

Every Girl Needs Stuff

By the time I climb the last winding step to my attic dorm, my legs feel like lead and my head like it's full of smoke. I shove the door open, letting it creak wide, and trudge inside. The silence is a warm welcome. No voices. No laughter. No hungry stares or cocky grins. Just small bits of dust swirling in the late sunlight streaming through the stained-glass window. I drop my bag with a heavy thud and flop onto the bed, the old mattress groaning under my weight. The springs dig into my back, but I don't care. For the first time all day, no one is watching me. No one is testing me. I press the heels of my hands into my eyes, willing the tension away. The scars. The whispers. The laughter. Every moment replays like I can't shut it off. I groan, rolling onto my side and tugging the pillow over my face. "Welcome to Thornhill Academy," I mutter. "Try not to lose your mind before day two." The silence answers back. For a fleeting moment, I let myself pretend this attic can be something else. It could be mine, be safe and hidden. Maybe with a bit of love and lot of ignoring the smell, I can carve out a corner of peace. My scars still burn, my lip throbs, and my pride is scraped raw, but somehow... I am still standing.

A knock rattles against my door, soft at first, then more insistent. My head pops up from the pillow, frowning. No one should even know I'm up here. Cautiously, I pad across the attic and crack the door open, only for Tessa to burst inside like a whirlwind. "You never said you were in the boys' dorm!" she squeaks, her strawberry-blonde braid bouncing as she spins in a full circle. Her eyes go wide as she takes in the room. "Oh my god." I blink, still holding the doorknob. "What?"

"This is amazing!" she exclaims, arms flinging wide. I stare at her like she's just declared the mildew smell was perfume. "Really?" Tessa stops mid-spin, planting her hands on her hips as if I'm the ridiculous one. "Are you kidding? This is like fifty, no, maybe eighty times the size of my room!" She darts across the floor, peeking behind the old wardrobe, then up at the stained-glass window. "Sure, it could use some... stuff, but this has so much potential!" I let the door swing shut and lean against it, deadpan. "Potential for what, ghosts?" She ignores me completely, skipping over to the far wall where the dust has thinned from the spell I used earlier. "No, seriously, Allison. With a little magic, this could be incredible. Big enough for a sitting area, bookshelves, maybe even a proper bed..." Her enthusiasm makes my head spin. I flop back onto the creaking mattress, groaning. "Or I could just leave it as is and use the smell to scare people off." Tessa rolls her eyes and plops down beside me, grinning ear to ear. "You're impossible, but lucky. Trust me, half the girls in my dorm would trade places with you in a heartbeat." I stare up at the ceiling beams, the faint cracks letting in stripes of fading light. Maybe she's right. Perhaps this place isn't just a dust-ridden punishment.

"Wait. How did you even find me up here?" Tessa beams like it's the easiest thing in the world. "I just went and asked at the office. The ladies there are always nice to me." She waves her hand dismissively, already scanning the room again. "Okay, so... we need school supplies, obviously and a lot of stuff to make this place nice and cozy!" Her nose wrinkles suddenly. "But... wait. There's no bathroom up here?" I frown, glancing around the wide, dusty attic. My stomach drops. "...Shit." Tessa's brows shoot up as I groan loud enough to make the rafters creak. "Shit is right," I mutter. "That means I'd have to use the communal one downstairs... With

the boys and there is no fucking way I'm doing that." She taps her chin, then brightens. "Oh! I've got it. There's a shop in town, Finnegan's Furnishings, that sells these little renovation boxes. Magic ones. You just open it in your space, and it builds whatever you bought. We could get you a bathroom in, like, an afternoon!" I sit up properly, arms crossing. "Tessa. You do realise I was living in the scrub lands not by choice, right? I'm broke. Like broke, broke." She stills, biting her lip. "What about your parents? Maybe they left you something?" I shrug, quick and sharp. "Don't know them. Never knew them." Her expression softens, but she doesn't push. Instead, her mind spins on some new idea, her braid swinging as she leans forward. "Then we'll just stop by the bank first. They can test your blood against the registry. If your family left anything behind, money, property, anything, it'll show up." She grins. "Maybe you're heir to some big vault of treasure and don't even know it." I snort. "Or maybe I'm exactly what I look like. A stray." Tessa just smiles stubbornly. "We'll see."

Before I can talk myself out of it, Tessa has me out of the attic, down the winding stairs, and into her 'ride.' I stare at the dented, paint-chipped minivan as it coughs and wheezes to life. The passenger seat is patched with duct tape, the dash rattles every time she touches the brakes, and the air inside smells faintly of carrots. "My parents could only afford to give me this," she admits with a sheepish smile, patting the cracked steering wheel as if it might crumble under her touch. "So, yeah. She's not much, but she gets me around." I turn to her, dead serious. "You're lucky, Tessa. Even if it looks like it might fall apart any second, it's still something. You've got something." Her cheeks pink, her grin softening. "Thanks, Allison." The van sputters down the road, and before long, the spires of the Academy give way to the bustle of town. Shops line the cobblestone streets, magical

lanterns glowing over doorways, students darting between them with bags swinging from their shoulders. We park by a crooked signpost and climb out. The air smells of roasted nuts and ink, and voices rise from vendors calling out their wares. The building we're going to towers over the rest of the street, its walls gleaming white stone inlaid with veins of gold that shimmer faintly under the sun. The massive double doors are carved with swirling patterns that seem to shift if you stare too long. Above them, in curling, enchanted script, is the name: The Gilded Ledger. I swallow, my stomach knotting. Of course, even the bank has to look like something out of a storybook. Tessa's braid bounces as she tugs me forward. "Come on. Let's see if fate left you anything."



1

Comment



Error Collection



Share Chapter