it. It just happened. That's it. It just happened. It won't happen again. No no no no no,"* I repeated over and over again in my mind.

"Devin, what was that?" Adriana drilled, and I looked over at her, voice high pitched but still in a frantic whisper.

"I don't know, it was an accident. I didn't mean to kiss him. It just happened. Accident, I swear." I tried to convince her, but it sounded more like I was trying to convince myself. I buried my tomato red face into my hands, shaking my head. This wasn't supposed to happen. It wasn't supposed to go like this.

"He's got a bad reputation," She whispered to me, and I looked up for a moment. Slowly closing my eyes and sighing. Bad reputation. That explained everything. Why me? "Devin?" She asked me, and I shook my head again. "Are you hearing anything I'm saying?" She asked, and I looked up at her, annoyance in my eyes.

"That's it." I shrugged, sitting back and crossing my arms and folding my legs over each other. "That's exactly it," a spiting smile crossed over my lips, and I rolled my eyes, laughing lightly.

"This isn't funny!" Adriana snapped, and looked at her from the corner of my eyes as I leaned my head back.

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"Yeah," I laughed stupidly. "It is. It really, really is." My smile was goofy, but it didn't fall as I sighed. "God, I'm screwed," I sighed, and she furrowed her brow.

"I don't get it," She said, and I shrugged.

"Neither do I."

Chapter 11: Like a Car Accident

Chapter 11

The rest of the day was practically one from hell. It took all I had not to scream at them to stop staring, and took all of me not to run to the farthest town possible. My face was red the entire day, until finally I was called up to student services in third period. With a groan I picked up my bag and made the slow, painful walk up to the office, dreading what sort of drilling I'd get this time. As I entered the cool building, I took notice of a short Italian woman, who stood cursing at the Junior guidance counselor. Alessandro sat slouched in a chair behind her, his arms folded over one another, and I looked at him, eyes confused. This couldn't have been about what had happened. Before anyone caught notice of me, I walked up to him. "Ale, what's going on?" I asked, and he shook his head.

"The fuckin' counselor wants me to drop out because of all the rumors that they 'figure' are starting. She doesn't want the school to get a 'bad reputation' as she called it." He spat, and I furrowed my brow.

"A bad reputation? What are you talking about?" He sighed and sank lower in his seat. Before turning those dark brown eyes of his to me.

"Meaning they don't wantâ fuck, what's the word?" He paused for a moment, closing his eyes in deep thought. "Whatever, they don't want a white kid and a colored kid to be together." My face dropped in angry disbelief.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" I demanded, decently loud as well. "That is the biggest bullshit I've ever heard of!" I said, standing up and looking at the counselor.

"Devin Marie, sit down and be quiet!" Jeffery's voice came from Mr. Mallory's office. I looked over and caught sight of them, still fuming.

"Do you hear what they're saying? It was a stupid mistake, neither of us meant it, and they're talking about expelling him? Who came up with these god damn rules?" I snapped, and Jeff's eyes filled with rage.

"Watch your language!" He yelled as he approached me, and I shook my head.

"It's not his fault that this happened! If they want to expel anyone here, it should be me!" I responded. "This is bullshit."

"Alessandro has a record, Devin, you don't," Mr. Mallory tried to explain, but I shook my head.

"Does it look like I give a shit whether he has a record or not?" I snapped, and Jeff grabbed me by the arm.

"That's enough." He growled, and something in his eyes, in his grasp, suddenly made fear shoot through my body.

"Let go of me," I hissed, yanking my arm from his grasp. Boys could get into a fight and not be expelled for that, but when my lips accidentally touched that of an Italian's, all hell broke loose. Who in god's name created these rules? "Don't frickin' touch me!" In anger I stormed out of the office. I couldn't listen to this crap.

"Devin!" I could hear Alessandro yell from behind me, but I kept walking. I took enough of this crap back home. I didn't need it here. "Deveen!" He called again, this time making the 'i' in my alias sound like an 'e' as

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he ran toward me. A long, tan arm caught mine, and I looked at him. "Calm down please, Bella," He said, and I shook my head.

"Calm down? Why should I calm down? This school is full of dumb asses who don't know how to run it!" I cried, and he nodded his head.

"I know, but please, if you react like this it'll only make it worse." He said, and I could tell that he was trying to calm me down.

"Don't go all smooth Italian accent on me or I swear to god I'll knock your lights out," I screeched, and he looked at me strange, facial expression telling me he was about to say 'what' when Jeff was suddenly upon us.

"Get your hands off of her!" He yelled, tearing us apart and shoving Ale on the spot. "Who the fuck do you think you are?" He demanded, and without thinking I grabbed his arm, pulling him back.

"Jeffery!" He did exactly what I didn't expect. Instead of looking at me with angry eyes, jerking his arm away and walking away, he slung his hand back and back handed me straight across the face, sending me flying backwards onto the cement with a gasp.

"Devin!" Alessandro cried, rushing for me and clutching my hand, pushing it away from my face gently and examining it, his fingers were soft and cooling against the blazing skin. In my normal way, however, I pushed him away, physically and emotionally.

"I'm fine, Ale, I'm fine," I softly brushed his hand away, cringing as my own accidentally hit the cheek. I refused to look in his eyes as he looked into mine, and he turned to look at Jeffery. No remorse echoed in those cold blue eyes of his as he knocked Ale out of the way, pulling me up by the arm. "Ouch- let go of me you sick ass hole" I growled, and Ale reached for me. The rest of our group were upon us however, Penny running toward our little trio with Giovanni, his mother, and the guidance counselors on her heels. Alessandro rushed for Jeffery, but his older brother grabbed him, locking his arms behind his back as his younger version tried to lunge for the blonde.

"Let go of me Vanni!" He growled, struggling against him and giving Jeffery a look that could kill. "I said let go!"

"Calm down," Giovanni growled, glaring at Jeffery as well. "He's not worth it, kid." The guidance counselors stared at us, but didn't say a thing, and I stared in shock at how many people could just stand by and watch.

"Come on, Devin," Jeffery began as he looked at Penny. "We're going home."

"Let go of me," I snapped, and he looked at me as he turned his back to the rest of them.

"We'll deal with you at home." What the hell was that supposed to mean? I wondered as he dragged me to the car. Penny walked along side us, head down and long brown hair draping over her shoulders. I turned my head and looked back upon the Italian family. Ale was shoving Giovanni off of him, and their mother was yelling at him, he yelled right back, just to get a simple tap to the cheek. The guidance counselors angrily spoke to them, but she dismissed them, sending her boys off to the car, where Alessandro stormed off to. A feeling of dread caught my heart and made my stomach churn as Jeffery shoved me into the back seat, slamming the door with all it's ferocity and making the car wobble a bit on it's tires. He climbed in along with Penny, whose head still stayed down as she kept quiet.

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It was a deadly ride back to the apartment complex. Not saying that we crashed or anything, but the air, it could literally kill someone. Fear swam through my veins, but I was truly my father's daughter and would not back down just because I was scared. I would dive head in and fight back. When we arrived back at the apartments, he pulled into our assigned spot and thrust open my door. "Get out," he demanded, and biting the inside of my lip I just glared up at him. I could feel my arm and face starting to bruise already, and that's something because I don't bruise easily. "I said," He started, reaching in and grabbing my arm. "Get out!" The force of which he jerked me out of that seat felt as if the car had just collided into a brick wall, or that the brakes suddenly worked like magic while it was going a hundred miles an hour. In shock and pain I cried out, trying to pull my arm from him as his grip tightened on the already tender left arm.

"You're fucking hurting me!" I screamed, but he just dragged me to the elevator, thrusting me into it while his wife followed silently behind. His grip tightened as we reached our floor, and as soon as we did, I made a bolt for it, just to be yanked back into Jeffery and pulled down the hall to our apartment. "Let go of me!" I let out at the top of my lungs, and the door two down from us opened a crack, just to be shut quickly. What the hell was wrong with these people? Jeff opened our door, and I was thrust inside, landing harshly on the wooden floor with a scream. I went to sit up, but all I felt was a hand on the back of my head and the sudden stinging of him pulling me up by the roots. In reaction I drew my hand to his wrist, digging my fingernails as tightly into them as humanly possible. In surprise he cried out, chucking me across the room, my arm being rammed into the top of the couch. I grimaced and groaned in pain as I tried to stand up. In a second he was on me, his eyes burning with fury as his fingers wrapped around my neck. I gasped for air and looked at my fingernail imprints. Blood was trickling from them, but I couldn't celebrate the little victory as he was trying to suffocate me. "J- Jeff," I gasped, head starting to swim. His grip only tightened, and I looked over at Penny, who merely leaned against the counter silently, head down. "Penâ !" Water brimmed in my eyes and Jeffery threw me back to the hardwood near the door.

"You will never go against what I say again, do you understand me?" He growled, towering over me as I pulled my upper body up. Hatred sparked in my eyes as I looked at him, furrowing my brow at him defiantly.

"You know what, Jeff," I said, pulling myself up a little bit more, heels clicking against the hardwood as I looked at him. "Fuck you!" My right leg shot up, and the heel of my shoe collided with his crotch. He dropped in an instant, and as he clutched himself in agony, I fled through the front door.

Chapter 12: Late Night Escapade

I ran out of the apartment, my heels clicking upon the stairs as I rushed down them. I was free of anything except the clothes on my back, the fire poker, and nothing besides them could catch on the railing as I made my decent. "Devin! Devin. Get. Back. Up. Here!" I could hear Jeffery scream from above me, his own steps rattling upon the metal staircase as we ran in squares around and around. I made it to the first story, with him one above me, and without thinking I grabbed the rail and leapt to the ground floor. My ankle twisted, but I ignored the pain as I knew if he caught up with me it would be more than the area above my foot that would be in agony. I made it to the door before he even got close to the bottom story, and without thinking I pulled the doors closed, shoving the metal rod in the pull handles so that when he tried to open them, it'd prove harder. He suddenly appeared behind the closed doors, slamming his hands against the doors as his face peered furiously at me. I screamed as he banged on the heavy metal doors, and turned heel and ran. I never looked back as sped off down the street, heart racing as I did. I wouldn't stop, and I didn't stop until I was well past a mile and a half from the apartment complex. With a gasping breath I came across a light post and I leaned against it, trying to breath as my throat felt like it was on fire. I'd never run that fast that far before, and my body wasn't used to it. My dad always told me when it came to running, that if you didn't puke when you were done, you didn't push yourself hard enough. I, according to his standards, pushed myself to the max this night as I curled over and hurled next to the metal post. Unintentional tears rolled down my face as the feeling of nausea swept over me. I wiped them away quickly, breath still heavy but feeling a tad bit better.

"Bambina have too much to drink?" An Italian accent asked me humorously, and I stood up straight, glaring at the familiar form.

"For your information, I just ran about a mile and a half at full speed on nothing but adrenaline to get away from a guy who I'm pretty sure was about to kill me, so I'd appreciate it if you didn't give me any of your shit right now!" I screamed, grabbing the pole to keep myself from falling, chest still heaving. Stepping into the light, Alessandro furrowed his brow at me and grabbed my arm just as I was about to collapse from exhaustion. My body really truly couldn't take it.

"Oddio! Bella Bambina!" He cried in Italian, wrapping one of my arms around his neck, and snaking his own about my waist to keep me up. "What happened? Who was trying to kill you?" He asked, and I shook my head, trying to keep my legs from going way.

"Jeff, I don't think he'd kill me," I said, taking more breaths. "I just think he'd beat me until I couldn't stand anymore. Looks like I did that to myself though." I half heartedly laughed, which was a bad idea because it made me cough horrendously. Alessandro cursed in Italian, and I pulled away from his grasp, thinking I could stand straight, but being ridiculously wrong. He caught me once again as my heel slipped from under me, and stood me straight. "I'm not going back though. I won't live in a," I coughed, rubbing my tender neck, "A place like that." I said, and he shook his head.

"I won't let you, come on," With that he wrapped his arm under my knees, lifting bride-style and walking in the direction he had come from. With a gasp I clung to his shirt, shutting my eyes tightly and biting my lip. I knew he wasn't going to drop me, but that fear of it still held hostage of my mind.

"Where're we going?" I asked him, and he re-adjusted me before speaking.

"La mia famiglia owns a place not to far from here. You can stay there for now." He stated, and I shook my head.

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"I don't want to bother you with my mess- you can put me down now, I think I can walk." I looked up at him and he stopped, his arms almost feeling reluctant to release the bare area between my calves and thighs. His mind seemed to win the battle however as he set my feet gently to the sidewalk.

"It's fine, Bambina," He said, watching me as I straightened out my dress and looked up at him. "It's not your fault men are cazzo's." He stated, then added in English as I looked at him confusingly "dicks." Frowning my brow I shrugged.

"Not all of them. Michel wasn't," The thought of my boyfriend made my heart clutch up, and my lips seemed to glue together as I followed him down the street. Just as he stopped however and he pulled out his keys, I spoke again. "You're not," He stopped for a moment and looked over at me, smiling sadly all the while.

"And how would you know that?" He asked.

"If you were, I'd still be back at that lamp post puking my guts out or you'd be feeling me up and down, and since I'm not and you're not, you've proved my point." I stated matter-of-factly and he rolled his eyes with a smile before opening the door. A little bell sounded as he held it open for me, and I climbed through just before he flicked the lights on. It was a cute little place, red walls, gold carpet, paintings up and a piano sitting in one corner while the kitchen sat across from it, hidden by wooden doors that had big glass holes for windows. Definitely an Italian restaurant. I laughed internally at the stereotypicalness of it all as I looked around.

"Just because I've helped you once doesn't mean I'm not a cazzo." Alessandro responded, locking the door, and I turned to face him, one brow raised.

"Prove me wrong, then." That might have been the wrong thing to say, but I hadn't thought about it at that point, and he just looked at me before approaching. His steps were long and quick and soon my back was pressed against a table on which his hands rested on, and he leaned down so that his face was just an inch or so from mine. His breath was heavy as he spoke, seducing.

"I could take advantage of you, Miss Devin," He whispered, "You've followed a guy who you've hardly known for less than three weeks into a place he knows front and back, his territory. Behind locked doors, where no one can hear you or care if you scream if I chose to ravage you right here." My heart raced in my chest as he said those words with a breathy, slightly accented voice. But this time it wasn't out of fear, but out of the sheer closeness of our bodies, how his chest, if moved forward even a centimeter, could be touching mine. His lips, touching mine. My eyes stayed at the area between his bottom lip and chin, focusing on that slight curve before I looked up as he awaited my response.

"But you won't." I said, whispering it slightly as my hazel eyes met his own brown pair.

"How do you know?"

"Because you're wasting your time talking instead of trying to remove my clothes." My statement was clear as day, and he laughed, standing up straight and taking a few steps back.

"You're something else, Bambina" He replied, shaking his head, his eyes filled with amusement as he looked at me. Slightly relieved that he'd backed away, not because I was scared he was going to do something, more frightened of the fact that I just might have had to grab that shirt of his and kiss those beckoning lips that rested so softly against his tan skin. Shaking the thought I pulled myself up onto the table, examining my companion.

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"Is that a good thing?" I asked him, tilting my head to the side and knocking my hair in front of my face. He laughed again as he leaned against the wall.

"It's a great thing." He looked behind me at the kitchen, then turned his attention back to the short girl in front of him. "You can stay in my room tonight, I'll talk to my parents in the morning. I'll come and get you afterward. Don't come out before then, ok?" He asked, and I nodded, completely seeing where he was coming from. I looked around as he stood up straight, gazing at the room, soaking in it all. It was, for some reason or another, really homey, and quite comfortable to be in. He walked past me to the large kitchen doors and stood at them, not that I noticed as I continued to stare around the room, and just looked at me. Feeling his gaze I turned to look at him, smiling. "You coming, Bambina?" He asked and I nodded, hopping off the table and walking past him, dragging a fingernail over his chest with a playful smirk as he held the doors open to me. "You're just looking for trouble, aren't you?" He asked me, shaking his head and I laughed.

"Of course I am! Haven't you been paying attention since I started school?" I smirked and he laughed again.

"You shouldn't have slapped white boy in the face, he's dangerous," I turned to him and smirked, letting him lead me up the stair case and into a small room at the end of the hall.

"If he's so dangerous why did you punch him?" I asked him, walking forward and sitting on the bed. It was a small twin bed, covered in home made quilts, and the room was painted light yellow with pictures of the family, Italy, and soccer. I tilted my head at them, knowing about Francesco Totti, and knowing that this guy wouldn't hear about him until he was far older than the eighteen, nineteen year old standing against the wall.

"Because I can back it up," A mischievous smile crept over his face "And I've been waiting for an excuse to hit him since the day I started at that high school." I laughed at this last statement and sighed, looking around once again. He looked back at me as his gaze had wandered to the window, and tilted his head. "You're not tired?" He asked, knowing that it was a rhetorical question I shook my head anyway.

"No, most people get tired from all this excitement but my blood's rushing too much to really fall asleep. Got too much on my mind." My response was slow and sighing, and he nodded.

"Know what you mean. You want to go out to the back?" He asked me, and I nodded.

"Sure, sounds good to me, lead the way?" I smiled, hopping up and beaming at him. He nodded and led me back down the stairs and through the back door, where there sat a little fenced in area with chairs, lights, and hanging clothes. It was so cute and I couldn't help but smile warmly at it all. Walking past me he fell into one of the seats, nodding over at the higher one, meaning for me to sit and I did. Reaching into his pocket he pulled out a pack of cigarettes. I couldn't tell what type they were as he did, but I didn't really care as he placed the stick between those delicate lips of his. I couldn't help but examine him the entire time. His hair was slightly curly when it wasn't slicked back at school, and ended at his shoulders, a bit longer than mine in soft waves. Those soft locks were a dark brown, almost black color, and my hand wanted to reach out and run my fingers through them. To see if they were as silky as they appeared. Resisting the urge I continued to watch as he lit the cigarette between his full lips. His dark brown eyes focused on the head of the tobacco, but flicked up to me as he noticed my gaze was upon him. He smiled at me before lowering his hands and shoving his items in his pockets. He took a drag, relaxing and sighing before letting the silver smoke escape from him. I watched the smoke. It swam around in the air like waves, beautiful silver waves.

"You want a drag?" He asked, pulling it from his lips and extending it to me. I looked at it oddly at first, not sure if I should, then shrugged. I had nothing to lose. Slowly I took it in my hands, and placed the end in my mouth, breathing in the toxins. Most people said that it burned horribly your first time, but for me it felt more like spices going down my throat and I merely pulled it away, taking a breath then looking at it and breathing

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out the same silver smoke. "Have you smoked before?" he asked, and I shook my head.

"Nope," I replied, taking another drag before handing it back to him.

"You're lying. What did I say about lying to me?" he asked, lifting his brow.

"I'm not lying. My parents used to like a lot of spicy food, and that's all it felt like, honestly." I said, shrugging and laying back.

"Oddio." He said, shaking his head and laughing. "Do you get any better?" He asked and I laughed too, blushing a bit.

"Yeah, but that's something for another time," I winked, not sure it would ever happen, but still blushing furiously. His brow rose, however.

"Oh?" I looked down as he spoke. He leaned forward in his seat, smirking broadly before scooting his seat closer to mine so that our knees were almost touching. I looked up at him, eyes wide as his face sat about a foot from mine. "And what would that consist of, Bambina?" He asked and I shook my head.

"Nâ !Nothing" I tried to smile, blushing once again and looking down.

"Have you ever heard of a shot-gun?" He asked me, and I nodded my head, looking up at him. "Have you ever had anyone give you one before?" His second question made me blush even redder as I shook my head.

"No." Another bright smirk crossed his face.

"Well thenâ !" He pulled the cigarette close to his lips again, staring into my eyes the entire time while I sat there, my own wide. He slowly took it from his lips, then with his free hand he quickly grabbed the back of my head and pulled me onto him. My hands rested on his knees to keep myself from falling onto his lap and my lips parted. I knew exactly how to do this without ever learning. He pulled me closer to his lips, my heart racing a million miles an hour as they almost touched, just before he gently blew his breath into mine. His hand tightened up on the back of my head, gently pulling at my hair as if he were fighting another internal battle. I took a ragged breath as he did so, and let it out, smoke filing from my mouth and brushing against both of our noses. Neither of us moved until yelling and screaming came from the place next door. I would have stood up as he leaned back against his seat, but I didn't trust myself to stand. I just took my hands off of his thighs and crossed them on mine, looking down all the while. Neither of us spoke for about ten minutes, until another cigarette found its way between his lips as the other one had disintegrated into ash by his feet. I needed to end the silence.

"So um, who else lives here with you?" I asked him, and he took drag before replying, counting the family on his fingers.

"My brother, Giovanni, and our mom." He said, letting the smoke drift out. "We're a pretty tight family. Vanni is usually off doing something this late though. I don't know where he is, don't know when he'll be back either." He said, the Italian nick name for Giovanni surprising me slightly. Most people would just call him Gio. I shrugged it off though.

"What do you mean? Like, partying or something?" I asked, and Alessandro nodded.

"Or playing soccer with his friends. He was the best in the high school league, and is actually accepted into a college for it, although they really didn't want to involve any of us in it." He said, looking down. I knew what

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he meant. I gently placed a hand on his, squeezing it lightly and making his eyes meet mine.

"I know I can't apologize for everyone of the white race, considering I'm not full myself," I laughed lightly, "But I can at least say that I'm sorry for the ones that I am related to." I held his hand for a brief moment. "I know they wouldn't care." He laughed lightly and shook his head, long black curls going this way and that as he cupped my face.

"Oh Bambina, you're too cute. Don't worry about it," He smiled, bright white teeth sparkling as he turned and smirked. "Vanni can take care of it." Suddenly the back gate opened, and we stared at it. Now, I'd never formally met Giovanni, nor had I ever taken a real look at him, but what I saw was startling. He must have been about six feet tall, one hundred and eighty-five pounds, and could probably bench about four of me, no problem. His hair was a long, but still just like a normal guys cut. He was loud and frivolous, and my eyes grew wide as they made contact with his. Good god, he was gorgeous, just as beautiful as his brother, and here I was, sitting there with both of them in the same place.

"Ah! Look what little Ale brought in! A piccola ragazza!" He laughed, his voice booming as he approached us.

"What the hell, Vanni?" Alessandro demanded, standing up and coming stepping in front of me, almost nose to nose with his older brother. He was about a few inches taller than Alessandro, who stood at about five nine, five ten, but like, they were still pretty close. "Keep it down before Mama wakes up!"

"Awe, does little Ale wanna keep his lady a secret?" Giovanni asked, and suddenly he snuck around his younger brother and ended up behind my seat, his face next to my ear. "And what might your name be? Is it la Belle?" He suddenly grabbed my hand and lifted it to his lips. My eyes went wide. Oh god. This guy was a romantic. My heart started racing.

"Uhâ ı Dâ ı Devin," I tried to say as I tripped over my words. Oh god, his accent was stronger than his brothers. "Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit!" I cried out in my mind. I looked at my hand in his, it was so much larger than my own. Everything about him seemed to be so much larger than me, and my face burned as his dark brown eyes looked in my hazel pair.

"Iâ ı I'm fine, honest," I said, pulling away from Alessandro, who was glaring hatefully at his older brother.

"What sort of night have you had, bella?" He asked me, and I turned to look at him. "Come, sit on papa's lap and tell me just what horrors have passed through you tonight," He winked, and patted his knee. My eyes grew wide as he did so, and his hand was suddenly upon mine, pulling me down so that my face was next to his. "Or what horrors you'd like to have upon you," His smile was devilish, and I swear he could hear my heart pounding, as it and his voice were the only two things I could hear at the moment.

"Leave her alone, Giovanni!" Alessandro growled, grabbing me by the waist and pulling me up against his rock hard body, and I realized, being with these two was just going to turn me into a human tug-a-war rope. "Come on, Bambina, let's get you upstairs!" He said through clenched teeth, trying to pull me back inside. Giovanni began to come closer, but Alessandro turned back and looked at him. "No! She doesn't want you in the room with her!"

"Why don't you let her decide, Alessa?" Giovanni replied, changing his brothers nickname for the time being. He smiled that devilish smile at me again, and my body felt like melting butter. Oh damn, this guy was good. "So what's it going to be, bella? Would you like some company in the bed tonight?" My eyes once again grew wide as I blushed a deep scarlet from head to toe.

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"Iâ ! uhâ ! uhmâ !" Hell, I couldn't talk straight, and damn me if I couldn't walk correctly either. But can anyone blame me? I had two Italian princes arguing over me, who wouldn't be like this in my position?

"Oh well," Gio sighed, "Buona notte, bella! Goodnight, beautiful!" He winked again and I nearly tripped as his brother pulled me inside the kitchen.

"He's drunk," Alessandro whispered in my ear. "Just ignore him. He's only doing this to piss me off. The cazzo." He hissed and I looked at him angrily.

"What? You're saying that a guy like him wouldn't just flirt with me? That he's got to be drunk and in the mood to tick off his brother to even talk to me?" I asked him, and he looked down at me seriously.

"He eats little girls like you for breakfast, Bambina, and right now, by the way you're acting, I can tell you wouldn't last very long being alone in a room with him." I was about to oppose, but he was right. I would just about die. I sighed and lifted a hand to my head, it was throbbing horribly.

"Ughâ ! my head hurts." I groaned, and he nodded.

"That's what usually happens when people first meet Giovanni." I laughed at his response and shoved him. "Uhmâ ! I've got some clothes you can sleep in, if you don't want to um, sleep in that," He said as we walked up the stairs and to his room. "Some clean shirts in the drawers and some sweats. I know they won't fit you but um, they'll work." Suddenly Alessandro was all red and embarrassed and shy. It was cute.

"I'm sure they'll be fine," I said, looking at his small room and turning back to him.

"Well um, if you need anything, I'll um, be downstairs, so um, good night." He said, and began to turn around to walk out. With a sudden burst of confidence I grabbed his arm to stop and turn him around.

"Alessandro!" I stood on my toes and kissed him softly on the cheek, smiling all the while. When I pulled away, his eyes were staring at me, wide with shock, and one large brown hand was clasped over where I'd just pecked him. "Thank you, again." I smiled, and he turned bright red.

"You're uh, welcomeâ !" He stuttered, "So good uhâ ! good night," He closed the door and I giggled before rummaging through his drawers for something clean to sleep in.

"Vanni, will you stop it?" Alessandro hissed, taking my wrist and pulling me out of the trance that I knew I was falling into, as every American girl would if she were to run into someone who was their type with an added bonus of an accent. I fell into his chest and looked up at Alessandro, a complete dreamy look in my eyes. "She's had a long night and doesn't need any of your crap right now!"

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