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I don't use the word hate often. My mother always quoted William Penn when I was a girl. "Dislike what deserves it, but never hate: for that is of the nature of malice, which is almost ever to persons, not things, and is one of the blackest qualities sin begets in the soul."

I kept repeating that quote, hearing her sweet and comforting voice as I was pushed against my lock and called all manner of vile things by Jane and her friends.

I repeated it as I rushed to homeroom, and I used all my willpower not to look at or respond to Darius. I only just met them. If I gave them what they wanted, if I stayed away from them, they'd leave me alone.

It shouldn't be hard, right? It should be easy. Then why did it hurt so much when I told Darius to leave me alone, for all of them to leave me alone?

I found myself shutting myself in a bathroom stall. "Fuck!" I yelled in frustration. I leaned my head back against the booth, closing my eyes, trying to hold back the tears—the sad look on Darius' face when I told him to leave me alone. I didn't want to say it, but I had to. Grace had been peeking in the classroom, and I didn't want more trouble.

All I had wanted was to go unnoticed and finish my senior year without issue. And maybe I could salvage that if I stayed away from the brothers. I could do this. Right?

I've gone this long without a guy in my life. I don't need that to change, let alone triple. Who cares if each of them makes my stomach do flips, my heart skip beats, and my

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knees go weak?

"Riko? You okay?" Cassidy questioned, knocking at the stall door. I took a deep breath, trying to regain my composure. "Y... yes, I'm okay," I sighed, stepping out. Cassidy was frowning, holding a tissue out.

"You don't look it. Come on. I've got some makeup on my bag. It can help you look a bit more together," she said with a small smile. I sighed, letting her pull me to the sink, lightly dabbing my eyes.

"I don't wear makeup," I shook my head. I never got into makeup. It was probably because mom was gone before I was old enough to be interested in it. Dad had enough trouble explaining menstruation and sex.

I don't think he'd have been of help talking makeup. "I know. And unlike you, with your gorgeous natural looks, mere mortals such as I need it," she smiled, getting out a small bag from her bookbag.

I rolled my eyes. "You don't need makeup. You're beautiful," I instituted. And Cassidy is with her fair skin with cute freckles across the bridge of her rounded nose, bright emerald green eyes, heart-shaped lips, and thick fiery red curls.

"Yeah, well, I'm sure my mom would love to hear that. I don't like my super Irish looks," she sighed. "Now close your eyes, and I'll make this quick, so we don't miss too much of our 2nd-period classes," she smiled. I sighed and complied.

A couple of minutes later, she was finished. "There. All set," she smiled. I blinked at my reflection in the mirror. The makeup had done its job. My eyes didn't look as

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puffy, and the slight bruise on my cheek where it had connected with the locker was invisible.

"Thanks, Cassidy," I sighed, shouldering my back. "Here, use these," she said, offering me some eye drops. "Why do you carry this?" I asked but did put some drops in my eyes.

"I wear contacts, and they sometimes irritate; this helps with the redness. I figure we should make it look less like you were crying in the girls' room," she smiled.

After giving it back, we left the bathroom. Cassidy went to her class, and I went to mine. I at least didn't have to face any of the Frosts or one of Jane's cohorts in this class. Milly will be in my next class, but so will Cassidy. I can do this.

I can get through today. Like dad said after mom died, the first day is the hardest, and if you can get past it, you can get past all those to follow.

If it was good enough for him to keep going after losing the love of his life, it is certainly good enough for me to get through my senior year without the triplets.

They are strangers to me. There's nothing between us. Or at least that was what I kept telling myself. I focused on class and kept my head down as I went to art. Of course, I didn't make it to Art.

As I passed an open door, someone grabbed my arm and tugged me inside, closing the door. I blinked as I found myself face to face with all three of the brothers. Crap!

"I... I told you to leave me alone," I managed to speak, backing hoping to reach the door. This wasn't going to work. One had moved before I could, and instead of

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reaching for the handle of the door, my hand found a muscular thigh.

"Move your hand an inch to the right, and it won't be my leg you're touching, sweetheart," Darius's deep voice whispered in my ear. I felt flush at the thought of how close he was to me, of how close to touching him there I was.

Damn it, why did they have to have this effect on me? "I need to get to class," I said, pulling my hand away from Darius's leg. "So, skip," Forrest shrugged like it was no big deal. I knew it was Forrest by the carefree posture.

"I can't skip class. Plus, it's art class. Which happens to be my favorite," I frowned. "You realize we wouldn't have to pull you into empty classrooms if you just answered our texts," Elijah spoke up, taking a step closer to me.

Damn them. All three boys were surrounding me. I should feel afraid. Right? That would be a normal reaction for a girl surrounded by three guys. My heart was beating wildly but not from fear. I couldn't see Darius's face, but I can bet it mirrors his brothers.

They all had the same expression of worry. They wouldn't hurt me. My heart was beating faster because of what I wanted them to do to me, what I hoped they would do. And that is so not like me. 1

"I... I haven't looked at it. I'm at school," I answered. They all laughed, and given how close Darius was behind me, I felt his broad chest shake. "You are too pure for this world, beautiful," Forrest smirked.

"Whatever, can I just go now?" I huffed. I need to get out of this Frost triangle they had me trapped in. "We know

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what happened at your locker," Darius stated, making me gulp.

"Rowana caves very easily under pressure," Elijah shrugged. "That and she'd give her right arm to bang us, let alone get in our good graces," Forrest snorted. 2

I frowned and narrowed my eyes at Forrest talking about Rowana. "Ohh, if you had a Sharing an, I'd be in some painful jiu-jitsu," Forrest chuckled, gently lifting my chin, so I had to look at him. 3

"Jealousy doesn't suit you. Besides, you're the one that has our attention," he smirked, rubbing his thumb across my lips.

I sucked in a breath as his touch sent sparks through my body. I was reasonably sure if not for sheer willpower, my knees would have given out.

Before I could respond or any of them do something to make me give in to the temptation they embodied, there was a loud knock at the door.

"Whoever is in there you, get out now. I'll have none of your teenage hormone hijinks," an agitated voice shouted. Forrest sighed and stepped back, and I felt the loss of his touch. The brothers all moved, and I was given breathing room.

Darius opened the door to whoever was on the other side. "We were just leaving. Come on, brothers. We don't want Riko to miss her favorite class," Darius said, shouldering his bag and heading out first.

"Can't blame her art is the best class in this place," Forrest grinned, taking my hand to have me following behind him. I wanted to protest, but the warmth and strength of his

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hand felt too good to argue.

I blushed a little under the gaze of the custodian who was eyeing us as we walked out. Elijah was shutting the door behind him as he left last.

They walked me to art, and I blushed as the whole class watched. I don't like this being the center of attention, especially when three guys are involved. It's not normal.

"See you in study hall, cupcake," Elijah said, giving me a quick kiss on the cheek that made me turn as red as my tie. "Ignore what other people say, alright. We've got your back," Forrest winked.

"If someone messes with you, text us, okay. Don't let them push you around again," Darius said more sternly before they left.



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