



RUNAWAY

CHAPTER-17

BY IZUMISAN


OH, MY DEAR! YOU'VE GROWN INTO SUCH A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG LADY. IT'S WONDERFUL TO SEE YOU AGAIN.

HEY! WELCOME BACK! MEET MY AUNT! SHE WAS JUST ABOUT TO LEAVE, BUT WHEN I MENTIONED MY FRIEND EMMA WAS COMING OVER, SHE INSISTED ON STAYING TO MEET YOU!



IT'S REALLY NICE TO MEET YOU, MA'AM! BUT... UM, HAVE WE MET BEFORE? I'M SORRY, I DON'T QUITE REMEMBER.

OF COURSE, YOU DON'T REMEMBER-- IT'S BEEN AGES! COME HERE, DEAR, AND SIT WITH ME FOR A BIT.



OH, YOU HAVE SUCH AN AMAZING MEMORY!
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU REMEMBER SOMETHING
FROM ALL THE WAY BACK THEN.

I THINK IT WAS CLARA'S 10TH OR
11TH BIRTHDAY.. HAHA, I CAN STILL REMEMBER
IT CLEARLY. YOU BOTH CAME RUNNING TO ME,
AND CLARA INTRODUCED YOU AS HER
BEST FRIEND.

HAHA, AT MY AGE, YOU TREASURE
SWEET MEMORIES LIKE THESE! BESIDES,
HOW COULD I FORGET SUCH ADORABLE
LITTLE BEST FRIENDS?



IT'S SO SWEET TO HEAR YOU REMEMBER ME LIKE THAT! I'M REALLY GLAD WE'RE MEETING AGAIN!

CLARA USED TO TALK ABOUT YOU ALL THE TIME BACK THEN! AND TODAY, WHEN SHE SAID EMMA IS COMING, I ASKED, 'IS THIS THE SAME EMMA FROM YOUR JUNIOR SCHOOL?' AND I COULDN'T RESIST SEEING YOU AGAIN!

I'M HAPPY TO MEET YOU TOO! YOU'RE SUCH A SWEET AND LOVELY LADY...

HUH! Y-YOU MET MY SISTER TOO?

I-I GUESS SHE NEVER MENTIONED THAT...

U-UH, HER CHILDHOOD PHOTO? I DON'T... I'M NOT SURE... I MEAN, I...

JUST LIKE YOUR SISTER!
I CAN SEE THE SAME CHARM IN YOU. SHE
MUST HAVE GOTTEN IT FROM YOU.

OH, OF COURSE I'VE MET MIA!
SHE'S EVEN VISITED MY PLACE PLENTY OF
TIMES! DIDN'T SHE EVER TELL YOU ABOUT
THAT? IT'S ALWAYS SO WONDERFUL TO
HAVE HER COMPANY!

WELL, I'M SURPRISED SHE DIDN'T MENTION IT!
BY THE WAY, WE WERE JUST TALKING ABOUT WHEN YOU TWO
WERE LITTLE, AND I SUDDENLY GOT CURIOUS ABOUT YOUR
SISTER... DO YOU HAVE ANY CHILDHOOD PHOTOS OF HER?
I'D LOVE TO SEE HOW CUTE SHE WAS BACK THEN!

SORRY, AUNT! BUT YOU KNOW, I TOLD YOU ABOUT THEIR PARENTS. SHE MENTIONED ONCE THAT THEY WEREN'T ALLOWED TO USE PHONES, AND THEY HAD TO LEAVE EVERYTHING BEHIND WHEN THEY CAME HERE.

SO, I DON'T THINK SHE HAS ANY CHILDHOOD PHOTOS OF MIA. AM I RIGHT, EMMA?

Y-YEAH, THAT'S TRUE...

OH, I SEE...



THANK YOU SO MUCH,
THAT MEANS A LOT TO ME.

I'M SO SORRY, SWEETHEART, THAT
YOU BOTH HAD TO GO THROUGH ALL OF THAT.
IT MUST'VE BEEN SO TOUGH LEAVING EVERYTHING
BEHIND, ESPECIALLY UNDER THOSE CONDITIONS.
BUT I'M REALLY GLAD YOU'RE DOING
WELL NOW...

AND PLEASE, THINK OF ME AS YOUR
OWN AUNT. IF YOU EVER NEED ANY HELP
OR ANYTHING, DON'T HESITATE TO
COME TO ME..

AND CLARA... SHE DIDN'T TELL ME THIS EITHER. WHAT ELSE IS THERE THAT I DON'T KNOW ABOUT?

OBVIOUSLY, HE'S MET PLENTY OF PEOPLE AS MIA... BUT SHE SAID HE EVEN VISITED HER PLACE PLENTY OF TIMES. WHY DIDN'T HE MENTION THAT EVEN ONCE?

HMM, IT'S ALMOST TIME FOR MIA TO GET OUT OF SCHOOL TOO. I SHOULD GET READY TO GO PICK HER UP.

OH MY, I DIDN'T REALIZE THE TIME! I REALLY SHOULD BE GOING NOW.

I THINK IT'D BE GREAT IF YOU TOOK EMMA WITH YOU! MIA IS GOING TO BE SO HAPPY TO SEE HER!

AFTER A WHILE...

HUH, HE STAYED AT YOUR AUNT'S PLACE FOR A NIGHT TOO? WHY DID YOU BOTH HIDE THIS FROM ME?

NO, I DIDN'T HIDE IT! I THOUGHT SHE HAD ALREADY TOLD YOU. I MEAN, HE...

SORRY, I GET MIXED UP WHEN TALK TO YOU ABOUT HIM.. REFERRING TO HIM AS 'SHE' HAS KIND OF BECOME A HABIT. IF YOU'RE OKAY WITH IT, CAN I JUST KEEP CALLING HIM 'SHE'?


UH, SURE... IT'S ALRIGHT... BUT I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND THE REASON FOR HAVING HIM STAY AT YOUR AUNT'S PLACE?



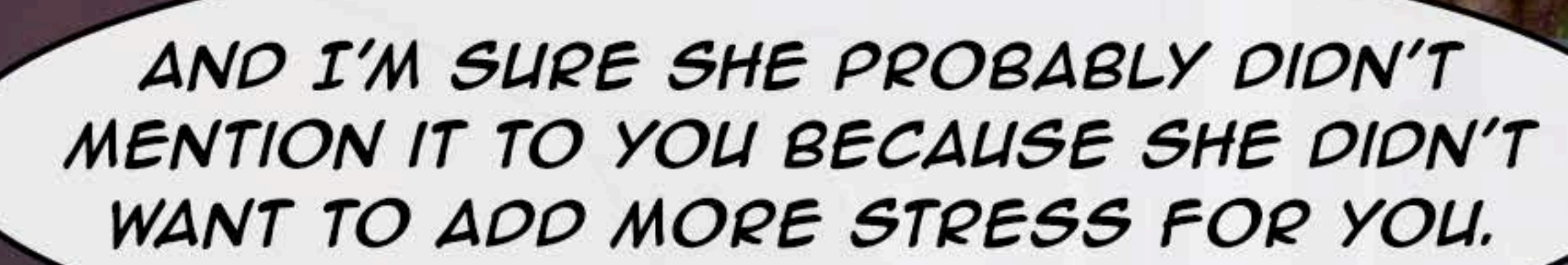
WASN'T THAT A BIT RISKY, THOUGH?
I MEAN, THERE'S A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
JUST DISGUIISING IN PUBLIC AND ACTUALLY
STAYING AT SOMEONE ELSE'S PLACE.

ACTUALLY, I HAD TO GO OUT OF TOWN
FOR A FEW DAYS BECAUSE OF MY DAD'S WORK.
AND YOU KNOW, I COULDN'T LEAVE HER ALONE,
SO I FIGURED IT'D BE SAFER FOR HER TO
STAY WITH MY AUNT.

DON'T WORRY, ANDREW PLAYED IT
VERY WELL AS MIA. ALSO, I TOLD MY
AUNT THE SAME STORY WE TOLD KEN,
SO SHE DIDN'T SUSPECT A THING.



HMM, YOU'RE RIGHT, I GUESS...
BUT HE WON'T HAVE TO ENDURE IT FOR
MUCH LONGER NOW. THANK GOODNESS
IT'LL ALL BE OVER SOON!



AND I'M SURE SHE PROBABLY DIDN'T
MENTION IT TO YOU BECAUSE SHE DIDN'T
WANT TO ADD MORE STRESS FOR YOU.





SCREECH

SCREECH




WHAT HAPPENED? WHY DID YOU STOP THE CAR? DID WE REACH ALREADY?

YEAH, ISN'T THAT A GOOD THING? AFTER ALL, THAT'S ALL WE WANT.

OUR FUTURE? OBVIOUSLY, AFTER THAT, ANDREW WON'T HAVE TO HIDE ANYMORE, AND HE CAN GO BACK TO THE LIFE HE HAD BEFORE.

NO, ACTUALLY, I NEED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT SOMETHING BEFORE YOU MET ANDREW. SHE TOLD ME THAT IN A COUPLE OF MONTHS, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO PAY OFF HER DEBT.

HEY, WE ALL WANT YOU TO GET OUT OF THIS MESS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE... BUT HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT YOUR FUTURE?



YOU DIDN'T THINK THIS THROUGH, DID YOU?
IF ANDREW QUILTS SCHOOL MID-SESSION, YOUR
COMPANY WILL DEFINITELY INVESTIGATE IT. AND WHAT IF
THEY RE-CHECK THE FAKE DOCUMENTS WE SUBMITTED?
THEY'LL GET EXPOSED TOO.

THEN, OF COURSE, EVERYONE WILL FIND
OUT YOU DON'T HAVE A SISTER. DO YOU REALLY
THINK KEN WILL HELP US AGAIN AFTER HE FINDS
OUT WE LIED TO HIM?

AND IF YOUR COMPANY FILES A FRAUD
CASE AGAINST YOU, IT COULD LEAD TO EVEN
MORE TROUBLE.

UHM, WE COULD SUBMIT SOME NEW DOCUMENTS AND SAY WE'RE TRANSFERRING MIA TO ANOTHER SCHOOL OR SOMETHING... AND MAYBE I'LL JUST RESIGN FROM THIS JOB ALTOGETHER AND JOIN A NEW COMPANY.

YOU'VE GOT A FULL-YEAR SCHOLARSHIP FOR HER SCHOOL, SO I DON'T THINK A TRANSFER IS POSSIBLE MID-SESSION. AND YOU'RE CONSIDERING LEAVING YOUR JOB?

YOU KNOW HOW DEMANDING COMPANIES ARE ABOUT EXPERIENCE THESE DAYS. FINDING ANOTHER POSITION LIKE THE ONE YOU HAVE NOW WON'T BE EASY. WITHOUT A JOB, HOW WILL YOU TWO SURVIVE?


AND AS FOR ANDREW, IT'LL TAKE TIME TO GET HER BACK TO HOW SHE WAS BEFORE. WHAT WILL SHE EVEN DO IN THE MEANTIME?

UGH, YOU'RE RIGHT. I REALLY DIDN'T THINK IT THROUGH. SO, WHAT DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD DO?

FOR HOW LONG... WAIT, YOU MEAN HE HAS TO SPEND THE REST OF THIS SESSION AS A HIGH SCHOOL GIRL?

I THINK THE BEST THING FOR NOW IS FOR YOU TO KEEP YOUR JOB AND FOR ANDREW TO CONTINUE AT SCHOOL.

I KNOW IT'S NOT WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR. BUT IF YOU BOTH CAN JUST GET THROUGH THIS PERIOD, YOU'LL HAVE ENOUGH SAVINGS EVEN AFTER PAYING OFF HIS DEBT, PLUS ENOUGH EXPERIENCE TO GET A NEW JOB. AND THERE WON'T BE ANY RISK OF SCHOOL INVESTIGATIONS EITHER.



I AGREE WITH YOU, BUT I HONESTLY
CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE HOW TOUGH IT MUST BE
FOR HIM TO HANDLE SCHOOL EVERY DAY,
AND NOW, AGAIN...

IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE YOU TWO MET IN
PERSON. MAYBE YOU SHOULD SEE HER AGAIN
FIRST AND THEN DECIDE WHETHER IT WILL BE
TOUGH FOR HER OR NOT.



I DON'T LIKE THAT KIND OF JOKE, AND JAKE WAS RIGHT THERE TOO, WHAT IF HE HAD HEARD IT? WHAT WOULD HE HAVE THOUGHT?

YOU'RE STILL STUCK ON WHAT HAPPENED THIS MORNING? COME ON, JULIA WAS JUST JOKING.

RELAX, IT WASN'T EVEN THAT SERIOUS, AND I'M SURE JULIA JUST ALL THOSE SOME RUMOURS AND DECIDED TO TEASE YOU ABOUT IT.


The scene is set in a school hallway with a tiled floor and brick steps. Two girls in blue and red school uniforms are standing and talking. The girl on the left has her hair in a high ponytail and is carrying a red bag. The girl on the right has her hair in a straight style. They are both looking at each other.

THE ONES ABOUT YOU AND JAKE.
DON'T TELL ME YOU HAVEN'T HEARD
THEM?

WELL, SOME OF OUR CLASSMATES
THINK YOU TWO ARE DATING.

RUMOURS? ABOUT WHAT?

ABOUT ME AND JAKE? WHAT?
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE
TALKING ABOUT.

The scene is set in a school hallway with large windows and a tiled floor. Two girls in blue and red school uniforms are talking. The girl on the left has a high ponytail and is holding a red bag. The girl on the right has long dark hair and is also holding a bag. They are both looking at each other.

I'M NOT REALLY SURE, BUT MAYBE IT'S JAKE'S TEAMMATES. THEY ALWAYS ASK HIM TO BRING HIS SISTER'S CAR, BUT HE NEVER DOES. THE ONLY TIME HE ACTUALLY BRINGS IT, HE ALWAYS BRINGS YOU ALONG TOO.

AND HE'S THE ONLY GUY YOU TALK TO AT SCHOOL, SO I GUESS THAT'S HOW THE RUMORS GOT STARTED.

WHAT?! DATING? HOW... WHO STARTED THOSE RUMORS?

HE ONLY GAVE ME A RIDE A COUPLE OF TIMES, AND THAT WAS JUST BECAUSE CLARA ASKED HIM TO. AND JUST BECAUSE I TALK TO ONLY ONE GUY DOESN'T MEAN WE'RE DATING!



GIRL, WHY ARE YOU EVEN GIVING ME AN EXPLANATION? I KNOW THERE'S NOTHING BETWEEN YOU TWO.

WAIT... THOSE TWO GUYS THIS MORNING WERE GOSSIPING ABOUT THE SAME THING. UGH, SHOULD I REALLY BE BOTHERED BY ALL THIS NONSENSE?

The scene is set in a school courtyard with a stone-paved ground and a brick wall in the background. Two girls in blue and red school uniforms are standing. The girl on the left has her hair in a high ponytail and is holding a red bag. The girl on the right has her hair in a straight style. They are both looking at each other. There are three speech bubbles containing their dialogue.

WHERE ARE YOU SPACED OUT NOW?
HAHA, JUST IGNORE THOSE GOSSIPERS.
THEY'LL GET BORED AND STOP ON
THEIR OWN.

YEP, LAST YEAR, THE SAME
STUFF HAPPENED WITH ME AND JACK.

UM, YOU THINK SO?

AWW, NICE TRY, BUT I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO DO RIGHT NOW!

SERIOUSLY, GIRL! IT WAS JULIA, NOT ME! HAHA, BUT OKAYYY.

MMM, ARE YOU SURE THEY WERE JUST RUMORS? MAYBE THERE WAS SOMETHING REAL GOING ON BETWEEN YOU TWO, HUH?

COME ON, YOU GUYS DID THE SAME THING THIS MORNING. CAN'T I HAVE A LITTLE FUN TOO?

The image shows two anime-style girls in school uniforms standing in a courtyard. The girl on the left has dark hair in a high ponytail and is wearing a blue jacket with a red bow tie and a red skirt. She has a red bag slung over her shoulder. The girl on the right has long dark hair and is wearing a similar blue jacket with a red bow tie and a red skirt, with a tan bag. They are in a courtyard with a stone floor, a wooden bench, and a building with large windows in the background.

BY THE WAY, OUR MIDTERM EXAMS ARE NEXT WEEK!

SO, I WAS THINKING, HOW ABOUT WE STUDY TOGETHER TOMORROW AT MY PLACE AFTER SCHOOL, OR MAYBE IN THE EVENING?



AT YOUR PLACE?
I'M SORRY, ALICE. I DON'T
THINK I'LL BE ABLE TO.

HUH, WHY? I ALREADY GOT
PERMISSION FROM MY MOM. PLUS I ASKED
JULIA EARLIER, SHE IS COMING TOO...

EXAMS? I DON'T EVEN CARE IF I FAIL NOW. IT'S NOT LIKE I'LL NEED THESE RESULTS FOR FINALS. BY THE TIME THEY COME AROUND... I'LL BE OUT OF HERE LONG BEFORE THAT.


YOU KNOW, WE CAN HELP EACH OTHER OUT WITH DIFFERENT TOPICS. AND I DON'T THINK CLARA WILL DENY YOU EITHER. SO, WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? DON'T YOU WANT TO STUDY FOR THE EXAMS?



HMM, I THINK I
KNOW HOW TO CONVINCE YOU...
SHOW ME YOUR NAILS?

COME ON, JUST
SHOW ME ALREADY!

HUH? MY NAILS?
WHY, WHAT'S UP WITH THAT?



OKAY, OKAY! SO, HERE'S A LITTLE DEAL...
IF YOU COME TOMORROW, IF YOU COME OVER
TOMORROW, I'LL DO YOUR NAILS FOR YOU.
SOUND GOOD?

UH, HERE! I WAS THINKING ABOUT
CUTTING THEM YESTERDAY, BUT I JUST
DIDN'T GET A TIME...

WHAT? HOLD UP! YOU KNOW, I ALWAYS THOUGHT YOU WERE WAY MORE MATURE THAN JACK AND JULIA. AND HERE YOU ARE, MAKING A DEAL LIKE WE'RE KIDS!

PFFT!

SORRY, I JUST CAN'T STOP!

UGH, SERIOUSLY? YOU'RE LAUGHING!

YEAH, YEAH, WE'RE JUST A KIDS, LIKE YOU'RE A GRANNY OR SOMETHING!







YOU TOOK HIM TO THE SALON
YESTERDAY?

REALLY? YOU THINK I WON'T
RECOGNIZE MY BOYFRIEND IF HE
CHANGES HIS HAIRSTYLE?

YEAH, YOU MUST'VE SEEN ON THE VIDEO
CALL. HER HAIR WAS A MESS, SO I THOUGHT
IT'D BE A GOOD IDEA TO GET IT DONE BEFORE
YOU CAME HERE. HONESTLY, I'M NOT SURE
YOU'LL EVEN RECOGNIZE HER NOW!

ALRIGHT, LET'S MAKE A BET THEN!



YOUR BOYFRIEND IS THERE TOO. CAN YOU SPOT... HER?

WOW, THERE ARE SO MANY STUDENTS AROUND...

IS HE, SOMEWHERE IN THESE STUDENTS? UM... I... I DON'T SEE HIM.



LOOK OVER THERE!
THE ONE WITH THE LIGHT-
COLORED LEATHER BAG.

REALLY? IS THAT HIM?
BUT WAIT, WHAT'S HE DOING...

IS HE HOLDING THAT
OTHER GIRL'S HAND...



OH, DON'T GET THE WRONG IDEA!
I KNOW THAT GIRL. HER NAME'S ALICE.
THEY ARE JUST FRIENDS.

SO WHAT? YOU EXPECT HER
TO HANG OUT WITH BOYS AS MIA?

FRIEND? WHY DID HE
BECOME FRIENDS WITH A GIRL?

UH, I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE
IT'S HIM... HE LOOKS COMPLETELY
DIFFERENT FROM BEHIND.

NO, IT'S NOT ABOUT HER...
I ACTUALLY HAVE SOME OTHER
STUFF TO DO TOMORROW.

HUH, OTHER GIRL?

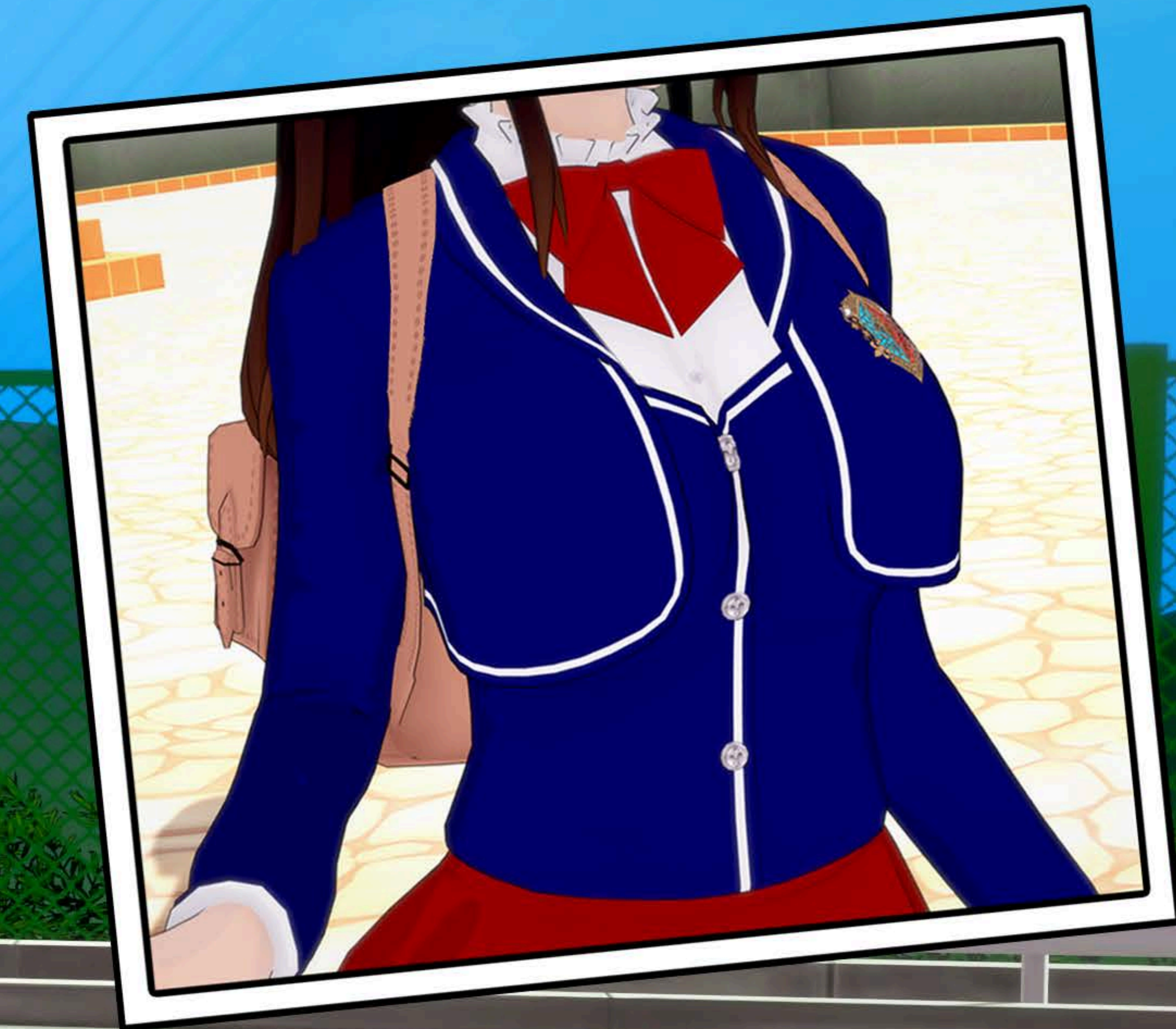
CLARA'S HERE! IF YOU
WANT, I CAN TALK TO HER AND GET
HER PERMISSION FOR YOU.

OH, AND BY THE WAY, WHO'S THAT
OTHER GIRL WITH HER? I'VE NEVER
SEEN HER BEFORE.



EMMA!

OH, SHE'S YOUR SISTER!



*HUH, IS THIS FOR REAL...
HOW DID HIS BODY CHANGE SO MUCH...?*



WHY DOES SHE LOOK
SO STUNNED?

SHIT!



WHY IS SHE ACTING SO WEIRD ALL OF A SUDDEN?

NO, MY NAILS ARE FINE JUST THE WAY THEY ARE. I DON'T NEED ANYTHING DONE.

UGH, HAS SHE EVER ACTED NORMAL, THOUGH? SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN LIKE THIS...

MAYBE YOU SHOULD FIND ANOTHER VOLUNTEER TO SHOWCASE YOUR NAIL ART ON... HAHA!

YEAH, YEAH, FINE! I'M NOT THAT FAR, YOU DON'T HAVE TO SHOUT IT LIKE THAT.



SO, YOU STILL DOUBT THAT IT'LL BE TOUGH FOR HER TO GET THROUGH THE REST OF THE SCHOOL YEAR?

TO BE CONTINUED...