



## Girl Talk

Her head was throbbing. She groaned and pulled a pillow tight over her head and whimpered when her mother's voice ltered into her nightmare of a headache.

"Go away, Mom."

"Sorry, honey. I just wanted to make sure you're okay. Considering the state of you when Riggs dropped you off, I was a bit concerned for alcohol poisoning."

"There is a very real possibility I am poisoned." She tried to lift her head and then let it fall back down with the pillow blackening out the bright lights of the room. She forgot to shut her curtains the night before.

"Bobbie used to joke her therapist's name was Jack Daniels. I have a feeling you booked a hell of an appointment with him last night."

"We had fun until Man-w\*\*\*e Max showed up demanding we reminisce."

"It's been ten years."

"Twelve and with luck it'll be another twelve if there is a god in heaven to save me from myself." She wiped the tear in the corner of her eye. She was feeling far too vulnerable as her mother slipped under the blankets and snuggled with her in the bed. "God, why on earth of all the people in the world, my stupid childhood crush has to be the guy who poses on the cover of GQ holding a dildo and looking sexy as f\*\*k doing it?" She recalled Ollie telling her about his cover the night before and rolled her eyes.

Everly Hoffman giggled at her daughter's words. "I think it's saying a hell of a lot you're more upset about seeing Max last night than you are leaving Douglas the night before."

"Ugh," she whined and snuggled against her mom's shoulder. "I think part of it is why I'm so angry at Douglas. I took one look at Max and thought of the two girls who got into a stght in the cafeteria in senior year over who was going to get to blow him. What is wrong with monogamy? Why can't a man commit to one woman, and it be enough? Men like Max and Douglas are everywhere, Mom."

"You think they're the same?"

"Yea, I do." She inhaled sharply. "Seems like I have a type. Guys who can't keep it in their pants."

"I don't know. I think there is a significant difference between a guy who makes it clear to anyone he is with he will never commit to them and plays the old and a guy who is in a committed relationship and f\*\*s around."

"Mom, I'm far too hungover to have a philosophical discussion on whether it makes a difference to my heart whether one is worse than the other. She has no business falling for either a player or a cheater. Besides, you're biased."

"Because Max is my godson?"

"No because he is your supplier of all the nasty s\*x toys Fallon told me she stumbled upon."

She giggled as her mother tickled her ribs for her comment.

"Hey, is this a private party or can anyone join?" Fallon's voice carried out.

"We're bashing man whores," she lifted her head to look at her sister whose bright blue eyes were identical to hers and wiggled her ngers beckoning her to join them.

"I'm so in. I swear we were raised in an alternate universe or Dad, Olivier and Uncle Riggs are the last of a dying breed," Fallon jumped into the bed, landing on the other side of Lark, and yanking the blankets over her shoulder. "A guy yesterday in my chemistry lab come up to me to tell me I was his new lab partner because he was commanding it to be so. He introduced himself as 'the third' and I wanted to laugh in his face. Told me he could make all my college debt go away if I agreed to be his."

Everly lifted her head with disgust over Lark's head, "please tell me you told him to go screw himself."

"Better. I mixed some compounds and smoked him out of the lab."

"Where were the triplets?" Lark asked giggling.

"Ronnie was with his new girlfriend. Mori was probably banging a professor and LJ was likely videoing for her so they could extort him with it."

"Fallon!" Everly glared at her.

Fallon shrugged, "don't look at me, Mom. There is something inherently wrong with the Villeneuve genes. They're my best friends and we grew up together, but they're twisted as hell. Did you know Ronnie is constantly talking about how he has powers like his grandmother, and he can predict the future? It's bullshit. He simply makes crazy stuff happen to suit his outcome, but he has the other two convinced and even Margot is starting to believe them. I love them but they're insane. There is way too much of the Villeneuve Witch in their veins."

"A lot of Moreno blood too," Lark snorted. "Last night Ollie was channelling her grandfather far too well. I'm a hundred percent certain while we were in the car heading to the other club, she ordered a hit on a guy."

"A hit?" Everly sat up in horror.

"Yeah." Lark shrugged, "its par for the course for being besties with billionaires, especially ones who were personally groomed by Gael Moreno. He has mob connections, you know."

Everly shook her head in disbelief, "you are far too laid back about all this."

"I have nothing to be afraid of. My only fear last night was the hit may have been on Douglas. She wanted his balls on a plate."

"We all do. Bastard."

"I blocked his number. He started calling when I was on my way here from the airport yesterday. I blocked him on all my social media. He got a new phone and started with it."

"I wish I could have seen his face when he went to the condo to get his belongings to nd them gone."

"I put them in a storage unit."

"In the worst part of Houston you could nd," Fallon laughed loudly. "You know Mom this is why we're not surprised by any of the antics from next door. We're as bad as they are."

"Not quite." Lark sniffed, disdain coating their words. "I certainly wouldn't have bragged about double-digit s\*\*\*\*I escapades by twelfth grade. The Villeneuve boys are horn dogs."

Fallon nodded emphatically, "do you know LJ and Ronnie will walk into a party with one girl, disappear with another and leave with a third and maybe a fourth. I'm quite sure they share girls too."

"Have you ever crushed on them?" Lark turned to look at her sister.

"No way, girl. I feel like once you've seen two identical guys have pissing contests and end up pissing on each other at summer camp and nding it hilarious it removes all the romance from it. I'd rather screw around with Mori, and she is currently on a bathing strike."

"She's what?" Everly looked like she was going to vomit.

"She is refusing to use soap. She is on a kick about how soap is impacting ecology and human's need for cleanliness is the cause of pandemics. Mom, she won't even wash her hands coming out of the toilets."

Lark was revolted, "what about when she has s\*x?"

"Or m\*\*\*\*\*s?" Fallon nished with disgust. "I can't even. I love her but she's freaky."

"She's spent too much time in the bayou with her father, uncles and brothers." Everly ipped back into the bed.

"Why are all my girls being lazy on a Saturday morning?"

"Daddy!" Fallon leaped out of the bed and raced to kiss his cheek and then wrinkled her nose. "You're sweaty." She rubbed his bald head and looked at it. "Really sweaty."

"Hi Dad." Lark smiled at her father. "Did you have a good run?"

"Yup. Came in to check to see if you wanted to join me but you were snoring. I propped your head up, so you didn't choke on your tongue you were so out of it." He winked at her. "You also said Max's name."

"What?"

"I mean, it was a 'f\*\*k you Max' but you were denitely dreaming of him."

"Ran into him last night," She rolled out of the bed as her mother moved too. She couldn't help her smile as her mom gave her dad a sweet kiss. She'd bet her last dollar they'd be showering together. She loved how close they were.

"What did he want?"

"To know why his best friend is no longer his best friend. Says I owe him an explanation."

"You don't," Grady held her eyes seriously. "He told you he'd meet you on the roof and then didn't show up and you almost got raped and left for dead. I don't blame him for what happened but as far as reasons for discontinuing a friendship, his need to put his p\*\*\*\*s ahead of his friendships is a damn good one."

"He doesn't even know," Everly played devil's advocate. "He'd feel horrible if he did."

"Sure, he would but it doesn't mean he would have changed a thing, Mom," Lark argued. "He still would have f\*\*\*\*d the quarterback's girlfriend. He still would have not come to the roof to talk to me. I dodged a bullet by not confessing to him how I felt back then and there is no way I could continue to put my heart in the line of his re over and over again. My walking away from our friendship had nothing to do with my assault and everything to do with the fact I was wasting my feelings and heart on a man who didn't deserve it. The best way for me to get over it was to cut all ties."

"It's kind of sad," Fallon said with twisted lips. "All the brains in the world didn't let him see what was right in front of him and his own careless behavior made him lose the best thing ever. Even if he didn't love you back, all he needed to do was be a decent human being and you would have probably still been waiting on him. I'm with Lark. She dodged a bullet. At least the events of the prom put things into perspective for her."

"Can we change the topic now?" Lark sighed as her mother looked ready to argue. Sometimes her mom acted more lawyer-like than the lawyers in the family.

"Why don't you girls get ready for the day? We can have family day?" Grady questioned. "We can go for a hike and a picnic?"

"I'd like that." Lark nodded as her sister gleefully exclaimed her thanks for giving her an out from hanging with the triplets.

For the rst time in her entire life, she found herself wondering if being so interwoven with the Villeneuve clan was healthy for anyone in her family.