

Chapter 4 No.4

Walking into my next class, I actually had to bite my tongue to stop a curse word from escaping.

There, sitting near the back, were the twins and Fiona. I wasn't a person who swore often, but the universe seemed to be testing my limits.

Just as I felt frustrated, I spotted a familiar head of red hair. Betty was in this class too!

A wave of relief so strong it was almost physical washed over me. I practically scurried to the empty seat beside her, feeling like her presence was a protective shield.

"Well, look who it is." Aldric's voice, smooth and lightly amused, came from behind us. "Fancy meeting you again so soon."

"Ugh, I can't believe my luck today," Fiona announced loudly, her voice dripping with disdain. "Running into someone I can't stand. And more than once. It's so annoying. Aldric, let's just ditch. This is boring anyway."

Caius chimed in before Aldric could answer. "And miss out on all this fascinating knowledge?" he said, his tone theatrically scandalized. "No way. I'm trying to be a good student now. Gotta follow someone's example and become a dedicated scholar."

Fiona stared at him, her mouth slightly agape as if he'd just suggested they fly to the moon. My cheeks burned. I knew exactly who he was talking about.

Suddenly, Fiona leaned over my desk, looming above me as if I were something she'd found on the bottom of her shoe. Her eyes, sharp and critical, scanned my face. Then, she froze, her gaze locking onto mine. A cruel, delighted smile spread across her lips.

"Oh my god, Aldric, look!" she exclaimed, grabbing his arm and pointing right at my face. "Her eyes! They're two different colors! She's a total freak!"

I clenched my fists under the desk, my nails digging into my palms. I thought to myself, "Don't let it get to you. Don't let it get to you."

But the word "freak" echoed in my ears, hitting a wound that had never fully healed.

"That's enough, Fiona." Betty's voice was firm beside me. She turned to face them, her expression defiant. "I think her eyes are beautiful. It makes her special. Something you wouldn't understand."

A warmth spread through my chest, battling the chill of Fiona's words.

Fiona rolled her eyes so hard I thought they might get stuck. "Special? She's-"

"Shut up." Aldric's voice cut her off, quiet but firm. It wasn't loud, but it carried a finality that silenced her.

The three of them had taken the seats directly behind Betty and me. I could feel their presence like a physical weight, the heat of their stares burning into my back. I stared straight ahead, too nervous to turn around.

Were the hostile glares from Fiona? Or the curious, intense ones from the twins?

About halfway through the lesson, I heard a soft clatter on the floor behind me. A moment later, I felt a touch on my back.

I flinched. It was a hand-large and warm. Its fingers trailed slowly down the length of my spine, following the curve from my shoulder blades down a few inches. It was a deliberate, intimate caress, and a jolt of electricity shot through my entire body, leaving a tingling trail in its wake.

My heart hammering, I spun around in my seat.

My eyes immediately met Aldric's. His expression was calm, almost neutral, but his gaze was so intense it felt like a physical force. My heart skipped a beat, stumbling over itself.

"My pen," he said, his voice low, meant only for me. He gestured to the floor near my feet. "It rolled. Would you help me pick it up?"

I nodded, my movements jerky and flustered. I bent down, my hair falling around my face as I quickly retrieved the pen. I handed it back to him, and our fingers brushed.

Instead of taking it, he closed his hand around mine, holding it for a moment too long. His skin was warm, his grip firm.

"Thank you," he said, his dark eyes locked on mine, seeming to see right through my unease.

"You're... you're welcome," I stammered, feeling utterly captivated.

"Is there a problem back there?" the teacher called out, snapping me back to reality.

I opened my mouth to stammer an apology, but Aldric was faster. "Just dropped my pen, sir. Everything's fine."

The teacher nodded. "Alright. Let's all try to focus, then."

I turned back to my textbook, my face flaming. I tried to concentrate on the words in front of me, but they swam on the page, meaningless.

All I could feel was the ghost of his touch on my back and the warmth of his hand around mine. The rest of the lecture was a complete loss.

The bell for lunch finally rang, a sound of sweet liberation. I met Betty in the bustling cafeteria, and we found a relatively quiet corner with our trays. The familiar, greasy smell of school food was somehow comforting after the morning's turmoil.

Betty leaned across the table, her red hair creating a fiery curtain around us. "Okay, spill," she said, her voice a hushed, excited whisper. "What is going on with you and the twins? I saw them talking to you. It's like they've locked onto you. How did you manage to get on their radar on your first day?"

I pushed my limp salad around with my fork, sighing. "I didn't do anything," I insisted, my voice heavy with frustration. "Honestly. It was just... a stupid accident. A few hours ago, I wasn't looking where I was going and I almost fell down the stairs. Aldric caught me. That's it. That's the whole story." I looked up at her, feeling utterly helpless. "I don't know why they've decided to make me their new source of entertainment. It's like I'm a toy they've found and they just can't stop poking at me."

The memory of Aldric's hand on my back, the intense look in his eyes, sent an unwelcome shiver down my spine. I quickly pushed it away.

"Is there... is there anyone I can report this to?" I asked, a sliver of desperate hope in my voice. "The principal, maybe? If an authority figure talks to them, maybe they'll back off. I just want a normal school life, Betty. I don't need this... this complication."

Betty gave me a sympathetic, yet awkward smile. She glanced around before leaning in even closer. "Sylvia, no. That's a really bad idea." She lowered her voice to a near-whisper. "The twins... they own this town, basically. Their parents are ridiculously wealthy. They're the biggest



donors to the school. The principal doesn't discipline them; he thanks them. If you complained, it wouldn't be them who got in trouble. It would be you. They're untouchable."

A small, defeated sound escaped my lips. I slumped back in my chair, the plastic seat creaking under my weight. "You've got to be kidding me," I mumbled, staring at my unappetizing food. "How is this my life?"

The reality settled over me, cold and heavy. There was no fighting this. There was no authority to appeal to. I was completely on my own against them.

"Look," Betty said, her tone softening. "Just keep your head down. They'll probably get bored soon and move on to someone else."

I nodded slowly, but inside, a different plan was solidifying. I didn't need to fight them. I just needed to endure them. This town, this school, the twins-it was all temporary.

I just had to make it until I was eighteen. Then I would leave. I would leave this town and all its drama behind for good.



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