

I stood at the bottom of the steps that led to the looming main building of Charrasee College, my mother's sickly sweet words still ringing in my ears.

*"This place is costing a lot of money, Eleanora, but you're a smart girl and we know you'll do the family name proud,"* she'd said with that smile she always wore. The one that had nothing to do with happiness or affection, and instead everything to do with *appearances*. It still made me shiver just thinking about it.

The building in front of me was old, the type that was made by homesick settlers to resemble the old world cities they had left behind. Huge grey stone blocks marked the corners of the building, while red brick made up the facade. You could see where renovations had been done to bring it up to modern building codes too. Smooth scars on its weathered face.

I was meant to be climbing these steps and finding the office where I would be told where my dorm room was, but I was stuck battling my frustratingly tenacious anxiety. I was enrolled as a girl, sure... But what if they *knew*? What if they didn't want me in a girl's dorm room and stuck me in a male one with a dude? Well, my immediate reaction would be to cry, but I had no idea how I'd get through college after that. Gosh I was scared.

Well, I had to find the damn place first, so I began to climb the steps, struggling to haul my oversized and overstuffed bag up the steps. Why did they make the steps just a bit too short? Or was it my legs that were too long. Damn long legs. I looked a tiny bit freakish with my legs, like was always wearing heels. Also... sure, there was a wheelchair access ramp off to the side that would make the whole wheeled suitcase thing a breeze, but it was *off to the side*. I wasn't going to waste time walking all the way over there!

Getting to the top was a struggle, but I made it. I wanted to say I missed the days when I had testosterone, but I was one of those lucky few who'd gotten on T-blockers. Age fifteen and the impending late onset of facial hair had finally done me in. Knocked me out cold like... a boxer in a ring or something. Had to be revived with a few pills of estrogen under my tongue.

At least when I'd melted down, my parents had been listening to Aunt Vicki and they'd actually done the right thing. Aunt Vicki was great. Even the thought of her brought a bashful smile to my lips as I remembered the last time we'd spoken, two months ago at a family gathering. There should be a trademark symbol next to that. Family Gathering™. Both letters capitalised too.

*"Hey girl! How's my favorite tree-related relation huh?"* Aunt Vicki had laughed as she pulled me into a hug from behind.

I'd let out a little squeal as her arms wrapped around me. Aunt Vicki always brought out the bubbles in me. That had earned a disapproving look from mother, of course, but Vicki was the older sibling, so she wouldn't dare say anything.

*"Auntie that didn't even make sense!"* I'd giggled spinning in her arms to beam up at her. She was an imposing woman. So tall!

*"Sure it does! Glades have trees, so your name is tree related,"* she had winked.

I'd just sputtered in reply, then buried my face in her shoulder. She was the only one in the family who hugged anyone. The rest were too proper for that.

I was grinning just thinking of my aunt. She was so great, and I knew that at least she loved me. That was enough — but only just — to keep me going.

Once up the stairs, I just needed to open these giant slabs of wood and talk to whatever receptionist was waiting on the other side. They were nice doors, all things considered. They were a bit weathered, but someone had been taking care of them. The pattern of the grain... no, don't get distracted. Forward, onwards, to victory or death! Probably death.

I pushed them open, but not without a bit of effort. My word did I need to do something about the whole being a muscle wimp thing. Was muscle wimp a phrase? Well, it should be, it was a good phrase. Maybe I should enter it onli—

"Hello miss, how can I help you?" a girl said from behind the counter. She looked like she was five years older than me, but I wasn't really looking at that. Her eyebrows were so good. The curves were great, I should ask— "Miss?"

"Damn your eyebrows are nice!" I blurted, then went bright red as I realised my mouth had run away from me again.

"Thank... you..." she said, smiling but also looking a little confused by my outburst.

"O-oh! Right! Uh, I'm trying to find the Selworth Hall?" I asked in embarrassment, thanking whatever deity might be watching over us all that I'd remembered the name of the place. Objects, faces, patterns and shapes? My mind was like a trap. Words and numbers? The heck are those?

“Oh, see that map behind you? It’s marked as building number fourteen,” she said, smiling sweetly and pointing at the map. She probably wanted me out of her hair real quick.

“Oh cool a map! That’s good thank you! Maps are great,” I chirped, happy to have something visual to look at and distract me from my embarrassment.

“Yeah... well, good luck finding it. Have a nice day!” she said, her smile faltering into confusion for a moment again at the start of her sentence. Gah, I kept being strange.

I hurried over to the map, dragging my bag behind me. Even with the wheels it was a struggle. My parents had just kinda thrown me out of the car as they drove past with a gruff, “*Good luck Eleanora,*” from my father. My father was emotions-phobic. They gave him a rash or something. He was also still trying to get his mind around the fact that I was weak and noodle armed. “*What do you mean you can’t help me move the furniture?*”

With the map and my destination planted firmly in my mind, I was off on a mission to find that building. Or complex, really. The map had blocked out a series of buildings that were in a rough square, with a larger square one on the southern side that looked like the admin building. Selworth Hall wasn’t just your average college hall, no they had weird delusions of superiority and grandeur. They styled themselves as some sort of old English boarding house, with all the ridiculous trappings of faux tradition that it implied.

Damn, I was being super judgemental. Just because my parents had decided on the hall, didn’t make it automatically the worst hall of the lot. I was damn lucky in so many different ways and I needed to remember that. My suffering was nothing compared to others. I needed to suck it up and get to work, as father was fond of saying. He had a lot of fond sayings. Sometimes, he spoke entirely by quoting other people. It was odd.

Anyway, this meant five minutes of walking across the darkening campus to find the building I needed. It was strange, this college. The original buildings were clustered together in the center, their cold stone architecture an intriguing counterpoint to the smooth steel and glass of the newer buildings. Call me weird, but I’d always loved that blending of old and new wherever I saw it. The way large sheets of glass were cut specifically to fit against the artfully worked old stone.

I loved that type of thing. Forming something around a base instead of trashing everything so you could achieve perfect lines. I envied those people over in older countries with their organically formed streets. Sure, congestion was probably awful, and— Oh, this was where I needed to be.

Darn, the moment of truth I guess. I wasn't exactly dressed particularly girlishly either, with my pop culture T-shirt and open white dress shirt over the top of it, scuffed navy jeans and black converse. My only concession to my mother's stupid lessons on appearance being the tight bun my long, dirty blond hair was wrapped in. I wished I could have it shorter, but my mother had explained that if I was going to be a woman, I had to be a *woman*. So my hair was down to my butt, and it was, well... a pain in the ass.

Shaking myself from yet another runaway train of thought, I looked up at the old building. Selworth had been around as long as the College had been here. This place didn't have the huge wooden doors though, having replaced them with nice functional two way glass doors. It was a start. Maybe this place wouldn't be so bad after all?

I pushed through and into a neat foyer with very convincing fake plants and a tiny little flowing water feature. It was homely in a weird corporate sort of way, which was probably the point if I had to guess. The reception didn't have anyone behind it, but as I moved in towards it, someone bustled out of a back door and smiled.

"Hello! New student are we? Welcome! What's your name dear?" the matronly old woman asked warmly, her glasses slipping down her nose as she looked over them to get a look at me.

"Uh, my name is Glade," I supplied before my brain realised she needed all of my name, not just the part I liked, and I blurted, "Oh! Right, uh, Eleanora Glade Stokes. Sorry."

Even when I said my full name it was just a jumble of letters coming out of my mouth. I hated the first name my parents had insisted on giving me. Eleanora, like seriously? It sounded like it had way too many vowels and stuff. I'd gotten to do my second name though, which I had everyone use, Glade. Simple and easy to say! Parents refused to use it though, preferring to say the one they had slapped on me. They loved using it too. Saying the whole damn three syllables.

I looked up when the lady cleared her throat. "Not a problem my dear, let me just look you up in our system... and, ah! It seems you are in the Meyer dorm. Here, let me get your keys, one moment please!" she smiled, moving back out through the door where I couldn't see her.

Was the Meyer dorm a guys one or a girl one? Damn, how did you tell?

When she came back out, she had a key and an access card, "Here you are dear! Your roommate will take good care of you I'm sure, she's a lovely girl. Her name is Aimee, just so

you're not going into your room blind. Oh, and if you need anything, be sure to come down here and ask me."

Oh thank gosh. I was in a girl's dorm. The key, when I got it from her, said I was in number 13. I had no idea where that was, or even where the building was.

"Um...?" I started to ask hesitantly.

"Out the left door right there, down the corridor, across the Meyer quad out there — but don't walk on the grass though, it's against the rules, use the path around the outside — and it's the building with the stag emblem on the front. Can't miss it!" she smiled amicably, making zigzagging motions with her hands to give me an idea of where to go.

"Thank you!" I smiled shyly. She seemed genuinely nice. Matronly even.

I left out through the door she'd pointed to and made my way around the quad to the building she'd told me about. It was large, with two wings and a central taller portion in the middle. It was all the same old grey stone multi-storey construction as the rest of the college and looked to be just as old as everything else.

I used my keycard to open the door and looked nervously around. No real indication of where to go, but a quick stammered question to a passing student had me pointed in the right direction. I wandered up a flight of stairs, dragging my suitcase every step, and then down a hallway.

It was nice in here. There were more of those attempts to merge both old and new architecture, but it was fairly obvious that the interior of the building had been gutted at one point or another. I found my number pretty quickly and hesitated at the door. Please let my roommate be cool.

I took a few deep, calming breaths and stuck my key in the lock, turning it with a little effort. When the door opened, I was surprised to find music playing from inside. Interesting. It looked like they had some good sound proofing in the walls.

The music had some strange vocals, I noticed as I pushed into the room. No weird music was going to scare me! There was a little three yard corridor that had a doorway that probably led into the private bathroom. That was something I was more than happy about. A bathroom that I only had to share with one other person. No communal showers here!

I moved into the room I'd be sharing with whoever Aimee was... and met her. My word did I meet her... Oh my gosh! I gave a squeak and dropped my suitcase with a thump to the ground.

My face going bright red as I turned away and realised just what those *strange vocals* had been. What do I do in this situation? Someone help! Fuuuu— dge!

She'd been spread eagled and bottomless on her bed, the biggest dildo I'd ever seen planted like a damn flag inside her and she'd been... wow that had been some rather... emphatic pumping. Going to town, I think was the word, or phrase. Oh my... oh my dear damn gosh darn.

"Oh fuck!" Aimee swore, and I heard a rustle as she grabbed her covers and threw them over herself. "Who the fuck are you?"

"U-uhh. I-I'm... I'm... I'm... Glade!" I squeaked, shaking like a leaf, my heartbeat through the roof and my eyes still very much turned away. Who just... just... did that! In the open!

I had never been prepared for this type of thing! This wasn't in the simulations! Crap! I hadn't seen another naked person since gym class in high school, and even then the guys had been too scared of catching "The Gay" to take their underwear off. Nudity in my family was taboo so dark it was worthy of exile! Not actually, I mean maybe... I didn't know with my mother, but still... she would have keeled over and died on the spot in my position.

"Ah shit, are you my roommate? I thought since you weren't at orientation that I might not have one! I'm so sorry!" she laughed a little hysterically, but not sounding sorry at all.

"Yeah I'm your roommate... I think. This is room thirteen right?" I said, my tone somewhere between strangled cat and panicking deer. I really hoped I was wrong and I could go somewhere else where I could start over with someone new.

"Yeah this is room thirteen. Well this is certainly a fun way to meet each other!" she laughed again, sounding a little more sane this time, and I heard the sound of her moving around the room for a moment. "Alright it's safe to turn around."

Was it really though? Would it ever be safe to meet her eyes again? I turned reluctantly back around to find her with a towel wrapped around her hips. She was still holding that absolutely enormous dildo, which was definitely, on closer inspection the biggest dildo I'd ever seen. Although to be honest I only had the one I needed to dilate with every few days, and it was a smallish metal one. Hers was... intimidating. I stared at that thing like it was going to bite me or something. It had like... ribs and stuff!

She saw me staring at it and winked, "I'm going to go clean up before we properly introduce ourselves, and I can't exactly leave myself like this now can I? Need to finish the job."

I wasn't able to reply, a strange, wild, almost singing squeak of panic coming from my throat instead.

"Right... well, see you soon!" she said, brushing past me and entering the toilet.

"Y-you forgot pants!" I finally managed to say.

"Don't need em!" she called, closing the door.

I stood in the hallway, completely stunned by what had just happened. People don't just... how was she acting so casual about this? My mind was spinning. Even worse was the way my brain had decided to capture that first impression of her and store it with great care. I didn't need the image of her spread open and bottomless on the bed with that... that... thing inside her! I shuddered just thinking about trying to get that giant thing inside my own recently acquired vag... anyway!

I picked my suitcase back up and yanked it across the floor to the empty bed. The room was partitioned into two mirrored spaces by a wall. There was a desk and wardrobe built in, with the beds on either side of the room. Aimee's side was a bit of a mess, she had clothes everywhere. A lot of clothes. Maybe she had more clothes than she could fit in the storage they gave us?

I opened my suitcase carefully, making sure that it didn't explode everywhere, because I might have packed it pretty tight. I used the unpacking to distract myself from the trauma of recent events, struggling to work out where to put everything. Already I was crippled by indecision. This was going to be so tough! I knew my laptop, keyboard and mouse would go on the desk at least, so I did that, then stared down at the rest in consternation.

When Aimee came back out of the shower, my attention was caught by the shade of pink that her cheeks had gone from the heat of the shower. How would I make that shade with the paints I had? I don't think I had quite the right red. Having to whittle down my collection of paints to just a select few had been so different. I could get pretty close with what I had though. Still, I needed to buy some more to fill my collection back out.

She had shoulder length brown hair, a big smile and expressive hazel eyes that were confusingly amber in one light and then brown the next. She was shorter than me, and a hell of a lot curvier in that huge bottomed way that some girls were. I was more of a stick of ciabatta while she was a full loaf of fluffy bread.

“Sorry about that,” she said sheepishly. “I didn’t think anyone but me could get in ya know?”

“Oh it’s fine,” I smiled awkwardly, avoiding her eyes, deciding to finally take my hair down out of the stupidly tight bun it was in.

My hair cascaded down my back like water pouring over a cliff. It swung back and forth for a moment, the weight of it giving it a lot of momentum. I had a lot of hair, but not only was it long and grew stupid fast, it was also thick. Really damn thick. I swear I could knot it up and use it as a blunt weapon or something.

“Wow!” Aimee exclaimed, shifting to get a better look at my hair. “That’s wild, how is it that long? What on earth sort of hair care routine do you need to go through to get it looking like that?”

I shrugged, feeling a little embarrassed by it. “Uh, I’ve been growing it for years. I sorta thought I needed to have it long, for... um, reasons. I keep it in a bun almost constantly these days, it’s too much of a pain to do anything else with it.”

“Why don’t you get it cut?” she asked, staring at the cascade with something like awe.

“My mum. She wants me to have it long, so I need to have it long,” I told her, beginning to gather my hair back up for a more comfortable bun. The wispy, messy kind.

Using the same scrunchie as before, I put it in a ponytail and then twisted it all the way up into the much looser and more comfortable bun, then pinned it in place with my pencil and a few bobby pins. The sigh of relief I let out was explosive as the headache from my damn hair being pulled tight began to ease.

“Damn...” Aimee murmured, before smiling again. “So uh, do you want to get dinner at the dining hall? Try and um, smooth over that first meeting.”

“Oh a dining hall? I thought we just had the common room kitchen. Alright, uh... lead the way. I have no idea how to get around this place yet,” I said shyly.

“Not a problem! I have it memorised already, even though I’ve only been here like two days,” she grinned as she casually walked into her partition. “Give me a second to get dressed.”

She had such a calm way about her.



Once she was dressed, she beckoned to me and we left the room. I was still in the outfit I'd turned up here in — an outfit that mother had frowned at, she hated my flannel and my pop culture T-shirts — and Aimee was in a simple jeans and T-shirt combo. I followed hesitantly along behind her as we exited the Meyer building and started towards the back of the main central one. A lot of other students were wandering over there as well. Guess we shared a dining hall with all the other houses too.

“So um, what are you here to study?” Aimee asked as we walked, smiling over me. She looked like she was still feeling a little guilty, in a cheeky sort of way.

“Art stuff,” I said, giving her a small smile back. “I can't remember the stupid official name for it, but I'm apparently good at painting, so here I am.”

“Nice! I'm a basic bitch doing commerce *stuff*, as you put it,” she grinned, looking around us at the other students. Her eyes rather blatantly hitched on a dude coming the other way. The dude was... a dude. I think he might have been cute? I wasn't sure.

When he was past us, I couldn't help a nervous chuckle, even if I didn't say anything about it. This girl was very... sexual.

“What?” she asked. “He not your type?”

I shrugged, a habit I seemed to be forming around her. “Nah, not that I know of.”

“You don't know your type?” she frowned, then indicated a guy across the quad of grass. “What about him? He's a bit nerdier than I'd like, but he's still cute.”

I looked over at the guy who'd been mentioned and really examined him. I tried viewing him in the same light that all the protagonists of my mother's romance novels did. My mother had started giving me those things as soon as it had become obvious that I was going to transition, and it had only ramped up as I changed, leading to a lot of confusion and nothing else.

The guy didn't really elicit anything particularly interesting in me, and I turned back to Aimee with a shake of my head. “Nothing, why?”

“Who *are* you interested in?” she asked, squinting at me like I was a crazy puzzle or something.

"I don't know. I've never really thought about it... I had other problems on my mind when I was growing up," I said, avoiding that piercing gaze of hers. Let's not have the trans talk just yet.

"Well... Are you into girls then?" she asked casually. "That would make our um... initial meeting a little more awkward."

"I don't know," I said with a long sigh. Mother had been trying to get me to look at some of her friend's sons for a while now. Some of them had checked me out for sure, but they all knew who I used to be, and you could see it in their eyes. I was an attractive girl, or so I'd been told, but that didn't stop the stigma from overriding the way my hips curved or the way my neck arched.

"Oh, this is going to be a fun year. I can't wait to see little Glade have her sexual awakening at college," she grinned, her eyes alight with excitement. Oh no.