

El POV

Conner banged on her door and opened it before she could answer, stood staring at her "Breakfast." He'd muttered and turned and walked away. Expecting her to follow him, it seemed, took right after his father.

She walked behind him, he was wearing a pair of dark blue jeans and a white tee-shirt that was straining at all his muscles, he needed a bigger size, she thought absently as she followed him, he was carrying a backpack slung over one shoulder. He was going somewhere, she thought, probably to the gym, clearly worked out a lot.

He took the stairs, trotted all the way down without stopping ve full lights, didn't so much as look to see if she was keeping up with him or not. Saw him greet a few others and three fell into step with him. They all looked at her, "Eliza." He waved a hand in her general direction as he turned down the next set of stairs.

They all smiled at her "Hi." They all stated at once.

"Hi." She nodded, noted they too were dressed like he was and all carrying backpacks, "Where are you all off too?" she asked out of curiosity.

"The university." One of them answered her.

She frowned at them now, but shrugged it off, they must be taking extra classes. Who knew? It was the weirdest breakfast she'd ever eaten. Well, the food was delicious but the place to eat was like, odd. There were heaps of people down there, it was a massive dining room, from what she could tell. Her mother smiled right at her, no Logan, she noted as she looked around, "Logan had to take a phone call, sends his apologies for not being here for your rst real meal."

She doubted that, probably just didn't want to be around her. Her mother walked her along a massive buffet and told her to have whatever she liked. She took poached eggs on Turkish bread with a side of bacon and a cup of coffee. Though saw many others heaping massive amounts of food on their plates.

She sat down and ate and looked around. Everyone here seemed to work out and even some of the women and girls she noted were just wearing gym clothes had denied abs, felt a little on the abby side compared to them. Wasn't at all what she would call fat. She had what she thought was a nice body, always got complement on her curves. But she was not super thin or ripped like those girls.

"You'll get used to it, they all eat like this around here." Her mother chuckled, "Took me some getting used to as well." Looked at her mother's plate, it wasn't piled high like the others, but it was more than what she would normally eat.

Though that wasn't the oddest thing about breakfast, it was when Logan actually walked into the room, the whole place went almost dead quiet. Then he stated, "Everyone, I'd like you to welcome Eliza, Brittney's daughter." Waved a hand at her and she found near on everyone's eyes on her, "She'll be staying with us for the foreseeable future, make her feel welcome."

Foreseeable future? That was not what she wanted, though she did not say that out loud, thought better of it. She just raised a hand in greeting when it seemed she must do something. Then everyone just went back to eating. How could one man just make a whole room stop talking when he walked in? Shook it off.

The day was spent walking around with her mother. She'd seen Conner and his friends all get into a Lexus four-wheel drive just as ashy as his father's and leave, to go to uni, she supposed.

Watched as everyone smiled and talked to her mother, called her by her name. Everyone seemed to know who she was. Asked her how they all knew who she was, got looked at. "I told you it was a really close-knit community, everyone knows everyone."

She was driven down to the lake, it was nice, and her mother asked her not to wander about of a night-time. There were some wild animals that lived in the woods around here, wolves mostly. She'd just nodded, didn't really have a problem with that, liked being outdoors, had seen wolves in the wild before with her father. Knew better than to mess around.

The lake was really nice, it was the rst place she could see herself coming and sitting, swimming even, though she was still going to try and get herself off to Italy. Still didn't understand why she suddenly couldn't go.

Brought that up with her mother as they walked back from the mall, only to be told Logan said "it's too far away, too dangerous for a young girl to be going to study abroad". It was a crock. "Then can I have my college funds back. Some of that money is actually mine, it wasn't all dads, and you just gave it away without my permission."

"El, Logan is going to put it to good use, you will get an allowance we've already discussed it, just need for your new credit cards to arrive is all."

"Is all. That money was mine and now it's just his. Did you give him dad's house too?"

"El."

"No, did you? Did you just give him everything you and dad owned?"

"He's very good with money, what we owned was a pittance to him."

"Oh my god, you did. Didn't you?" She gasped. Couldn't believe it, her mother had just given him everything. How stupid was she? If this marriage of hers didn't work out, she would have nothing at all. Would be broke and destitute, have nowhere to go even.

"El, our life is here now, we don't need any of that stuff anymore."

"If he sells dad's car, or gets rid of it. I'll key every car he's got." El muttered a little angry now.

"Eliza." Her mother gasped "You will do no such thing."

"I swear I will." She snapped "That is my car and I have a right to something that was my father's. Just because you have forgotten about him doesn't mean that I have." She yelled at her mother and stalked off up the path. The woman was not her mother, did still act like it sometimes but had completely lost her mind to this man.

She found her own way back to the apartment building and headed to her room. She had nothing left but what was in this room. She realised this was it. Her whole life in three suitcases, and one of them had been books. Sank down on the couch and pulled her laptop out, saw the Wi-Fi pop up and connected to it, expected there to be some sort of password but there wasn't. A bonus she guessed as she logged in and looked through her emails, found that letter of acceptance of her withdrawal from her university of Bologna, Italy, in there and nearly cried as she read it.

Logan had actually cancelled her admission, was actually going to force her to stay here in this place. A part of her had thought her mother had been joking, but there it was in black and white. Now what was she supposed to do with herself? She'd worked damned hard to get that acceptance, had even managed to get on campus living.

Called Cordi and told her. Cordi couldn't believe it either. She told her "Girl, you are 18, just get on a bus and come back here, what can they do really?"

"I don't know, it's really weird out here, and I told them I didn't want to come. You know I was put in the car and made to come. What if that man just sends someone to get me?" and she wouldn't put it past him.

"Do you feel safe, El?"

Thought about that, really thought about that. Nothing bad had happened, she didn't feel unsafe. She just didn't like it here. "I guess so." She sighed.

"You got your own place, you said?"

"I did, so far away from mother it's like he's trying to keep us apart. Doesn't want me anywhere near him or her. I don't like him."

"Sounds like a right ass."

"He is." She muttered.

"I could drive out there with a few of the girls and we could hang out. We're all on summer vacation."

"It's a gated community, I'd have to ask permission."

"Then go and ask. Surely your stepdad doesn't expect you to just give up your entire life in the blink of an eye."

"He does, mum gave him everything, signed it all over to him. There's nothing left."

"What is she crazy?"

"I think she is Cordi. Or perhaps this whole place is a bloody cult and she got sucked into it, sucked in by him. It's really weird here."

"Go and ask, we'll come. We might be able to get you out."

El didn't even know where anything was, or how to nd her so-called stepfather. She walked around on the ground oor looking at things. This place had everything and there were teens all over the place, though most just stared at her and then turned away. "Welcome my ass." She thought, these people, they didn't like newcomers, that was for sure.

Ended up calling her mother to nd out where she was, in Logan's oce, she was told. "And where is that?" El had to ask. She'd been told never to go in there, but not where it was.

Heard her mother chuckle "Oh, sweetie it's on the ground oor. I'll meet you by the entrance."

She headed there and found both her mother and Logan standing waiting on her. He was frowning at her, what a shocker, only seemed to smile at her mother, likely happy he'd sucked her into giving him everything she owned.

"Eliza, I hear you have some concerns about my managing your mother's funds."

"I have concerns that she gave you my money and now I have nothing." She muttered.

"If you want that back, I will write you a check."

"I'd rather you do a bank transfer right now. I'm not going to be reliant on you."

Saw his frown deepen even further. "You are now part of this family, and I have organised for you to have access to unlimited funds, young lady. It will take a day or two for the cards to get here, is all."

"My father's car?"

"On its way, I did not sell it." he snapped at her. She could see he was angry. Obviously her mother had relayed their conversation to him. Didn't like being questioned at all. Used to people doing as he told them to. "Give me your bank details, I'll send it through right now. How much of that money was yours?"

"All of it. It was my college fund. For me to go and study abroad."

"Well, you can study here now."

"I don't want to. I want."

"Enough Eliza. What you want and what will happen are going to be two very different things from now on. My world is very different to yours, a period of adjustment will be required for you to be here."

Stared up at him, "Then let me leave and go back to California. I can stay with Cordi, seeing as mother has signed everything over to you and I no longer have a home to go to."

Saw his anger now, watched him take a breath and try to calm himself even, "Like I said, a period of adjustment is going to be needed. I run things a bit differently from what you are used to. This attitude of yours needs to stop. Your mother and I are married now. You need to give it a chance here."

"I didn't even want to come here, you should have left me back there to go overseas to study, then you wouldn't be getting my attitude now, would you?" She shot right back.

"I will go and write you a check before I lose my temper, and trust me Eliza, you don't want to see that." Watched him stalk off and bang into a room.

"El, please just give it a few days?"

"How long is a few days to you? You got sucked into a cult and now I'm bloody stuck here. You should have left me out of it."

She saw her mother's eyes go wide at the word cult, "Honey it's not that."

"Then what the hell else do you call it, marrying a stranger and giving him everything we own and now living here, I'm not allowed to have what I want. He just told me that. What you want and what will happen are two different things." She repeated Logan's words back to her mother.

"Please, it was an adjustment for me too. Please just give it the summer. If you don't want to be here after that, I'll nd you a nice place on campus at uni."

"Oh really, at the university of where? I just got the acceptance of my withdrawal from my university. Logan cannot I remember."

Saw her mother sighing, "El, he just thinks you should study here is all, not be so far away."

"Why, so I can be sucked into this cult like you got?"

"Enough." It was Logan and he was angry. She could not only hear it but feel it as well.

Turned and looked at him and took a step back away from him as he approached her, backed right up when he stalked towards her, heard her mother call him. She found his hand on her wrist in a vice-like grip, pulling her to a standstill, stopping her from backing away from him. "Your money Eliza, go bloody cash it, see for yourself that I'm not after your mother's money." Shoved a check into her hand and thrust her hand away, took her mother by the arm and snapped "My oce."

Looked down at her wrist when the door banged shut with her mother and Logan on the other side of it, a full reddened handprint around her wrist. It was going to bruise and she knew it, still hurt even though he wasn't touching her anymore. Moved her eyes to the cheque. It matched the amount in her college fund.

Turned and walked out of the apartment building. She'd not seen a bank here to cash it, walked away down into the small town, asked someone if there was a bank here to cash a cheque. The woman had shaken her head and said "no, you'd have to go into Logan, for that."

"I just got a cheque from Logan." She'd frown.

"Not Logan Greystone, the city of Logan. It's about 40 minutes by car from here."

"Oh, thank you." She'd nodded to the woman.

Sighed there had to be a bus or something, looked at her watch it was only just on 2pm headed down the main road they'd come in on. The man at the gate looked right at her, "Can I help you?"

"Yes, you can let me out."

"May I ask why?" He enquired.

"Because I want to go out."

"You need a car to get anywhere from here, Eliza is it?"

"It is. My car has not arrived yet. So, I'll take the bus. I'm sure there is one."

"Does Logan know you're going out?"

Glared right at that man, "Why do I need his permission to leave?" she snapped.

"It is the rule for newcomers," he stated.

"So, I am locked in." she muttered and turned and walked away. Pulled out her phone and called Cordi as she stalked away, "I can't leave, the gate guard won't let me. Newcomers need permission."

"That's not good, El."

"You're telling me." She muttered. "I don't know what to do Cordi." She stopped walking up the road a piece and sank down on the ground, leaned back on a tree and sighed "How the hell did my mother get sucked into this s*t?"

"I don't know El. What do you want me to do? If you can't get out. I don't think they're going to let us in."

"Agreed." She muttered. "Might have to just try and sneak out during the night. I'm not bloody staying here, Cordi."

"Well, if you get out let me know where you are, I'll come get you."

"Thanks." She clicked the line closed and looked about her, it was very mountainous here, an hour's drive from here to Logan. Googled how long it would take her to walk from her current position to Logan. And groaned showed a good 10 hour walk and at night in an area she didn't know. Perhaps she should just ask for a car to go into Logan to cash that cheque. If it didn't bounce, that was.

Got herself up. She rst needed to find a way to get out of this gated community, headed off into the woods behind her, nd a man strolling around, looked right at her as she tried to walk past him, and he stopped her. "Can I help you?"

"No, I'm just walking." She commented and went to move past him, only to be stopped again.

"I'm sorry, this is the border of the community, it's best you turn back, miss."

She looked around her, there was no fence here, she was on the border, hadn't even known she was near it. Just presumed gated meant fully surrounded by a fence. This was good news to her, that meant she could sneak out during the night. Though she wasn't going to be able to take much with her, she had come with suitcases, not backpacks.

"Thank you, I didn't know that." She smiled at him friendly like and turned and walked back the way she came. Spent the afternoon wandering in the woods, got turned back several times in several different places, just laughed a little each time and said oops sorry I didn't realise. It was dark by the time she got back to the apartment complex, and she found a dozen people standing around. They all turned and looked right at her.

Saw both Logan and Conner standing amongst them. "Where have you been?" Logan asked her.

"Exploring, or aren't I allowed to wander about?" she asked, already knew she wasn't allowed to leave. Had been told so. He'd cut her that cheque, but she at this point had no way of actually leaving to go and cash it. He knew that when he'd given it to her. Likely why he'd written in the rst place, wasn't actually concerned about her cashing it because she couldn't.

"Of course, you are, but after dark there are many dangerous animals about, we were just going to send a search party for you."

"Don't bother. I like the woods and being out in them in the night doesn't scare me. My father always took me camping and hiking. Could take us two days on a trail to get to a good campsite." She walked passed them all.

"Eliza, I don't want you walking about in the woods at night."

"Just like you don't want me leaving either." She muttered softly to herself, going through the door into the apartment complex. It had been a long day and she was tired and hungry.

"Oh Logan, I'd like a lock on my door. It doesn't seem to have one." She turned and looked right at him.

Saw him blink a little surprised by her request, she thought.

"Alright, I don't think it's necessary, but if you want one."

"I do." She stated atly "Would feel safer having one." Then turned and walked away. Was going to need one at some point, she thought. She'd heard enough about cults to know young girls weren't always safe inside them.

"You're completely safe here Eliza." He called out after her.

"I doubt that." She murmured to herself as she headed up the stairs. How could a place you're not allowed to leave make you feel safe? Thrudded up the ve lights of stairs and down to her room, found a man putting a lock on her door already. That was quick, she thought.

He smiled and nodded to her. "It'll be a key card entry like a hotel miss."

"Alright." She nodded. It took him only an hour to set it up and show her how it worked. Didn't even make a noise, just tapped the card on the panel and the door simply unlocked for her to push open. She thanked him and he was gone a few minutes later after packing up.