







"Settle down, everyone. We have a lot to discuss today. Please, take your seats," Ms. Carpenter's voice rang out, clear and authoritative.

Raven hesitated at the doorway, dark eyes sweeping over the room with an intensity that belied her feigned uncertainty. She had the look of a new student, out of place and unsure, but beneath that facade, her gaze was sharp, searching for every angle, every opportunity.

Jacob, trailing just a step behind, picked up on her reticence. "Something wrong?" he asked, his voice imbued with genuine concern.

A hint of a falter entered her voice, purposefully crafted. "I-I don't know where to sit..." she murmured, her eyelids fluttering delicately.

Jacob's smile was earnest, a stark contrast to the layers of her machinations. "How about next to me?" he offered, indicating an open chair beside him.


Pausing for a beat, Raven's eyes darted to the suggested seat, then back to Jacob. A blush, perfectly timed, colored her cheeks. "Would that be okay?" Her voice was soft, dripping with faux innocence laced with the subtlest hint of flirtation.

Jacob's laugh was light, unaffected. "Of course, it's just a seat," he said, breezily dismissing any deeper implications. "Come on."









Hey, I think Jacob may have found himself a new girlfriend. Look.

*\*whisper\**

Mmm, you sure?  
Her eyes tell a different story.

Jacob? No way.  
That man is too head-over-heels  
for Candice.









\*tch!\*





Candice!  
Nice of you to join us.

Sorry, Ms.C.  
I had to use the restroom and  
lost track of time.

Please,  
take a seat.





Uhm...





"I believe you're in my seat," Candice remarked calmly, her tall stature casting a formidable shadow on the adjacent wall.

Jacob, sensing the subtle tension, jumped in. "Candice, I thought it'd be alright if Raven sat there just for today. She didn't know where to sit."

A momentary flicker of unease crossed Candice's eyes. "We've sat in these same seats all year, Jacob," she gently reminded, a twinge of sadness in her eyes.

"I understand," Jacob replied, his tone apologetic, "I just wanted to be welcoming."

Raven, ever the opportunist, chimed in. "I can move, if you'd like," she offered, her voice dripping with feigned concern.

Letting out a soft sigh, Candice nodded. "No, it's okay," she conceded, choosing the seat directly behind Raven. As she moved past, her gaze lingered on Raven, attempting to decipher the unfamiliar girl's countenance. Settling into her new spot, she remarked with a hint of jest, "Trust my boyfriend to always be the gentleman," though beneath the light-hearted quip, a faint shadow of unease began to take root.





The classroom's ambience subtly shifted as Ms. Carpenter prepared to address her students. "I'd like everyone's attention up front. Today, we have a couple of new additions to our class," she began, her voice carrying a note of warm welcome. "First, Raven?" she gestured towards the young woman who, despite her hidden motives, feigned a hint of shyness. Upon Ms. Carpenter's silent cue, Raven hesitantly raised a hand, offering a tentative wave to her peers. "And over here," Ms. Carpenter continued, turning her gaze to the opposite end of the front row, "is Luke." Luke, with his pale skin and bleached blonde hair, looked up sternly, his tough expression inflexible. He gave a brief, rigid wave, a sharp contrast to Raven's reserved gesture. "Let's ensure both of them feel right at home here at Maple Valley High."

Pivoting swiftly to the day's agenda, Ms. Carpenter instructed, "Now, everyone, I need your copies of 'Romeo and Juliet' out. We'll pick up from the scene where the Nurse returns to Juliet with news of Romeo."

While the students rustled their books into position, Raven leaned discreetly toward Jacob, her voice soft. "I...uh, haven't gotten my copy yet," she whispered, feigning helplessness.

Jacob, ever accommodating, whispered back, "No worries. You can read over my shoulder." Both of them scooted their chairs slightly closer, allowing better proximity for shared reading. As Jacob adjusted his book to create a shared space, Raven subtly leaned in, her gaze not on the words of Shakespeare, but locked intently on Jacob's unsuspecting eyes. Unbeknownst to him, she was not interested in the tragic tale of star-crossed lovers but, instead, silently weaving her own intricate web right beside her prey.









Moments later, the engrossing scene from 'Romeo and Juliet' came to a close, punctuated by Ms. Carpenter's enthusiastic clapping. "Bravo, Sam! A job well done," she praised the student who'd just concluded the act.

"Now, my lovelies," Ms. Carpenter continued, barely containing her excitement, "I have some fantastic news to share. We're going to bring Shakespeare to life by staging a 'Romeo and Juliet' performance for the entire school!"

The class reaction was decidedly mixed; a ripple of apprehension spread across the room. The lackluster enthusiasm was tangible, some students exchanging wary glances while others let out audible groans of dismay.

Undeterred, Ms. Carpenter's eyes twinkled with unwavering optimism. "Oh, come on! It'll be a blast once you all get into the spirit of it," she insisted. She paused, her gaze sweeping the room thoughtfully, then suddenly lit up with an idea. "I know! Why not start with a little demonstration to get us all warmed up? May I have two brave young ladies to re-enact the scene we've just covered between Juliet and her Nurse?"

Silence enveloped the classroom, the tension palpable as students carefully avoided making eye contact, fearing they'd be the next target of her exuberance.

Seeing no hands in the air, Ms. Carpenter decided to make the choice herself. "Natalie," she began, pointing towards the girl sitting front and center, "And...Keiko!" Her gaze landed on the tall Japanese girl in the back, known around school for her basketball prowess more than her acting.

Both girls exchanged uneasy looks, the weight of the unexpected assignment pressing on them. "Come on up here," Ms. Carpenter beckoned, waving them forward with an inviting hand. "No time like the present to step into the world of Shakespeare!"





Natalie and Keiko took their places at the front of the room, two islands of uncertainty in a sea of expectant faces. Keiko, tall and rigid, kept her hands clasped tightly in front of her, her gaze drifting to a distant point on the classroom floor. Meanwhile, Natalie's discomfort manifested in a series of nervous fidgets: a tug at her shirt hem, a hasty swipe of hair behind her ear, and a constant scratching at the back of her head.

Ms. Carpenter, ever the observant teacher, recognized the palpable tension and quickly interjected. "Ah! Silly me, I almost forgot." With a swish of her hand, she pushed a neatly printed sheet towards them. "I've prepared a few short lines for this very purpose. Don't worry, it's nothing too complex."

Natalie leaned in to get a better look at the script, her eyes widening slightly as she gauged its content. Keiko, however, looked even more apprehensive, if that were possible.

Ms. Carpenter tried to assuage their fears. "It's just a snippet! You, Natalie, will be our Juliet. And Keiko," she paused, sizing up the athletic girl, "you'll play the Nurse."

Keiko's brow furrowed. "You mean like... a wet nurse?"

The unexpected comment caught Ms. Carpenter off-guard. Her eyes inadvertently darted to Keiko's prominent chest before quickly returning to her face, cheeks flushed in slight embarrassment. "No, no, the Nurse in the play, dear," she corrected swiftly, grateful for the light chuckles that broke the building tension in the room.

Eager to move past the awkwardness, Ms. Carpenter clapped her hands together. "Alright then, let's get this show on the road. Whenever you're ready, ladies."







Nurse, you've returned!  
What says Romeo?

*\*nervous\**

*\*fidget\**



Speak quickly!  
My heart cannot bear  
the suspense!

*\*blink\* \*blink\**







Keiko, what—?!

HE SENDS HIS LOVE  
AND WISHES TO MEET IN SECRET!!

\*gasp\*

\*woosh!\*





Uh...  
N-Nurse?

*\*sob\**

Yet, love's path  
is never without thorns....



