The Offer

Chapter 2

The street running alongside Dylan's house was a cheerful kind of chaos, a living serpent of cars parked half on the sidewalks and half in puddles that mirrored the neon glow of string lights wrapped around the trees. The autumn night had turned into a warm cocoon, thick with the smell of damp leaves and stale beer, while the bass from some pounding electro track throbbed through the Victorian walls like a giant heart.



It was the biggest party Alan had ever seen on campus—hundreds of students, red cups in hand, queued endlessly at the open gate, laughing, shouting, shoving their way into what looked like a temple of legendary debauchery. Voices clashed, laughter broke apart in the noise, and somewhere beyond, the shimmering reflections of a heated pool revealed half-naked silhouettes already drunk enough to dive in without a care.

Alan, Madison, and Larry stood a little apart, leaning against the cold body of an old, anonymous sedan, watching the crowd flow by. Madison had ditched her college outfit for a tight black dress that hugged her athletic figure, her loose hair spilling down her shoulders.

Alan, in slim jeans and an open shirt over a plain tee, was already sipping from a lukewarm beer he'd snatched from a group of freshmen. Larry, true to form, wore an oversized hoodie and a beanie pulled low over his messy hair, nervously scrolling through his phone.



"Dude, this is insane. It looks more like a music festival than some rich kid's house," Larry muttered, tucking his phone away, eyes wide at the crowd pouring through the glowing gate.

Madison crossed her arms, smirking as a gust of wind spun a dead leaf past her boots. "Yeah, and look at those guys—they totally broke the door open. If Dylan calls the cops, we're all spending the night in a cell."

Alan laughed, crushing his empty can with a mock-dramatic gesture. "Larry, your 'friend of a friend' better have us covered. If not, I'm blaming you for the hangover and the arrest."

Larry raised his hands like a shield, pretending to be offended. "Relax, man! The invite's solid. Look around—open bar, pool, and a ton of girls who definitely aren't here to talk about their thesis. It's Christmas come early."

They burst out laughing, the excitement rising like a tide, when a horn blared at the end of the street. A beat-up car screeched to a stop, and Bella jumped out like a storm, poured into a sexy top and low-rise jeans. Sean, her eternal sidekick, climbed out more calmly, locking the doors with a soft beep.

"Madi!" Bella shouted, running to Madison. The two girls crashed together in a theatrical hug, their laughter cutting through the street noise.

"Oh my God, you look amazing tonight! Those legs, girl—you're killing it!" Madison said, stepping back with her hands on her hips, giving Bella a once-over.



Bella twirled playfully, making her short skirt spin. “Please, look at you! That dress is fire. You’re smoking hot—guys are gonna fight to get a glance. Seriously, I’m jealous.”

The boys, standing like amused statues, exchanged knowing looks. Sean shook his head with a grin. “Same old story. The second they meet, it turns into a runway show. We’re invisible.”

Larry snorted. “Nah, it’s just their ritual. You interrupt and you’re dead.”

Alan folded his arms, faking boredom. “So, we going in? Or are you two auditioning for a Sex and the City reboot out here?”

Bella shot the guys a wink, looping her arm through Madison’s. “Come on, losers. And Sean—stay close. These animals look hungry.”

The group finally crossed through the gate, swallowed by the massive house that seemed to pulse with the rhythm of the music. The entrance—a grand hall with vaulted ceilings and crystal chandeliers that tinkled lightly under the bass—overflowed with moving bodies. A spiraling staircase led to upper floors drowned in dim, muffled music, and the walls, lined with old portraits—probably Dylan’s ancestors—watched the chaos with offended dignity.

The air was heavy with sweet perfume, sweat, and cheap alcohol, intoxicating enough to make your head spin before you even drank.

The guys made a beeline for the makeshift bar in the main room, a folding table piled with half-melted ice buckets and cheap liquor bottles. Sean came back with a round of cold beers, Larry threw back a suspicious shot of vodka, and Alan grabbed two glasses for

the girls. They squeezed their way to a cozy corner—a cluster of worn velvet couches around an unlit fireplace—where they collapsed in a messy circle, knees bumping.

“This place is a damn palace,” Sean murmured, raising his beer, eyes scanning the gold moldings and Persian carpets trampled underfoot. “Dylan must’ve paid for all this with his grandfather’s inheritance or something. I saw a room with a pool table and a cigar bar. No joke.”

Larry nodded, his cheeks already flushed. “Yeah, the dude’s loaded. His dad’s in real estate in New York—skyscrapers and all that. But Dylan’s chill. Not one of those rich assholes.”

Madison sipped her beer, one eyebrow cocked. “Whether it’s fancy or not, I bet there’s a secret room with a safe full of cash. Or coke. Or both.”



Laughter burst out, and Alan followed up, “And what about bets for tonight? Who’s ending up in tears in the bushes? Larry, you’re the favorite with your ghost crush on Ophélie.”

“Shut up,” Larry grunted, laughing, though his smile betrayed how entertained he was. “No, I’m saying Bella—she’s gonna dance on a table and sprain an ankle.”

Bella chucked a throw pillow at him. “Try it and I’ll drown you in the pool.”

The mood was electric, a little bubble of laughter in the middle of chaos, when a shout rose from the crowd: “Larry! Hey, Larry, over here, man!”

A tall guy with short dreads, shirtless under a denim jacket, waved from a cluster near the glass doors. Larry straightened up at once, his face lighting up.

“That’s Jake! The dude who hooked me up. Guys, I’ll be right back, promise. Don’t have too much fun without me!” He lifted his drink in an exaggerated toast, gave Madison an over-the-top wink—she rolled her eyes—and dove into the human tide, swallowed by dancing bodies.

Outside, through the steamed-up windows, people pressed around the pool, lit by solar torches that danced across the hot water. Joyful screams greeted another round of flip-cup: rival teams lined up on folding tables, downing beers and flipping cups in rapid succession. The group stretched out across the couches freed by a mass exodus, legs extending as one with a collective sigh.

Sean, an arm slung around Bella’s shoulders, scanned the room. “Hey, wait… isn’t that Tom over there? The guy from my freshman photo club?”

Bella narrowed her eyes. “The blond with the scruffy beard? Yeah, we should go say hi.”

Sean stood, tugging Bella up by the hand. “We’ll be right back, promise. Madi, keep an eye on Alan—don’t let him hit on everything that moves.”

“As if I need to,” she retorted, waving a hand.

And just like that, Alan and Madison found themselves alone on their little velvet island, the party swirling around them like a distant hurricane.

The night flowed like a cold beer: smooth, fizzy, effortless. Madison sank into the cushions, crossing her legs. “So, how’s school? Still designing bridges that don’t collapse?”

Alan shrugged, a teasing smile tugging at his lips. “Yeah. And you? Going to get rich off your econ classes? Gonna buy us a yacht for the holidays?”



She elbowed him, feigning indignation. “You idiot. Seriously, it’s going well. Yesterday we did derivatives, and the professor said I’ve got a knack for analysis. By year-end I might apply to Goldman or something. Hired straight out, glass offices and all.”

He raised his glass, this time sincere. “That’s awesome, Madi. Really. You’ve always been the smart one. Dad would be proud—and Mum would knit you a ‘future banker’ sweater just to annoy you.”

Their glasses chimed softly as they touched, and they drank in companionable silence for a beat, enjoying the easy closeness that needed no words. Alan noticed his cup was almost empty. “Hang on, I’ll top us up. Want another?”

Madison hesitated, glancing at the writhing crowd. Alone? Here? No way. But she waved the thought away with a gesture. “Yeah, go for it. But hurry.”

“Promise, two seconds.”

He slipped away, moving through the crowd like a fish in a current. Madison drummed her fingers on the armrest, watching a couple making out outrageously against a wall,

when Alan reappeared with two foamy drinks. He handed one to her with a wink. “Here—special house brew. Dylan must’ve imported it from some secret fraternity.”

She lifted the glass and grimaced, nearly spitting. “Ugh! What is that? Cat pee with syrup? You trying to muffle me or something?!”

Alan burst out laughing and flopped down beside her.

Their laughter wove back into the background noise, and the conversation slid naturally toward home—the family house up north they hadn’t been back to in weeks. “Dad’s doing better, you know,” Alan said, his tone softer. “Last scan’s clean. Mum says he’s getting his strength back—already nagging about the garden.”

Madison nodded, relief softening her face. “Phew. I was scared. But yeah, we’re okay now. This weekend we’ll bring him a giant pizza to celebrate.”

“Mum’s gonna yell at us for the cholesterol,” he replied, laughing, then started teasing about their mother’s latest supermarket mishap—the time she forgot an entire shopping list in the produce aisle. Jokes popped like bubbles, light and buoyant, when Alan leaned in suddenly, a conspiratorial brow raised.



“Hey, that guy over there—the plaid shirt near the bar—he’s ogling you like you’re the last donut on campus. You’ve got a fan.”

Madison glanced discreetly over her shoulder, spotting him: slicked hair, too-wide smile, a lost-puppy expression. She stifled a snort. “Oh God, no! He looks like a bodybuilder hamster. Walk away, poor thing.”

Alan snorted into his cup. “You’re mean. Look, he’s making a face now. He knows

you laughed at him. His heart's broken, right away."

"Oh no, that's so awkward! I'm awful, that's not right..." she moaned, cheeks coloring for real, but her eyes were bright.

Alan piled on the theatrics. "Yeah, he's gonna cry into his pillow tonight. 'Why did she look at me like that? I even used gel!' You ruined his life, Madi."

She tapped his shoulder, playful little hits that made him twist with laughter. "Shut up! Or I'll give your number to that ugly girl over there and tell her you're desperate—adopt him, please."

They exploded into more laughter, breathless—the kind of teasing that marked the closeness of siblings and friends, effortless and warm.



After a while, Madison glanced around the room, frowning. "By the way, where'd everyone go? Sean and Bella said 'back soon,' but it's been forever. And Larry's vanished too."

Alan shrugged. "Probably lost in the sauce. This party's massive, we'll run into them sooner or later. In the meantime—another round?"

"This time, I've got it," she declared, springing up and smoothing her dress. "Stay put, I'll bring back something drinkable."

She slipped into the crowd like a shadow, weaving between dancers and clusters of drunk conversations. The kitchen, at the end of the hall, looked

like a war zone—counters littered with empty bottles, the sink overflowing with cups, and some guy in a makeshift apron—probably one of Dylan's friends—playing volunteer bartender.

Madison approached with an innocent smile, fluttering her lashes. "Hey there! Could you make me two drinks of… I don't know, something strong and fruity? Like, surprise me? I'm hopeless at mixing. I owe you a dance after, promise."

The guy—a broad-shouldered brunette with an easy laugh—nodded. "No problem, princess. Surprise coming up." He shook two fluorescent pink cocktails and handed them over with a wink. "But the dance—it's now or never."

She laughed politely, grabbing the glasses. "Next round, promise!" And she was gone before he could answer, slipping back toward the living room.

From afar, she spotted their little sofa corner—and froze. Her seat was taken. A girl with short black hair and a tight red dress was perched next to Alan, talking animatedly. He was laughing, clearly hooked.

Madison came back, slightly out of breath, handing Alan a drink. "Finally! I almost had to throw hands for these."



He took the cocktail, grimacing at the sugary smell. "Thanks, Madi. Oh, and this is Rebecah. Rebecah, meet Madison. We've known each other since, what—five minutes ?"

Rebecah turned with a dazzling smile, her green eyes gleaming beneath perfectly smoked lids. She was the kind of beauty that stopped the room—curves framed by a silk black dress that flowed down to her ankles, a thin gold chain glinting at her throat, and an easy, confident grace that made the chaos around her fade away.

She'd spotted Alan sitting alone, teased him about the "haunted Victorian décor," and the conversation had clicked effortlessly. Madison sat down in the armchair beside them, curious. "So, what's your deal on campus? I've never seen you at any econ mixers or parties. Are you in some secret grad program or what?"

Rebecah shook her head, a low, sultry laugh escaping her. "Nah, nothing like that. I'm just visiting—total tourist. Don't study here, I work in marketing downtown. But tonight's my night off. Oh, and I'm Dylan's cousin—the guy throwing this haunted mansion rave."

Madison blinked, surprised. Alan's eyes went wide. "No way! Dylan's cousin?"

Rebecah shrugged with a wink. "Bingo."



The shock melted into a rush of questions—stories from Dylan's past parties, ridiculous anecdotes (like the time he drowned his iPhone during a pool-dive contest), and soon, jokes were flying fast and sharp. Rebecah's humor was quick and biting, but never cruel, and she downed her drinks with a natural ease that pulled the

three of them into a soft, glowing buzz. Their cheeks flushed, their laughter rose louder.

After what felt like five minutes but must've been an hour, Rebecah stood, mischief sparkling in her eyes. "Alright, let's move! There's a wild beer pong game next door. How about a three-person team? We'll take on whoever dares."

Alan and Madison exchanged a conspiratorial look, adrenaline and alcohol urging them on. "You in?" Alan asked, already on his feet.



"Hell yeah," Madison grinned, draining her glass. "But if we lose, I'm blaming you, Rebecah."

They slipped into the adjoining room—an old library turned battleground. Ping-pong tables lined up like altars, red cups filled to the brim, and the air thick with the sour tang of spilled beer.

Across from them stood three challengers—two guys in backwards caps and a blue-haired girl—grinning like predators. The match exploded instantly. Rebecah threw her shots with surgical precision, shouting encouragements ("Come on, bro! Dead center!"), Alan deliberately missed just to make her laugh, and Madison, fierce and focused, nailed cup after cup with infectious joy.

They jostled, high-fived, bumped shoulders, moving like a team that had known each other for years. Rebecah fit right in—her laughter was contagious, her energy magnetic.

Heads turned when she moved, whispers followed in her wake. She glowed, radiating that rare kind of charisma that made the air crackle. Alan wasn't immune—that smile, that effortless teasing—but Madison felt it too: a spark of fascination and curiosity toward this stranger who seemed to electrify the night itself.

The rematch against a group of sorority girls—heels, glitter, and shrill laughter—was epic. Rebecah landed the final throw, they exploded in a collective high-five, and their victory roar drowned in the chaos of cheers and clapping hands.

The rush from the beer pong match faded like a wave breaking on shore, leaving Madison's legs shaky and her head pleasantly hazy. She wiped a bead of beer from her forehead and glanced around the room, a lazy smile curling her lips. "Okay, I think I've flailed enough for one night. Time to chill?"



Rebecah, still catching her breath, nodded with a crooked smile, her cheeks glistening under the dim spotlights. "Deal. Victory takes it out of you."

Alan, bending to grab a stray ping-pong ball under the table, straightened with a laugh. "Same here. But the couches in there? Forget it. Probably overrun by a pack of sweaty dancers by now."

One glance toward the living room proved him right—their former velvet refuge had been swallowed by a writhing mass of laughing bodies. Alan shrugged.

"Outside, then? Fresh air might do us good. And there's still beer lying around by the pool."

They slipped through the glass doors, grabbing three cold cans off a makeshift barrel-bar, the aluminum biting at their palms. Outside, the autumn night wrapped the garden in a damp hush, the solar torches flickering weakly over the trimmed hedges. The house's noise dulled into a distant hum, replaced by the soft slap of water in the pool and the faint murmurs of a couple hidden somewhere in the dark.

They found a quiet spot on the grass—a small slope bordered by abandoned lounge chairs—and dropped down without ceremony. Rebecah stretched out flat on her back, arms spread, while Alan and Madison sat cross-legged on either side of her, their shoulders almost touching.

"Damn, that beer pong game was fire!" Alan said, cracking open his can with a sharp hiss, foam spilling over his fingers. He raised it in a clumsy toast. "To Rebecah, our sniper queen. Without you, those girls would've wiped the floor with us."



Rebecah burst out laughing, a low, throaty sound that rippled through the night. "Hey, you two carried the team! Madison, that last shot? Surgical. And you, Alan, don't even try to act innocent—I saw that smirk when you missed on purpose just to make me yell."

Madison snorted, spilling a bit of beer on her knee. "Totally did. But yeah, we crushed it. Those dudes looked like they were already regretting life."

Their laughter rolled loud and easy, drowning out the muffled thump of music from inside. Then, as if the cool air had smoothed the edges of the night, the conversation softened—words flowing with a surprising ease even Alan didn't expect.

Rebecah, half-lidded eyes tracing the clouds hiding the stars, murmured, "Nights like this don't come often."

“Yeah,” Madison agreed, plucking at a blade of grass. “The vibe’s perfect. Seriously, Alan, you should bring her around the crew. Larry and Sean would love her—especially Larry, he lives for crazy stories.”



Alan nodded, his can dangling between his knees. “Totally. She’d fit right in. Bella would adore your energy, and Sean… he’d nod like a drunk philosopher.”

Rebecah smiled in the dark, her eyes glinting. “Sounds tempting. What about you two? What keeps you going, besides classes and beer?”

The talk flowed effortlessly. Alan joked about sleepless nights spent trying to design bridges that “refused to collapse,” Madison rambled about a seminar on market flows with quiet enthusiasm. Then, curious, Rebecah turned to her. “And you, Madison? What’s next after econ?”

Madison shrugged. “Depends on my grades, I guess. If the company where I’m interning keeps me, that’d be great. And you? You sound like someone who’s got life figured out.”

Rebecah chuckled softly, rolling onto her side to face them better. “Not even close. I dropped out after one semester—too damn boring. My parents… let’s just say they’ve got enough to cover the bills, so I drift. Work sometimes, travel sometimes. A month in Bali last winter, road trips through Scotland this summer. Total mess—but the good kind.”

Alan whistled, impressed, without a trace of envy. “Lucky. My adventures are usually carpools to Manchester for shitty concerts. Still, sounds like a dream.”

Madison’s eyes sparkled. “Seriously… that’s amazing.”

Silence settled—comfortable, warm. Then Rebecah, her voice lower now, as if dipping her toes into cold water, shifted the mood. “Okay, enough about jobs and rich parents. Let’s talk about something real. Something fun.” She stretched lazily, her body forming a smooth line on the grass between Alan and Madison. After a measured breath, she added, calm and almost shy, “Can I tell you guys something?”



The words dropped like a pebble on still water. Alan and Madison traded a quick look—a half-second charged with a silent *uh-oh*—their raised brows mirroring each other. But the alcohol blurred hesitation, and they both nodded, half-grinning, half-curious.

“Go on, spill it,” Alan said, feigning casualness.

Rebecah pushed herself up on her elbows, her expression hovering between awkward and sincere, her cheeks tinted pink in the flicker of the torches.

“Hmm… how about a threesome?”

The world seemed to freeze, the air thickening under an invisible weight. Alan blinked, a startled laugh slipping out first—too loud, too forced—dying in his throat the second he caught Rebecah’s calm, unwavering gaze. His grin faltered. He bit his lip, searching for words that wouldn’t shatter the fragile magic of the night. Madison just stared, pulse thudding, sensing the tension stretching thin enough to snap.

She was the first to break it, quick and awkward: “Wait… Alan’s my brother—like, my *actual* brother.”



Rebecah froze, her eyes darting from one face to the other, her mouth parting in stunned disbelief—as if someone had just told her gravity had stopped working. The silence thickened, tight and charged, before it burst into laughter—hers first, raw and uncontrollable, rolling through the night until her shoulders shook.

Alan and Madison exhaled in sync, their own laughter following hers, shaky and relieved, muscles unclenching in the aftermath.

“Jesus, you should’ve seen your face,” Alan gasped, wiping away a tear. “Thought we were about to get kicked off the property.”

Rebecah laughed harder, breathless. “No, seriously… I totally thought you two were a couple.

You've got this *thing*—like, magnetic. I've been vibing all night thinking that's what was going on."



Madison caught something under her tone—a hint of regret, faint but real—but she didn't press. The moment softened into giggles again.

"Not the first time someone's thought that," Alan admitted with a grin, sticking his tongue out at his sister. "It sucks hanging out with your sister—everyone assumes weird shit."

Rebecah propped herself on one elbow, curiosity flickering in her eyes. "Wait, so who's older?"

Alan smirked, but Madison answered first, pointing a mock-accusing finger at him. "That idiot's two years younger. He acts like the protective one, but I've been babysitting him since diapers."

"Traitor," Alan muttered, bumping her shoulder. That set off a playful scuffle—she called him a "man-child," he shot back—and for a minute, it was all light and easy again… until Rebecah watched them quietly, a faint flush creeping up her neck, something darker glinting in her gaze. Her lips parted, slow, like she was painting out a forbidden picture in her head.

Alan and Madison noticed it. The look wasn't innocent. It burned, curious and charged, blurring lines neither of them wanted to name.

Then Beca broke the silence—soft, but direct. "You're *really* sure you're not into it? Not even a little?"

Alan laughed first—a nervous burst meant to armor himself—but Madison felt it: the seriousness laced beneath the words. This wasn't a joke. A sting of discomfort—and something else, something unnameable—passed through her. She straightened.

"What are you doing, Beca? Seriously?"

The reply came fast, unfiltered. "It'd just… turn me on. Seeing you two. Together. Just like that." Her eyes didn't waver, a raw mix of boldness and vulnerability.

Alan shook his head, still laughing, trying to brush it off. "You're nuts. Completely insane."



Rebecah dropped her gaze, a flash of regret breaking across her features. "Yeah… sorry. Too many drinks, clearly. Forget it." The tension deflated, leaving only the clinking of cans on damp grass—a fragile truce forged in awkward silence.

But she wasn't done. "You'd actually make a great couple," she murmured, half-smiling, "if you weren't, you know… siblings."

Madison chuckled, catching the thread. "With this idiot? Not in a million years."

"And this drama queen?" Alan shot back.

Their insults volleyed like a familiar game, effortless and harmless, making Rebecah laugh again. Then, quietly—her voice threading through their banter like a dare—she asked, "But… you've never kissed? Not even just to see?"

Madison froze, her tone firm. “Cut it out, Beca. That’s weird.”

The persistence came, gentle but sharp. “Would you do it, though? In front of me? Just for fun?”

The question stunned them both, the absurdity of it hanging heavy in the cool air. The alcohol blurred everything, softened boundaries they’d normally never approach. They *should* have walked away. But curiosity—dark, disquieting—held them still.

Alan, feeling the ground tilt beneath him, rose abruptly, spotting familiar shapes by the gate—Larry, Sean, and Bella waving, ready to leave. He gave Madison a subtle nod. “Hey, looks like they’re heading out. We should go.”

But before she could stand, Rebecah’s voice floated after them, low and velvety: “What if I paid you? A hundred bucks. Just a kiss.”

They turned to her, stunned. The offer hung between them, absurd and intoxicating. Madison pushed herself up, her legs a little unsteady.

Rebecah didn’t stop. “Five hundred?”

A flicker—barely a hesitation, but it rippled through both of them.

Then came the hammer: “Two thousand dollars. Just one kiss.”

The words hit like a shockwave. Two thousand. Rent money. Debt cleared. A door to something dangerous swinging open.

Alan’s mouth went dry. Madison’s pulse stuttered. And then, mercifully—

“Hey! You two! Let’s go! Cops are coming!” Larry’s voice sliced through the dark, waving from the gate.

They looked at each other one last time—three faces suspended in the electric silence—before diving back toward the swarm of escaping students.

The night swallowed its secrets whole. But that one clung to their skin, sticky and poisonous, a promise neither of them would ever fully shake.