Preston Duval scratched his signature swiftly over the line at the bottom of the document and handed it back across the desk, and Ms. Theyer took it and tucked it into her file.

“Anything else?” he asked dryly, trying to keep the impatience out of his voice. As the Director of St. Anthony’s, most of his time was spent on higher-level issues. Parent relations, for one, took up over half of his time. It was inevitable with such a wealthy, powerful clientele. The parents of the students they educated were accustomed to having their issues handled personally by the man at the top.

That made delegation essential, and as the Dean, Emma Theyer did an excellent job of handling most of the day-to-day running of the school. But there were some issues that simply required the boss to sign off on them, and when enough of them piled up, one of these meetings was necessary.

“Two more minor issues, sir,” said Ms. Theyer in her usual tight, clipped, lightly accented cadence, handing over another file. “The first concerns our women’s swimming coach.”

Preston took the file and flipped through it, pausing at the attached photos to smirk and chuckle. “Oh yes. I don’t get out onto campus that much, but even I heard of that one. She made… quite a splash.”

Ms. Theyer simply stared at her boss, the expression on her beautiful face firm but steely. “Yes, sir. The last swim meet caused quite a stir.”

Preston glanced up at her, nonplussed. “I’m never sure if you don’t get my jokes, or you’re just German,” he said sourly.

“Austrian, sir. And what joke?”

“Anyway, I was under the impression that our swim coach’s predicament was a result of young Miss Lind exploring her sapphic side. Is that not correct?” He said, tossing the incident report back onto his desk. It flopped open to a photo of the swim coach in question, standing with her team while wearing a completely see-through one-piece swimsuit. A fetching pink blush had spread from her face downward toward her breasts, and her nipples poked obscenely through the thin material. The girls on either side of the coach, wearing swimsuits that were identically cut, but made from sensibly opaque, dark blue material, wore wide, wolfish grins. None more so than Miss Lind herself, the cheerful blonde with an arm over her blushing coach’s shoulder.

Ahh, the excitement of youth.

“That is correct, sir.”

“I don’t see the issue then, Ms. Theyer. You know our long-standing policy. Youth is about… experimentation. Our administration doesn’t stand in the way of that. In fact, we’ve even been known to help out at times, if we can do so discreetly. Why should this be any different?”

It was the way of the world. The wealthy and powerful do as they please, and the rest of the peons were simply there for the amusement and enrichment of their betters. St. Anthony’s didn’t make the cutthroat rules of the world, but they did create a place where the truly superior members of society could revel in their power without the need for shame or subtlety. Sometimes that meant that a well-meaning swim coach or a scholarship student or a member of the kitchen staff got turned into a slutty sexual laughingstock. What else could you expect from young, horny college-age students with unlimited power?

That was the service that St. Anthony’s provided: a playground for young men and women first coming into their power to express themselves however they wish and get it out of their systems.

Oh… and they got an education too. Obviously.

Ms Theyer’s lips tightened in mild disapproval. “The issue, sir, is that the coach in question has lodged a formal complaint. How would you like me to handle it?”

Preston raised his eyebrows in mild surprise. Most of the staff learned very quickly that the complaints system was a sham. In fact, they usually figured that out early on when a much less serious event happened. It was rare for someone to even bother bringing a complaint to Ms Theyer by the time they got to the point of being a student’s public sex toy.

Preston sighed and steepled his fingers. “Tell her you take all such complaints seriously. Tell Miss Lind what is about to happen ahead of time so she can prepare, then call both of them into a meeting together. Treat it as a he-said, she-said issue and ask them to work the issue out between the two of them.”

Now even the stoic Ms. Theyer had to crack a smile. “In other words, make it clear to our swimming coach that the only thing that snitching got her was making her mistress angrier. It’s diabolical, sir.”

Preston shrugged, but returned her smile. “It’s reality. The lessers lose, and the betters win. Our esteemed alumni and clientele pay us well to make sure our school follows the harsh rules of the jungle.”

Ms. Theyer nodded sharply and scooped up the file she had left on the director’s desk. She tapped them smartly on the desk to arrange the papers, then tucked them back into her folder before pulling out another sheaf of documents.

“One last matter to attend to, sir. Admissions received this application recently.”

She handed the application in question across the desk, and Preston flipped through it disinterestedly. The very fact that he didn't recognize the name on the front meant that it was a scholarship student, and therefore not really something he was interested in.

The scholarship system was a necessity to keep things running smoothly and give the clients the experience they wanted. As nice as it sounded to have an exclusive school where only the rich and powerful were ever admitted, that practice would run into difficulties almost immediately if they tried it.

To put it bluntly, being upper class meant nothing if there was no lower class. The elite students of the school needed peasants to rule over. If you threw a group of college-aged students together, they would naturally establish a pecking order, and if the school didn't supply clear victims, then some of the elite sons and daughters might end up getting bullied, which simply wasn't what the parents were paying for.

So St. Anthony's admitted a number of scholarship students equal to the number of elite students that had been accepted that year to keep a roughly fifty/fifty split. The scholarship students got an excellent education out of the deal, as well as a clear path to an elite college. More than enough to make up for being a plaything during their two years at St. Anthony's, Preston thought.

It seemed like an average scholarship application to him. Bright student, leadership qualities, top of her class, blah blah blah. They usually only accepted attractive scholarship students for obvious reasons, and the cute picture attached to the front certainly fit well enough. Preston looked up at Ms. Theyer inquisitively. "So? What seems to be the problem?"

"Our admissions team had an odd feeling about this particular application. So they asked our private investigator to take a closer look. The entire application is fabricated. Bailey Rose doesn't exist."

Preston grunted as his eyes flicked back down to the document. If it was a fake, it was a good one. Nothing had seemed off to him from his surface-level examination.

Ms. Theyer went on in her clipped, exact tone. "Our investigator dug a little deeper, using the provided photo. It seems that 'Bailey' is actually a journalist named Madison Bellerose attempting to gain access to the school."

Preston raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips in annoyance, flipping back to the picture on the front. "Well, she certainly looks the part," he muttered darkly. It was annoying. This type of busybody really got under his skin. Journalists and lawyers always wanted to poke and prod and try, in a feeble and pathetic way, to tear down what he had built. As if they didn't know the rules of the world as well as he did. The haves in society had ruled over the have-nots since the very beginning of civilization. Slaves had labored in the sun while the pharaohs lay in the shade

and watched their pyramids take shape. The only difference nowadays is that the rich and powerful had to pretend they didn't have unlimited power for politeness's sake. St. Anthony's was a haven where they could be their true selves, and these journalists wanted to ruin that for petty, emotional reasons.

Foolish. Childish. It made Preston want to teach this Madison Bellerose a lesson. He was in the business of education after all.

"This application is for the coming Fall term?" asked Preston with a wicked gleam in his eyes.

"That's right, sir. I can deny it promptly if you wish. Should I get lawyers involved as well, to look into any laws she may have broken in misrepresenting herself?"

Preston handed the application back across his desk with a predatory grin spreading across his face. "On the contrary, I want you to accept it and welcome this… Bailey with open arms."

Ms. Theyer blinked swiftly, the closest she ever came to looking shocked. "Sir?" she asked dryly. "You understand that this is a journalist who means to expose the school, correct?"

"Of course. She wants to see what goes on at St. Anthony's; I intend to teach her thoroughly. Do you know of any… enterprising young women who might want to make a new friend?

Ms Theyer's smile was frosty, but a flickering flame lit in her eyes as she took her boss's meaning. "I think I know a few, yes sir."

"In fact, we got that suspicious application for the open staff position the other day as well, didn't we?" mused Preston, leaning back in his chair. "Why not accept that as well? Contact her and tell her we've changed our minds and want her to come in for an interview. Let's make this a party… and give an example to anyone else who might try to snoop around our affairs."

"Very good, sir," said Ms Theyer, squaring away all of the documents in her folder. "It seems that it might be an interesting fall."

"Quite," said Preston softly, imagining what fun it would be to get some well-deserved revenge on the journalists that were always annoying him. "I might even need to get… personally involved in this bright young woman's re-education."

…

"You have my number memorized, right?" asked Harry again, turning his coffee nervously in his hands.

Madison sighed and rolled her eyes. “555-291-7891,” she intoned in a sing-song voice. “And yes, I have my fake ID rather than my real ID. I triple-checked. Quadruple-checked. We are set to go.”

Harry didn’t look so sure. Madison herself, though, was filled with nervous but optimistic energy. In theory, the most difficult step in this entire process was getting accepted into the program in the first place. Even with a very impressive fake application supported by the fake records she had slipped into her connection’s school, she had been competing with some of the top high school seniors in the country for her spot.

But she had done it. Gotten into one of the top schools in the country, with them none the wiser. True, she would have to convince some college kids that she was one of them, but she had been on a strict social media diet matching a woman six years younger than herself all summer. She was confident she could pull it off.

She would have to do it alone, however. St. Anthony’s was a boarding school, and she would be living on campus for the next few months until she decided that she had all of the information she needed for her story.

That meant she couldn’t have her editor’s number saved on her phone. She wasn’t sure exactly how the rules on campus were enforced, since the school was notoriously closed-mouth about student life until students arrived for orientation, but it seemed all-too-plausible that her phone might be confiscated. She would have to risk taking notes on a daily basis on her laptop, using a hidden, locked document file and her phone’s hotspot, but that could be the only time she ever acted as a reporter. She would live, breathe, and even think like “Bailey Rose” from the moment she stepped on campus. Anything else invited disaster.

“I don’t know. I don’t like it,” grumbled Harry. “I mean, as your editor, it’s my job to make sure you don’t get into trouble. This seems like nothing but.”

Madison tried to be patient, but she didn’t really have time for this. Her two massive suitcases sat next to the outdoor table at the cafe, ready to be packed into a rideshare and take her to her journalistic destiny. Orientation was starting at nine AM sharp, and she had to get going. She wasn’t really in the mood to soothe the nerves of a man who thought she needed to be protected like a child.

“Well, then you shouldn’t have given your permission six months ago, Harry. It’s too late to get cold feet now, “ she said lightly, and drained the rest of her coffee in one go. “I’ve already called my ride, and they’ll be here soon.”

“I mean, what if you get caught? What if you get bullied, just like all those rumors say?” asked Harry, his expression bleak.

Madison stared at him wearily, trying hard not to roll her eyes. “I won’t get caught. The admissions board would have scrutinized me far harder than any of the teachers or students. People see what they want to see. And as far as bullying goes, I’m not some delicate flower. Sticks and stones may break my bones Harry, but I’m used to words a lot more sophisticated than these rich brats use. I’m a big girl. I’ll be fine.”

Madison could see her driver pulling up, so she stood and gave her editor a tight smile. ‘Well, this is me. Don’t be such a worrywart. We’re finally taking these bastards down!”

Harry just stared up at her sourly. “Promise me that you’ll contact me at the first sign of trouble.”

This time Madison did roll her eyes. “I promise. But if I don’t contact you, assume I’m fine. The easiest way for this to get fucked up is for you to jump the gun and try to get in touch. Trust the process, Harry. I’ll see you in a few months.”

And then, Madison turned and headed toward the car, taking her first steps into a different life. She had already arranged a house and cat sitter, told her mom not to expect any calls for a while, and put all of her bills on autopay.

For the next few months, she was Bailey Rose, an eighteen-year-old student starting her first semester at St. Anthony’s.

She couldn’t wait.

…

The school campus of St. Anthony’s was in the middle of nowhere, tucked into a landscape of rolling hills and forests. The exit from the road was unmarked, and the confused driver passed it three times before finally turning down it. About a mile down the paved drive, they finally reached the gate.

Madison had been expecting a frantic, carnival atmosphere of cars arriving and parents tearfully dropping off their sons and daughters, just like her actual first day of freshman year at college had been, but instead there was just a neat line of cars waiting for their turn to pass through the gate. The gate itself was apparently a good distance away from the school buildings, which could barely be seen in the distance, peeking through shrouding trees. Far enough away and well hidden enough to make photography more difficult, said Madison’s instincts.

The driver was a little annoyed that the ride was taking so long at this point, but when they got to the front of the line, all it took was Madison speaking to a curt voice at the other end of an intercom to pass through.

A short ride later down a tree-lined lane, and she was on St. Anthony’s campus for the first time. Madison couldn’t help gawking as they pulled up to the student center and she got out of the

car, but she didn't hold herself back. She assumed that any new student on the campus would react the same way to the sight.

The massive amounts of money that had been poured into the facilities were apparent at a casual glance. The spacious buildings were made of a rich, dark-red brick, arranged around a central commons with perfectly manicured lawns and shady trees. She could see students laughing and chatting as they strolled by or lounged on the grass, all wearing the traditional uniform of St. Anthony's. It was very similar to a Catholic school uniform, with white button-down shirts, blazers, and ties for both sexes, slacks for the men and tartan skirts for the women. Maybe the skirts were a tad shorter than would be typical in a truly religious school, but certainly nothing scandalous. Interestingly, instead of one uniform color, uniforms appeared to be either red and maroon, or blue and navy. Madison couldn't see any obvious reason why.

Madison looked around keenly at the students as the driver helped to unload her hefty bags from the trunk, on the lookout for any signs of bullying. But as far as she could tell, it was all average behavior for young adults their age… girls giggling and whispering and boys acting foolish to impress their friends.

Her covert surveillance was interrupted by a cool, dry voice saying, "Do I have the pleasure of speaking to Miss Bailey Rose?"

Madison jumped at the sudden sound and turned with her hand on her heart to see a striking woman standing nearby with a clipboard in hand.

The woman was a head taller than Madison, which wasn't unusual considering Madison's height. The woman's pale blonde hair was pulled back into a severe bun, and her eyes were like chips of blue ice beneath her rectangular glasses. She could have been a mature-looking woman in her early thirties, an extremely well-preserved woman in her mid-forties, or anywhere in between. It was impossible to tell based on her beautiful but harsh features.

And, even though Madison would normally not be the type to note that sort of thing right away, the other thing that stood out about the woman was her bust. Her breasts were massive, even in comparison to the rest of her curvy frame. Even the suit jacket that she was wearing did very little to draw attention away from them.

The woman projected an air of authority, and Madison had already decided that "Bailey" respected authority almost to a fault. She snapped to attention immediately, plastered a bright smile on her face, and gushed, "Yes, Ma'am, nice to meet you, ma'am. I'm Bailey."

The woman favored her with a frosty smile. Her icy gaze was so piercing that for a moment, Madison thought that she had been discovered immediately. But then, the severe beauty said, "A pleasure to meet you, child. You may call me Ms. Theyer. Now, your orientation group is about to get started, and you are the last to arrive. If you would follow me, please?"

Shit. Madison could have sworn that she was early, but a quick check of her phone revealed that it was a few minutes past the hour. In other circumstances, she probably could have counted on other people being later than this, but she supposed that an elite school like St. Anthony's was at another level. She hadn't wanted to stand out for any reason, so being the last one here was unfortunate. She made a mental note to herself to work harder to be early so she didn't stand out.

But it seemed like Madison didn't have any choice but to stand out even further. She gestured with a wince at the bags standing next to her on the sidewalk. "I'd really like to join the group as quickly as possible, Ms. Theyer," she said apologetically, "But I still need to drop my bags off in my new room. Could I maybe meet the group while you're in progress?"

Ms. Theyer looked down her nose at Madison incredulously for a moment, then shook her head with a tight little smile. "Oh, dear. I keep forgetting that our new scholarship students may not be used to how things are done at institutions such as ours." She snapped her fingers, and seemingly out of nowhere, a man appeared at her shoulder, murmuring, "How may I assist you?"

"Have Miss Rose's bags taken up to her room," said Ms. Theyer crisply, without looking in his direction.

The man obeyed immediately as Madison looked on in surprise. He didn't look like a servant in his purple polo with "St. Anthony" stitched on the breast and light khaki pants, but a quick glance around showed that there were other similarly dressed adults lingering near the drop-off area, which meant that it was likely some sort of uniform for support staff. Madison made a mental note to try to get close to someone in the support staff if she could.

But for now, it was best to watch the man whisk her bags off to her dorm room while she hurried after Ms. Theyer, who had begun striding off without another word.

Inside the student center, Madison saw another group of students leaving led by what looked like an older male teacher in a suit, as she was led to her own group of around a dozen students. Madison could tell right off the bat that there was something up with her groupmates as she joined them. One slim boy with a mop of wavy blonde hair waved politely at her, and a girl with long dark hair and glasses gave her a shy smile, but most of the other students looked nervous or distracted. Madison couldn't really see a reason why they were acting strangely, but notably, all of the students who seemed oddly upset were already wearing red and maroon school uniforms. The students acting normally were just wearing street clothes.

It was something she would have to investigate, but for now, Ms Theyer clapped her hands, drawing the attention of the group.

"Good Morning, students. Many of you attended last night's getting-to-know-you mixer, but for those of you who chose to arrive today, I would like to welcome you to St. Anthony's.

Regardless, for everyone, this will serve as your introduction to the academics, student services, and facilities of our campus."

Shit. Madison had read about the mixer, but the documentation had made it sound like an optional event, and she wasn't sure how well-attended it would be. Besides, she had decided to have one last night of drinking and acting like an adult before she became an 18-year-old for a few months. Her head still pounded lightly from her hangover even now. That explained why most of the students were wearing uniforms already; they had arrived yesterday evening for the mixer.

If Madison had known that the bulk of new students would be at the mixer, she probably would have come yesterday. Too late now. But it did make her wonder why all the students who had been at the mixer seemed stressed.

"Staff members will be leading the orientation tours today, and you all have been lucky enough to have me as your group leader," said the severe blonde without a trace of humor. "I have introduced myself to some of you already, but you may call me Ms. Theyer. I am St. Anthony's Dean. Our institution doesn't have a 'principal' like a high school would, but I handle most issues that you might expect that position to be responsible for. Behavioral problems, day-to-day functions of the school, issues with the staff, and student discipline. If you know your place and cooperate fully with our rules and community spirit, you may never see me again after today. But if you are a troublemaker?" She gave the group a small, frosty smile. "Then we will get to know each other quite well, I assure you. Are there any questions before we begin?"

One slim, short boy with dark skin and intelligent eyes raised his hand, his brow furrowed. "Actually, yes. If you're in charge of student misbehavior, there's something I would like to report about last night's mixer."

Now that he had spoken up, some of the other worried-looking students in uniforms nodded, looking up hopefully. Madison watched in fascination, more curious than ever about what might have happened the night before, but unfortunately, it seemed she wasn't going to learn anything for the moment. Ms Theyer fixed the young man who had spoken up with a penetrating glare and said, "Ah. Very well. It is, of course, my job to handle any such complaints. But I will not do so here in front of everyone. I will speak to you individually when we are not engaged in a tour, Mr. Thompson."

Without any further discussion, the Dean launched into a clipped, efficient explanation of the services available in the student center. The student who had spoken up looked disappointed, but Ms Theyer's speech swept everyone along like a tide, and soon they were following her around the campus. Madison attempted to sidle up to this "Mr. Thompson" a few times to ask what had happened at the mixer, but any time anyone struck up a conversation, the Dean snapped at them for "making idle chit-chat" and launched into another lesson on the school's history or the many amenities available on campus.

There was no helping it. There wouldn't be any chance to speak to other students during the tour itself. Madison would have to wait until lunch to make her move.

But even though Madison felt a bit stymied by her inability to investigate the strange attitude of the students, the rest of the tour was fascinating all its own. The facilities and services available for students at St. Anthony's were jaw-dropping. The student center didn't have cafeteria-style dining, but food made to order by chefs. The gym had state-of-the-art technology and 24/7 on-demand massages. The biology lab that they toured had equipment that wouldn't have looked out of place at a professional laboratory. Even the most elite colleges that Madison had been to before had some lecture halls or old buildings that looked a little run down, but at St. Anthony's, everything was top-notch and state-of-the-art. It was honestly impressive. If Madison was actually an eighteen-year-old who was touring the campus she was about to spend two years at, she would have been ecstatic.

Despite that, the other students in uniforms still seemed stressed and listless. Madison's curiosity ramped up further and further, and by the time they made it to lunch, she was dying to find out any information she could. After they had made their orders, Madison made a beeline to sit near the boy who had spoken up, pulling up a chair and introducing herself. "Good morning, nice to meet you. I'm… Bailey." Shit. Even after practicing her new name hundreds of times, she had still almost called herself Madison. She would have to be more careful.

The boy across from Madison gave her a wary stare with his deep brown eyes, then sighed and said, "Nice to meet you too. I'm Angel. Sorry if I'm not exactly a ball of sunshine right now."

"I noticed," said Madison sympathetically. She gestured around at the other tables nearby in the spacious, sunlit dining hall, where their groupmates sat staring morosely at their phones for the most part, except for the few who hadn't arrived from the night before. "You all seem a little on edge. What exactly happened at that mixer last night?"

Angel looked a little worried, chewing his lower lip for a moment before saying. "I was told that I shouldn't tell anyone. I assume that Ms. Theyer wouldn't be included in that, but I'm not sure I can just…"

"Mr. Thompson?" The Dean appeared next to their table like a ghost, startling both of them. Madison had no idea how the woman moved so silently on the stiletto heels she wore. "You wanted to make a report? I think now would be a good time, while everyone is waiting for their meals to be prepared."

Well shit. Just when it seemed like Madison might get somewhere, the opportunity was snatched out of her hands. She had no choice but to watch as her potential source got up and walked away with the Dean to have a private conversation.

Madison was hoping that at least she would be able to follow up with Angel after he made his report, but when he got back, Angel looked more upset than ever. Before Madison could even ask what was wrong, he had picked up his tray and began moving away toward an empty table.

“Hey, wait! What the matter?” asked Madison, calling after him.

Angel only half turned, his expression stony as he said, “Sorry. I’d like to eat alone today. I can’t talk about what you wanted to know anyway.”

A definitive dead end. Something about his conversation with Ms. Theyer had convinced the boy to stay quiet. Maybe she could work on him more later, but for now her plans were stymied. Madison couldn’t exactly get up and move to another table when everyone was already in the middle of eating. At least the shrimp alfredo she had ordered was incredible. Regardless, Madison wasn’t too worried. She might be striking out for big scoops, but she had only been here a few hours. She had months to build trust and develop sources. It was better not to rush things.

When the brief lunch break was over, they continued the tour. For the first hour or so, things were mostly the same. The fine arts building and gallery. The stables. The theatre. But something strange happened as the group made its way across the commons toward the school medical facilities.

A knot of boys stood beneath the shade of a tree, lounging and occasionally shoving each other and laughing, like most boys their age were prone to do. The little tour group that Madison was a part of had passed dozens of little knots of students as they went along, presumably students beginning their second year who had no need of a campus tour. But mostly those groups had ignored the underclassmen that had passed by. These boys were different.

“Ayo, fresh meat!” crowed a raw-boned boy with a too-wide grin and one of those broccoli haircuts that Madison found so annoying. He crudely grabbed his crotch and thrust it outward in the direction of the passing tour group, his eyes alive with cruel delight. He reminded Madison of the kind of person who fried ants with a magnifying glass when they were younger. Except this time they were the ants.

Madison expected Ms Theyer to snap at the boy any second and get him under control. After all, she seemed like a no-nonsense type, and she had said early on that she was the one in charge of student discipline. Instead, the blonde administrator just stared forward, as if pretending she didn’t see or hear as the obnoxious man elbowed his friends, muttering things under his breath that Madison was too far away to hear, but could guess based on the context.

“Bluebloods,” said Angel darkly, staring at the boys in the shade with a troubled expression.

Madison wasn’t familiar with the term, but it wasn’t hard to figure out. All of the students in her tour group had uniforms in various shades of red and maroon, while the knot of boys in the

shade had uniforms of blue and navy. Her eyes flicked back to Angel. “Those are the… non-scholarship students, aren’t they?”

Angel nodded, never taking his eyes off the group of boys, who were leering at the passing underclassmen like a pack of wolves stalking deer. He hesitated, biting his lip, then said, “Watch out for them,” and picked up speed, walking ahead to end the conversation.

Madison looked back, but this time her eyes weren’t caught by the skinny class clown, who was still making a scene. Instead, she locked eyes with a taller boy next to him. He had broad shoulders, a powerful jawline, and perfectly styled blonde hair that fell down around his ears. Instead of chuckling and making comments like the other boys, he was simply staring silently at the group as they passed, his finger hooked through the blazer he hung over his shoulder.

He was attractive. That was what struck Madison first. How could he not be, with his chiseled features, powerful build, and perfect hair? He was probably rich enough to have a stylist and a personal trainer who made sure he looked fucking incredible at all times. Madison squashed that instinct ruthlessly. If there was one thing she absolutely couldn’t do while she was here, it was to get involved with a student.

It wasn’t that she thought that would be some massive temptation. It didn’t matter how attractive some of these college-aged students might be; she was an adult woman on a whole different level of maturity. The tricky part was dodging any and all interest from boys (and girls, for that matter) while not blowing her cover. Presumably any girl “Bailey’s” age would normally be interested in being pursued. Luckily, her “Bailey” personality was mainly interested in academics, which could provide a pretty good cover.

Even from this distance, the boy’s eyes were startlingly blue. But something about them put Madison off. This young man’s malice wasn’t as blatant and crude as his friend’s, but Madison still sensed a cold cruelty in his gaze that sent a shiver through her. Suddenly, the young man in blue winked at her, and she realized she had been staring a couple of seconds too long and glanced away.

The only thing that cut off the lingering attention of the blueblood boys was the door of the medical office as it swung shut behind the group.

Most campuses that Madison was familiar with had a nurse on campus, and relied on medical facilities nearby for anything more serious. But the medical building at St. Anthony’s seemed to be staffed like a miniature hospital.

Before they left, Ms Theyer passed around a sign-up sheet for some sort of physical exam that she said was mandatory the next day. One of the boys in the group piped up and tried to ask what it was for, but all that the Dean would say was that the school took the health of all its students seriously and needed to get some baseline information.

Before Madison knew it, the tour was finished up. Despite her attempts to get closer to the other students, she didn't have much to show for it. Everyone was withdrawn and upset, and she suspected it had to do with more than just first-day jitters. The orientation tour had been so fast-paced that she hadn't had much time to talk anyway. She didn't sweat it. It just wasn't a good venue to begin her investigations. The opportunities would come.

Ms. Theyer didn't ask for questions at the end of the tour, instead sorting the students of the group by their residence hall and giving them directions on how to get there. All students who attended St. Anthony's stayed on campus. Not only because the campus was so remote, but also, at least according to the school's literature, because they prided themselves on school spirit and student discipline, and having all students on campus at all times helped to create a unified culture.

Madison patiently waited her turn to be given her housing assignment. She was a little alarmed to see all of the other first-year students get sorted into groups of two or three and sent off, leaving her alone with Ms. Theyer. She had been half-hoping that she would be in the same dorm as Angel, so she could work on him a little more, but no such luck.

As Ms. Theyer turned toward Madison again, standing alone with her in front of the student center with the sun slowly setting, Madison began to feel nervous again.

"There isn't something wrong with my accommodations, is there, Ms. Theyer?" she asked, playing the role of nervous young woman to a T.

"Far from it," said Ms Theyer calmly. "In fact, you might consider yourself lucky. You've been assigned to Sacher Hall, which is somewhat unusual for first-year students. You will have an excellent opportunity to receive guidance and support from your upperclassmen." She reached into her pocket and dangled a brass key on a wooden key fob for Madison to grab.

"I do hope that you have a good school year, Miss Rose," said the Dean, her piercing blue gaze boring into Madison for a moment. "I'm sure that we'll be seeing a lot of each other soon."

Madison wasn't sure what to say to that. Earlier, Ms. Theyer had said that only troublemakers would be seeing more of her, and Madison had already determined to keep her head down when she was "Bailey".

But it seemed like a response was not required or desired. Ms Theyer raised her finger to point down a shady path toward a building set a little distance away from the others in a stand of oak trees. "Sacher Hall. Your new home. You're in room 306, on the third floor, naturally. You can ask the staff member at reception for assistance if you have trouble finding it, but you seem like a bright girl. I think you can manage."

"Thank you for the tour, Ms Theyer," said Madison meekly, accepting the key from the taller woman's outstretched hand. "I think that I'll be very happy here."

The blonde's smile grew wide, but no trace of warmth reached her eyes.

"I think so too, child. Now run along. You need to get situated and meet your roommate."

Madison turned and hurried down the shady pathway that Ms. Theyer had indicated. She looked back just before she turned a bend to see that Ms. Theyer was standing there in her usual stiff posture, watching Madison walk away with a calm, neutral expression on her face. It made Madison shiver. Was it possible that the Dean suspected something? Surely not; if she did, she would have absolutely no motivation to play along.

Despite that strange interaction, Madison was in good spirits as she made her way toward her new dorm building in the orange light of the setting sun. Her purpose here was to gather information about the school's dirty secrets, but after her tour today, she was actually kind of looking forward to the student life as well. Madison had enjoyed college, and the prospect of going back to a simpler time, when the worst she had to worry about was passing the next test, was sort of appealing.

The inside of the residence hall looked more like the lobby of an upscale apartment building than the run-down dorms Madison had stayed in her freshman year of college. Instead of a bored, surly student on work-study behind the reception desk, there was a bright-eyed and attentive-looking middle-aged woman in the same polo that the man who had taken Madison's bags earlier had been wearing.

"Can I help you, Miss?" the receptionist asked brightly. "I can show you to your room if you like."

Madison considered the offer, but decided against it. Presumably, she was about to meet the other students that she would be spending the next few months living with. It might be a bad look if it seemed like she was confused and uncertain. She already knew where she was going.

A swift, silent elevator brought her to the third floor of the building. Once again, as she stepped out, Madison was reminded of an upscale hotel or apartment building rather than a dorm. The halls were broad, and the carpeting was plush beneath her feet. Girls wandered the floor, leaned in doorways, and, as Madison could see peeking in through the open doors off the hall, sat on beds, chatting and laughing.

The atmosphere was the same as the dorms she was used to… with one small exception. There was a marked difference between two groups of girls. Girls who were wearing blue seemed completely outgoing and confident, laughing loudly and smiling wide. Girls in red were more subdued. Once she noticed it, Madison saw the difference in girls wearing casual clothes and pajamas as well. There were two distinct groups.

Perhaps another sign of bullying? If the scholarship students were this cowed, there had to be some reason for it, and Madison was determined to discover what it was.

Before she could make a start at meeting people and making connections, though, Madison had a bigger issue on her hands.

None of the rooms were numbered.

Madison tried her best to look like she knew what she was doing, making her way down the hall and peering at the doors as she passed, but there were no numbers on, beside, or over the doors that she could see.

Maybe she should have asked at the front desk after all. It probably wouldn't be a big deal to ask a friendly-looking girl for directions to her room, but now that Madison had decided to look competent and independent, she didn't really want to surrender and ask. And so she wandered, hoping that maybe she would figure out the numbering scheme or see her luggage through one of the open doors.

She was just cautiously peering into another room when a voice from nearby asked, "Looking for something, Meat?"

Madison turned to see three girls sitting together on a couch in a little lounge area that opened up from the hallway. Madison realized that she was about to have her first real conversation as a peer with one of the other students, since the conversation with Angel earlier hadn't really gotten off the ground. She steeled herself for potential trouble. Being called "Meat" wasn't exactly a great start, although she was excited at the potential for learning more about the bullying firsthand.

The girl who had addressed her was still wearing her blue uniform from the day, although she had seemingly rolled the top of the blue tartan skirt over to make it shorter, and added black knee-high socks and Vans sneakers to the regulation uniform.

Her entire style was aggressively, performatively gothic, her pale skin made even paler with makeup, her eyes decorated with dark liner, and her lips covered in black lipstick. A glossy raven bob completed the look. The girl looked like the fantasy of every horny young man who had ever hated their dad and gotten into My Chemical Romance. Especially so because she had unbuttoned her shirt far enough to reveal a generous view of her massive tits.

They have to be fake. Through Madison immediately. As a fairly flat-chested woman, she struggled mightily not to care about such things, but in this case it was obvious. The girl wasn't even wearing a bra! There was no way boobs that big could be that perky without either support or serious augmentation.

"Oh my God, Faye, you can't just say stuff like that!" giggled the girl on the other end of the couch, reaching over to slap the goth girl's knee. "You don't even know if she's a scholarship or not!"

This girl was more or less the opposite of Faye in every way, although she also wore a blue uniform. The girl was tall and slim, with brilliant blue eyes, almost disturbingly white teeth, beautiful dirty blonde hair worn in soft curls, and a dark, even, luxurious tan. There was one other thing she had in common with Faye, though… this other girl had also apparently liked to show off a little. She was wearing platform heels, and while she was actually wearing a bra, the only reason that Madison knew that was because she could see it. This other girl had apparently swapped her regulation blouse for one that was nearly see-through.

If the other girl looked like she had stumbled out of a Hot Topic, this one was a Barbie. Madison couldn't help but note that if this girl wasn't sitting near Faye, Madison would have thought she had big tits too… not that Madison cared, of course.

"Are you serious, Teagan?" drawled the goth with a sneer, crossing her arms beneath her tits, drawing even more attention to them. Madison tried not to stare as the stranger's obviously pierced nipples pressed tight against the fabric. "What blueblood would be wandering around the floor like a little lost lamb? She's meat. Guaranteed." The pale, dark-haired girl was now staring directly into Madison's eyes. Her pupils were an arresting shade of pale, ghostly blue.

"I am soooo sorry about her," simpered Teagan, turning toward Madison with a dimpled smile that Madison immediately read as fake. "It sounds worse than it is. Sort of a joke, really. Blue uniform, bluebloods; red uniforms, red meat. A little rude, but the slang predates anyone here by a decade. It was a different time. I'm Teagan, by the way. And Faye is the one being a total bitch to a new freshman for no good reason."

"Charmed," said Faye with a low chuckle.

It had taken a second for Madison to get her bearings, but she did her best to smile and roll with it. "Nice to meet you both. I'm Bailey. And, umm, what's your name?"

Madison was addressing the girl who was sitting between the two young women, flanked by Faye on one side and Teagan on the other. She had a sweet, girl-next-door kind of beauty with a curvy, slightly plump build and long, soft brown hair pulled up into a ponytail. Unlike the other two, this girl wore what looked like the regulation red uniform of a scholarship student. The only anomaly that Madison could see was some sort of black leather strap that emerged from beneath her blouse to loop around the back of her neck.

Strangely, after Madison addressed her, the young woman glanced nervously to both sides, first to Faye, and then to Teagan.

"Well," said Teagan in a tone of faint exasperation paved over with sweetness, "Don't be rude. Introduce yourself."

The girl gulped, her delicate, pale neck bobbing, then looked up with wide hazel eyes. She didn't quite meet Madison's gaze as she said, "I-I'm Heather. Nice to meet you," in a tentative whisper.

There was definitely something odd in the dynamic between these three. Teagan and Faye had almost seemed to ignore Heather's presence completely until Madison had brought her up. But the girl didn't seem to be in any mood to talk. Madison would have to see if she could get Heather alone later. For now, she searched for and found a different topic of conversation.

"You know, I was wondering why the school has the colored uniforms. They seem to be big on building the school community, and it feels like separating people like that would just cause division." She was fishing for info about the relations between the upper class and scholarship students with the comment, and it seemed like she had struck gold.

Teagan and Faye looked at each other over Heather for a moment with shocked expressions, then both of them burst into laughter.

"That is a *very* interesting idea, hun," said Teagan, fighting through a fit of giggles, "and I'm just *positive* that your heart is in the right place…"

"Everybody can already tell who's scholarship. There's just an obvious difference in level," said Faye with a lopsided grin. "The color-coding is just for convenience's sake."

"Can you imagine all of the red meat wandering around campus wearing clothes from… I don't know, where do poor people shop? The GAP?" snickered Teagan, her face pink with hilarity. "No, no, it would be even worse than the uniforms, darling; you must see that."

Madison felt a surge of excitement. The two girls weren't even trying to hide their elitism. If this was the prevailing attitude among the so-called "bluebloods", then it wouldn't be difficult at all to prove the rumors of hazing and bullying.

A little more fishing was in order.

"Well, even if some people see the two groups as different levels, it's inspiring that you two can be friends with one of the scholarship students."

Faye's perfectly sculpted, coal-black eyebrows wrinkled in confusion. "What are you talking about?"

"She means Heather," said Teagan, barely suppressing more giggles. She laid a hand on the thigh of the girl in red next to her and began gently massaging it. "And it's true! We really are the best of friends, aren't we, Heather dear?"

The sandwiched girl licked her lips and nodded. “Y-yeah,” she said softly. There was something wrong with Heather, although Madison couldn’t quite tell what. She was breathing heavily now, and her face was even pinker than Teagan’s.

“Uh-huh,” said Faye with a lazy smile, glancing sideways at Heather with hooded eyes and laying her hand on her other thigh. “Teagan and I got really, really close with our little piggy last year. And we just spent all day today… catching up.”

They were describing some sort of bullying scenario; Madison just knew it. She wanted more than ever to speak to Heather alone. Maybe she could even look for an opportunity later tonight.

All of the girls went silent for a moment, and as the conversation lulled, Madison heard something just on the edge of audibility. Some sort of mechanical buzz. But before she could determine what the source of the noise was, Teagan spoke up again.

“So, are you looking for your room? I can understand why you’re so confused! Apparently someone a few years back complained that only poor people have numbers on their rooms, or something like that. So they removed all of them.”

“That wasn't it, idiot. Someone was concerned that the room numbers would get out and there might be another kidnapping,” said Faye, rolling her eyes, still massaging Heather’s thigh with her idle hand.

Another kidnapping? Just one more thing to look into. Madison would be taking a lot of notes tonight. But before that, she wasn’t about to look a gift horse in the mouth, even if it came from these two somewhat disturbing bluebloods.

“That’s right, actually,” said Madison with a meek smile. “You wouldn’t happen to know where room three o six would be, would you?”

Strangely, Teagan and Faye exchanged glances and burst into laughter once again.

“Three o six, huh?’ said Teagan with her sweet, dimply grin.

“That’s perfect,” added Faye, her smile considerably more sharklike. “We happen to know exactly where room three o six is… and who your roommate is too.”

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Who is Madison’s new roommate?

Teagan, the toxic, bratty Barbie?

Faye, the sultry, dominant goth?

or

Heather, the quiet, meek submissive??