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“So this is what closure feels like,” Digby says.

We’re standing on the grassy patch where his little sister, Sally, was buried nine years ago.

“Closure sucks,” Digby says. “Now what?”

He isn’t asking for suggestions. He is telling me something I already know. The search for the truth about what happened to his sister after her kidnapping had been the basis of so many of our arguments, so much of the hurt we’d dealt other people, all the times we’d broken the law, all the times we’d broken our bodies. I’d gone along because . . . *Digby*. He needed to find Sally. But now, for the first time in a long time, Digby doesn’t have an angle to play. He doesn’t have his next move planned.

“What did I expect, right? It’s like they say. The truth is almost always disappointing.” Digby turns to me. “But . . . now what? Other than me, talking in clichés.”

I watch him wrestle with his paralysis and I think about how

different my priorities have become since I met Digby eight months ago. I'd first arrived in River Heights wanting nothing more than to make some friends and have some normal high school fun.

And I did that. I made friends. I even had a boyfriend. But I blew all that up because . . . *Digby*. And now, with a trail of bad blood and narrowly avoided felony charges behind me, I perversely find myself dreading the end of the crazy.

Because it really does look like it is game over. Sally Digby is dead.

I know it's selfish to wonder, but what does this mean for Digby and me? As a wise woman once said, relationships that start under intense circumstances never last.

"This isn't the time to think about what's next," I say, putting the shovel back in his hand. "Now we keep digging."

We are about to get going again when a pair of flashlight beams comes out of the main house's back door and bobs toward us.

"Do we run?" I say. The anguish on Digby's face makes me wonder if he can survive a late-in-the-game plot twist.

But, as usual, I'm starting at the end.

So here it is. One last time, from the top. Meaning, we have to go back to the night of Kyle Mesmer's lake house party.

ONE

My awareness that Digby and I had been standing on the gravel road at Kyle's house kissing for a long time came only from my feet turning into burning balls of agony. I wasn't used to being jacked up on the five-inch heels of Sloane's loaner boots. I tried shifting my weight, but the gravel and rocks under my feet gave way and all of a sudden, I was falling backward.

Only I wasn't falling. Without breaking away from kissing me, Digby had scooped me up and was carrying me to the grassy field off the path we'd been standing on. When he set me down on the ground, I lay back and pulled him on top of me. I hated to compare, but I thought back to the times when I had to stop and ask my recently ex-ed boyfriend Austin to move this and move that so I could breathe. Digby knew just how to rest his weight mostly on his knees and elbows so I was exactly the right kind of breathless under him.

"Ready to have your world rocked?" Digby said. In one

smooth move, he sat up, and then unzipped and pulled off my boot.

I'd started to laugh but the sensation of my liberated toes unfurling was so fricking sublime, I straight-up moaned. I even writhed a little bit. After Digby peeled off my other boot, I pulled him back down on top of me.

I felt his hand creep up my hip and linger on the bare skin of my midriff. It took me a minute to realize he couldn't get any farther than that because the leather clothes I'd borrowed from Sloane were so binding.

"Forget about abstinence education. Let's just start putting people in these sexbot outfits. Teen pregnancy rates would fall through the floor. Nothing's getting past this." Digby flicked his finger against my tight leather second skin. "And why are none of the zippers and buttons anywhere you'd think they'd be . . ."

Wardrobe malfunction or not, this was our champagne-popping moment. Just earlier that day we'd helped Henry get his football coach arrested for distributing steroids to some of the players. Austin had just dumped me to be with my (supposed) friend Allie and while that sounds awful, it was actually a blessed end to two weeks of agonizing over secretly wanting to be with Digby when I was officially still with Austin. Now that I was kissing Digby, it felt crazy that I'd ever considered being with anyone else.

And then, most importantly, Digby had just gotten our local

oligarch and parody of an evil villain, Hans de Groot, to admit he'd kidnapped Digby's sister, Sally. Even better, Digby had gotten him to promise to reveal what had ultimately happened to Sally—in exchange for what de Groot had kidnapped Sally to get nine years ago: Digby's mother's bionanotechnology research.

And with that thought came the memory of something Digby had said to de Groot. I pushed Digby off. "Wait a minute."

"What? Too much?" he said. "Sorry . . ."

"You said you'd trade your mom's research for the truth about what happened to your sister," I said. "You plan to take it from inside your mom's old lab in Perses?"

"Yep."

I said, "But how? Won't it be hard to—"

"Break into an unbelievably secure facility with federal clearance to manufacture sensitive defense-related assets?" he said. "Yep. It sure will be."

I was confused by how calm he looked. "So how—?"

"Should I be worried you're distracted here?" Digby gestured at our intertwined legs. "Because I'm coming at you with my A game."

I tried to relax, but when we started kissing again, his conversation with de Groot continued to replay in my head. I could only get up to lukewarm in my response. Digby groaned and pulled away again.

“Really?” he said.

“Sorry,” I said.

“After eight months of frustration, we’re finally here on the same page and you want to talk about this?” he said.

“You said ‘inside job.’ What inside job?” I said. “Who do you know inside Perses?” I could think of only one possibility. “Besides Felix’s dad.”

Digby sat up.

“Oh, no.” I sat up too. “Wouldn’t that get him arrested? And put away for treason? Just like you were afraid *your* parents might have been?”

“I mean, it isn’t my plan for anyone to get caught,” he said.

I said, “Digby. You can’t—”

“Wait. Shh,” Digby said. “Do you hear that?”

“Don’t change the subject,” I said.

“No, really,” he said. “You didn’t hear that?”

I listened and then I did hear it too. It sounded like someone was in the bushes.

Digby jumped up and helped me to my feet. He waited for me to pull on my boots and then we headed into the tree line. We split up and looked around.

When Digby and I met up again, I said, “There’s no one here.” The truth was that there could’ve been twenty people standing two feet away from me and I wouldn’t have seen them. We were enveloped in pitch-black, far from the party’s lights and at least a hundred yards away from where Mesmer’s landscaping crew called it a day.

“But I definitely heard someone.” Digby pointed at the ground and said, “And look at these footprints.”

“Are you sure those aren’t our own?” I said.

He walked farther. “We were never over here.”

I followed him on the trail of the footprints. “Who do you think it was?”

“Best guess?” he said. “De Groot’s security guys.”

My phone rang. I couldn’t make out the image in the message until I turned up my screen’s brightness. “What the hell is this?”

“Typical evil scumbag move . . .” Digby said. “Make a deal with me and then immediately try to cheat me out of my information without having to give me his.”

When my eyes finally made out the image, I said, “It might not have been de Groot.”

“No, this was definitely de Groot,” he said. “This is exactly their MO.”

“Then their MO now includes carpet-bombing our school with pictures of us.” I showed him the grainy picture of Digby and me rolling around in the grass.

“Whoa.” Digby looked at the picture, patted his gut, and sucked in. “I better start getting my ten thousand steps in. Who sent this to you?”

“Charlotte forwarded it.” I took the phone back from Digby and typed in, “Where did u get this?”

A second image came through. This one was of us ugly kissing. Or, more precisely, it was a picture of me ugly kissing Digby.

“Oh, my God.” Whoever took the picture had caught me with my tongue sticking all the way out.

Digby laughed.

“Yeah, I see it. I have a freakishly long tongue,” I said. My phone beeped. “Charlotte just said everyone’s getting the pics. She doesn’t know who’s sending them. Let’s go back to the party. I need to figure out what’s going on.”

Our fingers brushed a few times as we were walking until finally, somehow, we ended up holding hands. But every time I got myself to relax and enjoy the fact that I was walking in the moonlight with Digby, my phone would alert me to another embarrassing picture of us that had been put into circulation.

When we were within sight of Mesmer’s house, Digby grabbed my arm and pulled me into the cover of some bushes. “Hey, Princeton. You know, we’re having such a good night.” He kissed me again. “We could just split. Deal with this tomorrow.”

I was about to agree when Digby burst out laughing and said, “Jabba the Hutt. *That’s* what that picture looks like.” He pretended to throttle himself with his own hands, wagged his outstretched tongue from side to side, and mimicked Jabba’s horrifying death rattle.

“That’s it.” I walked back to the party as fast as my high heels let me.

“Hey, Princeton, wait up,” Digby said.

“I’ll find you later. I need to talk to Charlotte,” I said. I crossed the lawn, wondering what exactly Charlotte had meant

when she'd said "everyone" had gotten the pictures. I started to fear the worst, though, when the group of people smoking on the porch snickered as I walked past them into the house.

When I got to the living room I noticed a new, slightly hysterical edge to the party's vibe. There was trash everywhere and I could see at least some of the walls would need to be repainted. A girl tripped right in front of me and didn't manage to put her hands out in time to stop her face hitting the floor. People were getting sloppy.

I helped her to the couch and then bumped into one of Austin's teammates on my way to the kitchen. "Hi, Pete . . ."

"Heeeey, Zoe . . ." Pete made sure I noticed how hard he was trying—but failing—to stop himself from laughing at me. The group he'd been standing with were all laughing at me too.

I finally found Charlotte by the keg in the backyard. "What's going on?"

"Dude." Charlotte led me away from the crowd. "This one's going to be a meme . . ." She showed me the Jabba pic.

"It looks like the pics went up on the yearbook group chat?" I said. "And then they got shared?" When Charlotte nodded, I said, "Then it was Bill. Has to be."

"Well, I mean, it was from an unknown user," Charlotte said. "And tons of people are on yearbook. Including you and me."

But I knew it was Bill.

Both our phones beeped.

"Oh, there's more," Charlotte said.

I looked down at my phone to see a shot of my face, scrunched up and unrecognizable in an ecstatic expression I'd never seen myself make. "Oh, my God . . ." That and the unfortunate camera angle of Digby between my legs pulling off my boots made the scene look much more sordid than it had actually been.

"Where's Bill?" I said.

"Inside," Charlotte said. "Crying like you made Digby leave her at the altar."

"You know, I got dumped tonight too," I said as I scrolled through the pictures. "This isn't fair."

No one was saying boo about Austin dumping me to be with my supposed friend who, actually, now that I was thinking about it, probably only hung out with me to get closer to my boyfriend. But more unfair was that my happy ending had lasted a grand total of a half an hour. A half an hour of rolling in the grass in exchange for death by social media.

"Look. Allie snaked Austin away from you. And then you snaked Digby from Bill, and if Bill had snaked a guy from someone else, then *she'd* be the home-wrecking slut we're all talking about, but . . ." Charlotte pointed at me. "Right now, you're it."

"Home-wrecking?" I said. "Wait. Did you just call me a home-wrecking slut?"

"*I didn't*," Charlotte said. "That's just what the comments say."

I went back into the house to find Bill.

TWO

Bill was in Kyle's living room, blowing cigarette smoke out of an open window and looking pretty while she cried. Three girls were comforting her. I was just about to wade into her pity party when she broke away and walked to the bathroom.

I rushed over and got there in time to block her from closing the bathroom door. I muscled my way in after her, not realizing how aggressive I was acting until I saw her frightened expression.

"Bill," I said.

"Zoe?" She took a big step back and would've fallen into the bathtub if I hadn't caught her.

"Chill. I'm not going to hurt you," I said. "I don't think."

"What do you want?" she said.

"Are you kidding me?" I said. "I want you to stop sending out those pictures."

Bill tried. "What pictures?" she said.

I grabbed her phone from her hand and found dozens of pictures in her album. I started erasing.

"Hey," Bill said. She tried to snatch the phone back from me.

"I can either erase these pictures or just drop the entire phone in the toilet. Your choice."

"Why did you say I could date him if you were just going to snatch him back anyway?" Bill said. "Was it for the extra challenge?"

"Bill, tonight wasn't something I planned."

"Oh, is that why you turned up in those clothes?" She pointed at my borrowed clothes. "This is like last year with you and Henry and Sloane . . . you and your love triangles," Bill said. "Your whole deal is just so *high school*."

That comment in and of itself wouldn't have bothered me, but knowing that by calling me "high school," Bill was giving me what she considered her greatest insult made me want to claw her eyes out. Luckily, someone started banging on the bathroom door before I could.

I yelled, "It's occupied!"

"Zoe? You have to come out here. *Now*."

"Felix?" I opened the door to find Felix hopping around outside the bathroom. "What's the matter?"

"Digby told me to come get you." And then Felix took off running down the hallway and up the stairs.

I said "To be continued" to Bill and followed Felix around

the corner onto the second-floor landing, where we ran into a jam of people in the hallway outside one of the bedrooms. They were laughing, and from their body language it seemed like they were talking about whatever was happening behind the closed door.

“Excuse me, people, make a hole, make a hole.” Felix parted a path through the crowd for the two of us. He pounded on the bedroom door. “Digby! Hey, it’s Felix.”

Standing right up against the door, I could hear the sound of angry talking and scuffling. And then I heard a male voice whimper, “Ouch ouch ouch that hurts.”

I asked Felix, “What the hell is going on in there?”

Someone toward the back of the crowd yelled out, “Yeah! What’s going on in there?”

Someone else said, “Catfight.”

And that’s when people began pushing up against me to get within earshot, so I banged on the door and yelled, “Digby! Open the door.” By now, the pressure from the crowd was pinning me against the door. I checked that the door opened away from me and saw the lock looked reassuringly old. “Felix, do you have a bus pass? Or some kind of credit card?”

Felix handed me a museum membership pass. “You know how to do that?”

“How hard can it be?” It had looked easy enough when I’d watched Digby do it, so the sound of Felix’s card snapping in half surprised me. “Um, do you have another one?”

Felix grimaced but gave me his library card anyway.

I pushed at the person behind me to back up so I'd have room to work the card gently. Click.

"You did it," Felix said.

My brain couldn't make sense of the chaos we saw when the door opened, but eventually the flailing bodies untangled to reveal Digby and Henry standing back to back, trying to keep Sloane from killing Maisie, the sophomore I'd found curled up in an armchair with Henry earlier that night.

The crowd behind me whooped and cheered at the sight of Sloane going crazy. I saw people raising their phones to record, so I pulled Felix inside and slammed the door shut behind us. The crowd outside started booing and complaining.

"Sloane, *ouch*," Henry said.

Sloane was climbing Henry, windmilling her arms to get at Maisie, who was trying to get around Digby to reach Sloane.

"Princeton. Help?" Digby said.

Neither Henry nor Digby was willing to actually put hands on either Sloane or Maisie, so I grabbed Sloane, wrestled her onto the bed, and sat on top of her. "Get Maisie out of here," I said. After a weird no-hands dance, Digby finally managed to shuffle Maisie out the door.

Once it was just the five of us, I climbed off Sloane and sat next to her on the bed. "Damn it, Sloane, what the hell's the matter with you?"

"It was me . . . my fault." Henry flopped onto the bed next to me and said, "I guess Maisie thought—"

Sloane leaped over me and started hitting Henry.

"Wait, Sloane! Nothing happened," Henry said. "Stop hitting me."

"I know nothing happened. Of course nothing happened," Sloane said. "Would you even be *breathing* if I actually thought something did happen?"

"Then why are you mad?" Henry said.

Sloane grabbed a pillow and hit Henry in the face. "Because you let her think something *could've* happened."

"She jumped *me*. I was just sleeping it off in the chair . . ." Henry pointed at the recliner. "And when I woke up, she was on my lap kissing me."

"Well, who told you to drink so much in the first place?" Sloane said.

Digby gasped. "Are you blaming the victim?"

"That's not funny. Of course she wasn't," I said.

"You know, Sloane, girls need to get consent too," Digby said.

Sloane kept ripping into Henry. "What's wrong with you? Spring workouts start next week—"

"Hello?" Henry said. "I got Coach *arrested* . . . which basically means I personally canceled spring workouts. Actually, I pretty much got next season canceled too, because they're going to check everyone for steroid use and I don't know *how* many of the guys are using." Henry flopped back on the bed. "And anyway, Coach is going to make Austin QB so, really, my whole life is canceled since if the college scouts don't see me play . . . no college for Henry."

“Number one,” Sloane said, “it doesn’t matter if he *had* decided to replace you with Austin, because as of this morning, Coach Fogle is a criminal. Number two: The season’s not over until they tell you it is and *then* we call my lawyers.” Henry picked up a random Solo cup from the nightstand. “And number three . . .” Henry lifted the cup to his lips for a drink but Sloane slapped it out of his hand before he could. “*Stop drinking.*”

Felix pointed at the now-beer-soaked wall. “Should we clean up?”

“This house is a gut job at this point,” Digby said. “We should just get out of here.”

“Yes. Definitely,” I said. “Party’s over.”

“I have to go to the bathroom,” Sloane said, and walked out of the room.

“So, is this true? You two now? Maya sent me this.” Felix handed me his phone, where the picture of my ugly kissing Digby was captioned with, *Isn’t she your friend?*

“Maya. The soccer captain?” I said. “So now all the sportos have it?”

“Oh, the Jabba pic?” Digby said.

Felix clapped his hands. “That *is* what she looks like.” He and Digby did the death rattle tongue waggle. “On the pleasure barge.”

“Ha-ha. Yeah, yeah, classic scene,” I said. And then I realized what was bothering me. “Wait. Where did Sloane go?”

There's a bathroom right here." I pointed at the en suite across the room from us. "Damn it."

I left the room just as Digby worked it out and said, "Uh-oh . . ."

I ran down the halls, alternating between asking "Seen Maisie?" and "Did Sloane come through here?" Finally, I found Sloane standing in the living room, holding a beer and looking weirdly calm.

"Oh, hi, Zoe," Sloane said.

"'Oh, hi, Zoe?'" I said. "Did you even need the bathroom? What are you up to?"

"She's talking about me," Sloane said.

I watched Maisie huddled with her friends across the room, being aggressively obvious about mocking us.

"Probably because you're standing here staring at her like a psycho. Let's go, Sloane, you're just driving yourself nuts," I said.

"Fine," Sloane said.

I'd already started for the front door when I realized Sloane wasn't walking with me. I went back through the crowd to find her. "Sloane, what the hell? Get back here."

And then—I swear—I saw her hand moving upward with her cup of beer, so I rushed over to stop her from dumping it all over Maisie. I got in grabbing range just as Sloane yelled Maisie's name and Maisie turned around. I almost had Sloane by the arm but then my left heel got caught in the tassels of the

living room carpet while my right foot kept on going. I dove forward and I reached out to break my fall but all I got was a handful of Sloane's hair. Both Sloane and I went down screaming, and I watched her cup of beer arc through the air and hit Maisie in the face.

Still crouched on the floor next to me, Sloane said, "What did you do that for?"

"To stop you from attacking her with your beer," I said.

"You mean like the way you just did? I was only going to cuss her out," Sloane said.

The chorus of OMGs and sympathetic faces gathered around Maisie morphed into angry sneers as people looked at us.

"They're turning on us, Sloane," I said. Sloane and I helped each other get up. "Go say sorry."

"Why?" Sloane said. "You did it."

Maisie pointed at us, with black eyeliner dripping down her cheeks. "You *bitches*." She picked up a random cup and flung the contents toward me but Sloane yanked me backward and took the soaking in my place.

The room burst into celebration. Maisie was coming at me with another cup, so I grabbed Sloane's hand and we ran out the front door and straight to Sloane's SUV.

Hince, her driver, started the engine even before we'd fully gotten in.

"I'll text Digby and the guys to come out here," I said.

Maisie stomped out the front door with a stream of people behind her.

“Uh, Miss Bloom?” Hince said.

“The angry villagers,” Sloane said. She locked her door. “We can’t wait for the guys. Go, Hince. *Go*.”

We lurched away, with Hince periodically slamming on the brakes to avoid killing the morons who thought it’d be funny to jump in our path or climb onto our moving car. When we finally shook off the last faux rioter and got under way, I handed Sloane the box of Kleenex she kept in the car and helped her wipe off some of the beer.

“Thanks for the save, Sloane. I didn’t need a public beer shower on top of the crummy night I’m already having.” And then I noticed her eyes flick down to my legs and I realized what was really going on. “It was your leather pants, wasn’t it? You didn’t want beer on your pants.”

“Those are brand-new. And speaking of . . .” Sloane reached down and straightened my legs. “Knees.”

THREE

I wasn't in the mood for one of Sloane's lectures about a poor little rich girl growing up alone in a castle on a hill, so I told her she could spend the night at my place. I put her in the guest bedroom, said good night, and brushed my teeth. But when I got back to my room, Sloane was sitting on my bed, reading one of my books.

"Something wrong with the guest room?" I said.

"Those sheets don't look clean," Sloane said.

"They're clean. No one's slept in them," I said. "I changed them myself after Digby moved out."

"Digby slept on that bed?" Sloane said. "Wait, did you ever . . . with him on that bed?"

I shook my head.

"What about elsewhere? Like, in the dirt outside Kyle Mesmer's summer house?" Sloane said.

"I can see those pictures are going to be so annoying," I said.

“No, we did not.” I dove into my closet. “There’s a sleeping bag in here you can have.”

“Is it clean?” she said.

“No, Sloane, I’m going to stuff you into a dirty sleeping bag and make you spend the night as a filthy proletariat Hot Pocket,” I said. “It’s *clean*.”

“Ha-ha,” she said. “By the way, thanks for lending me your clothes, but . . .”

I threw Sloane a set of my pajamas.

She caught them and said, “Are they—”

“Yes, Sloane, they are clean,” I said.

“Also, I’m thirsty,” she said.

After a while, I realized that she was staring at me because she expected me to do something about it.

“Go to the bathroom and get a drink,” I said.

“Like a dog?” she said.

“Did I say drink from the toilet?” I said. “I don’t know how it is in your house, but we have a sink in our bathroom.”

“Is the water filtered?” she said.

“Then just go get a bottle from the fridge already, okay?” I said. “My God, you are exhausting.”

Finally alone, I exchanged a few awkward messages with Digby in which I avoided saying what I really wanted to say—*please come over*—before I figured out that he didn’t think Henry was in any shape to be left alone.

“What’s this?” Sloane came back in the room holding a white envelope.

“Mail? I don’t know.” I didn’t recognize the crest on the envelope at first, but when I finally did, my entire being flooded with dread.

“The Prentiss School? Is this . . . ?” Sloane said.

“The decision letter. It’s so late,” I said. “I just assumed . . .” Sloane ran her finger along the envelope’s flap. “Open it.”

“Ugh. This on top of everything else tonight,” I said. “Man, I wish I hadn’t let you talk me into going to that party.”

“Don’t look at me like I *made* you go,” Sloane said.

“Literally, that is what you did,” I said.

“Wait. Did you tell Austin you were applying?” Sloane said. “When you sent in the application, I mean?”

“I didn’t tell anyone I applied,” I said. “Not even my parents.”

Sloane said, “So, besides the admissions people and yourself . . .”

“You’re the only other person who knows,” I said. “Yes.”

Sloane laughed. “You’re mad at Austin and Allie for ‘stabbing you in the back,’”—Sloane made air quotes—“but *really*, you were making plans to leave town behind *his* back the entire time you guys were together?”

“To be honest, I only applied out of spite because my father said I wouldn’t get in. I didn’t actually contemplate what I’d do if I did,” I said. “And look, I *didn’t* get in.”

“You don’t know for sure you didn’t get in,” Sloane said.

“It’s the skinny envelope, Sloane,” I said.

“But until you open it, you don’t *know*,” she said.

“You just want me to read the letter so you can watch me get rejected,” I said.

“Wow. I’m glad you have such a high opinion of me,” Sloane said.

Even for Sloane and me, it was a low blow. I resigned myself to taking a major hit to the self-esteem and tore open the envelope. “Happy now?”

It took me another minute to register what the letter actually said.

“What?” I said. “What the hell?”

“What is it?” Sloane said.

I couldn’t think of what else to say, so I just spat out every filthy combination of swear words my exhausted brain came up with.

“I have to see this.” Sloane took the letter from me. “Wait . . . you got in. Zoe? You got in . . .”

I took the letter back from Sloane and reread it. A few times. “*Dear Ms. Webster, we are happy to inform you that we have a vacancy at the Prentiss School starting this fall . . .*”

“You got in,” Sloane said.

It finally sunk in. “You bet your sweet ass I did.”

Sloane was silent. Something weird went on with her face.

Eventually, I just had to ask. “What’s your deal? Are you fighting a sneeze?”

Sloane held up a finger to buy herself time and then, when she was more composed, she said, “I’m doing my exercises.”

“Exercises?” I said. “Exercises for what?”

“They’re like this.” She breathed in and said, “Zoe has more.” She breathed out. “But I don’t have less. I am not less.” She pointed at me, and said, “You.” She drew an invisible perimeter around herself. “Me.”

“Okay,” I said. “That’s weird. Why *would* you be less?”

“What? You don’t feel bad when other people get something you wanted for yourself?” she said.

“But, Sloane, you could easily get in anywhere,” I said. “Prentiss . . . *wherever*. Why would you feel bad?”

“I can’t go to a private school,” Sloane said. “My family’s Democrat and my father wants to be the president of the United States.”

“Then what’s the point of feeling bad?” I said. “It doesn’t make any sense.”

“Of course it doesn’t make any sense. I’m competitive. It doesn’t have to make sense. Oh, please. Don’t even try to tell me you don’t get competitive like that.” When I couldn’t deny it, Sloane said, “Exactly. It started to be an OCD thing with me, so I got help. What do *you* do about it?”

“Well, I don’t have eleventy thousand dollars to spend on grooming my feelings . . .” I said. “So I just eat my heart out like a regular person.”

Sloane said, “Well, this feels much better.” She redrew the invisible perimeter around herself over and over.

“And—*bonus*—it doesn’t at all look insane,” I said. “Oh, God, I feel kinda good. I think I need to dance.” And so I did. “How you like me now, Dad?”

“And *that* doesn’t at all look insane,” Sloane said. “So, that’s who you’re telling first? Your father? Are you telling Digby? How will he take it?” She paused. “So that means you’re going to accept your spot?”

Each question left me feeling crummier than the one before. “I don’t know. I haven’t decided if I’m going yet.”

“Of course you’re going,” Sloane said.

I glanced at my phone and saw more posted images of me. Ugly reality beckoned me off my cloud. “Great.” Sloane had gotten back on my bed, so I sat down on the floor. “Do you think a lot of people have seen these? The pictures of Digby and me?”

“Sure. They’re everywhere.” When I groaned, Sloane said, “Sorry.”

“Oh, God,” I said. “It’s so humiliating. I look so . . .”

“Are you and Digby together now?” Sloane said.

“No idea,” I said. “Everything happened so fast.”

“Although . . . what would ‘being together’ even mean for a guy like him?” she said.

“I get to carry the bail money?” I said. “I’m his steady alibi?”

I spotted the sleeping bag under a pile of shoes at the bottom of my closet and yanked it out.

“I guess before I worry about whom to tell, I need to figure out what I want to *do* about Prentiss. I’d better do it soon, though. It says here the deposit’s due,” I said. “I don’t know. I mean, is it worth it to go for just one year? What will I even have time to learn in a year?”

“‘Learn’? How the real world works, for one,” Sloane said. “People don’t go to places like Prentiss to *learn*. Stay home and read a book if you want to learn. People go to places like Prentiss for access. Colleges reserve places for Prentiss graduates.”

“Is that really true?” I said. “I mean, it sounds like an elitist fairy tale.”

“Look. On average, two-thirds of Harvard undergrads come from thirty thousand public schools, *but* five percent of each Harvard class comes from just *seven* private schools.” Sloane said. “See?”

“It’s four a.m. and you’re switching between percents and fractions. I have no idea what you’re saying to me,” I said. “And I don’t even want to go to Harvard.”

“Ugh. Harvard’s just an example. What I’m saying is . . . a handful of schools like Prentiss sent around fifteen of their grad class to Harvard last year while the public schools averaged point zero five of a person going to Harvard. You’re dreaming if you think that’s all because of merit and grades,” Sloane said. “Trust me, they hold places for the preps.”

“Nope. That’s way too much math for the night I’ve had,” I said. “God, just thinking about telling Mom makes me want to forget the whole thing already. Is that lame?”

“Lame,” Sloane said.

“Plus, I feel like if I went, my father would be winning somehow,” I said.

“Double lame.” Sloane flopped back on my bed and said, “Your problems make me tired.”

“You don’t know, okay?” I slouched down onto the floor and propped my head on the rolled-up sleeping bag. “My parents are *divorced*. Everything I do is, like, a huge *choice*. Someone’s always offended. New York equals Dad. River Heights equals Mom.” I was already staring into the abyss, so I decided to keep going. “And how do I deal with the crap Digby’s going to give me? Seriously. Being called ‘Princeton’ is annoying enough. I can’t even think what he’ll come up with when I tell him *this*.” But when I did start thinking about it, I felt myself getting angry. “I mean, am I supposed to be embarrassed I want to go to a good school? Does he think—what?—that he can just blow into my life and suddenly be the most important thing? And what do I do when he decides to blow back out of town again? It took me, like, an entire week to get my life back together the last time he disappeared. And that was *bad*. It was, like, no-shower-no-food-for-a-week bad.” Maybe that last bit was an overshare. “So *whatever*. Bite me, Philip Digby. I did *good*, dammit. I’m going to celebrate. I want ice cream. Do you want some ice cream?” Sloane was silent. “Hey, Sloane. Ice cream?”

All I got back from her was a snore. I sat up to find her sprawled out on my duvet, eyes shut and breathing deeply, already fast sleep. I didn’t feel like going through the drama of peeling her off my bed, so I unzipped my sleeping bag and got comfortable.

I'd started the day at the apex of a love triangle and now I was ending it sleeping on the floor of my own room, wrapped in a filthy sleeping bag because I'd given up my bed to the mean girl who'd once stopped Austin and me in the hall and asked him, "Her?"

Things had definitely taken a turn.