
Chapter 1

“Don’t talk to me and don’t tell anyone you know me.” Beckett Dawson’s cold demand scraped along her skin.

Her soon-to-be stepbrother usually spoke to her in a cold monotone. The threatening edge was new and made the nervous knot in her stomach tighten. The rest of her body sat motionless in the passenger seat.

Greer Smith’s head was lowered and her shoulder-length brown hair concealed the side of her face. Her first instinct was to bite back at him, but she took some breaths to quell that notion. She needed to think before she acted.

“Did you hear me?”

Beckett’s sneered question had her tightening her hands into fists. She snuck a glance at him out of the corner of her eye. His chiseled jaw was locked and his bronze eyes were hidden behind aviators, but she knew they were cold and indifferent—the same way he had looked at her for the past two weeks.

She drew another breath, lifted her head to look out the windshield, and concentrated on making sure her reply was calm and steady. “Yes. We don’t know each other.”

Beckett’s response was to turn the music up to a bass-pounding, windshield-shaking level. Greer slowly let out the breath she had been holding, relieved they were back to ignoring each other.

The plan had been to have her mom, Vivian, take her to her new school. But Vivian’s new fiancé, David Dawson, stunned everyone in the kitchen last night when he overruled.

“That is ridiculous. Beckett is already going there. He will take Greer.”

David continued eating, like he hadn’t just dropped a bomb.

Vivian and Greer’s eyes had widened at each other before they swung toward Beckett’s rigid body. Vivian then turned back to David.

“I can take Greer. I really don’t mind, David.” Vivian hastily assured her fiancé.

David looked up, seemingly oblivious to the tension at the table. He leaned toward Vivian and cupped her cheek with one hand. “Honey, your work is in the opposite direction. Beckett doesn’t mind.” He pinned Beckett with a razor-sharp look. “Do you Beckett?”

Now here Greer was in a supple, black leather, bucket seat with white stitching that was amazingly comfortable. She thought all car seats were treated the same, she was wrong. Too bad she wasn’t enjoying it.

The barely veiled hostility radiating from Beckett had been present since she and her mom had moved in two weeks ago. Being in a truck, a place she was unable to escape, was excruciating. She hadn’t moved a muscle since she had reluctantly entered the gleaming, black pickup truck. The air, as usual between them, was thick, but inside the confines of the truck, it was stifling.

Luckily, her after-school job at The Coffee Shack was within walking distance from her new school. And since Beckett had football there would be no forced ridesharing after school.

They were a couple of blocks from the start of the lush, green Oak High School campus when Beckett pulled over to the curb and shut the music off. Looking straight ahead, he said in a deadly serious voice, “Get out.”

Greer looked around the busy, city corner. “Seriously?”

The aviator lenses turned in her direction and she saw her incredulous face reflected.

“If we don’t know each other, how would I explain you getting out of my truck?”

She didn't mind walking, it wasn't far. She was just stunned. Wordlessly, she undid her seat belt and slid out of the truck to the ground. As soon as the door clicked shut, the glimmering black Mercedes truck shot forward and was soon out of sight.

He actually did it. He drove away and left her. Greer didn't know why she was surprised, but she was. He had left without a backward glance. She slid the backpack she was holding over one of her shoulders and started the walk to her new, elite private high school.

Ten minutes later Greer was admiring the awning the big, old oak trees formed along the drive up to the school's wrought iron gates. A week ago, Greer and her mom had entered the imposing gates for the first time.

They had both gotten out of the car in front of the administration building and slowly took in the private high school she would be attending. Greer had lived in New Hampshire her entire life, but obviously only knew the middle-class sights. What was before them, was straight out of a movie.

If Greer didn't know better, she would swear they were in London. The school had a distinct old royal feel. The sprawling, Tudor-style school had rustic red bricks, imposing arches, and intimidating doors. Ivy was clinging to the building and the grounds were covered in artistic bush sculptures, colorful flowers, sprawling oak trees, and lush green grass as far as the eye could see. Off in the distance, she could make out the shape of a football stadium and she had seen tennis courts as they drove by the oak trees lining the road. Greer couldn't believe they were in Manchester, New Hampshire.

She had turned, wide-eyed, to her mom and whispered, "How much is this costing?"

Her mom's awed look disappeared, replaced by determination. Vivian looked over the top of her white Honda Accord and declared.

"That is my job to worry about. All you need to worry about is taking advantage of everything this school offers. Being able to list Oak High on a college application gives you a leg up on other candidates."

She knew she shouldn't have asked the next question burning in her, but she had to know. Ever since she could remember, her mom had preached about the importance of taking care of herself. 'Never depend on a man.' And now a mere two weeks after announcing her engagement, they had moved into David's mansion and they were at one of the top private schools in the country. "Is David paying for this?"

Vivian Smith never broke her gaze from Greer's. "No. David got you in. I am paying for it."

Her mom was a paralegal. Even with David paying all of the other expenses, Greer knew the tuition still had to be a stretch for her. "I don't have to go here, Mom. I'll be fine at Public."

Her mom's expression lightened and filled with love. "I know you would be, but I want this for you."

Greer wasn't sure she wanted it for herself. She had never been the new kid at school, and she wasn't sure she wanted to start as a senior in high school.

She knew this was important to her mom and Vivian was right. Going to this school would look good on her college applications. So, she pasted a smile on her face and said, "Okay, let's go make this official."

Now that the first day was upon her, the closer her feet took her to campus the more her nerves ratcheted up. With each step more and more groups of students appeared. The ball in her stomach was gradually working its way up her throat. Her heart was fluttering like a hummingbird and she felt like she had just run a marathon instead of walking a couple of blocks. It was like she was walking toward a death sentence instead of school.

Heads started turning her way. She pretended to be oblivious and tightened her grip on the strap of her backpack. Conversations came to a halt as she approached and then resumed with hushed whispers as she passed. The school had an enrollment of 1,200 for grades 9-12, and she had a feeling someone new in their midst was rare.

The further she walked the more she realized she already stuck out like a sore thumb. The pit of her stomach fell and she had to concentrate on regulating her breathing. The one thing she didn't think she had to worry about was what was making her stand out.

Oak High had uniforms, but hers did not look anything like the other girls. Greer had chosen the 'A' line black skirt that fell above her knees. She had worn simple black canvas shoes, with a white polo.

Every other girl had a formfitting micro skirt. The only thing their skirts had in common was they were black. Some were so short, Greer wasn't sure how they would be able to sit.

Both girls and boys were required to wear a white shirt with a collar. She had apparently missed the footnote that the girls had to wear button-down, white, sheer silk shirts, with the ends tied. All of them had enough buttons undone to reveal a glimpse of the lacy, brightly colored bra they had on.

Heels were the only shoes she saw. They might have been ankle boots, thigh-high boots, stilettos, or any other type of shoes with a heel, but definitely no canvas.

Greer gratefully stepped through the door of the administration building and felt her shoulders gradually ease down from her ears. She lingered as long as possible in the office, grateful for the reprieve from the stares and whispers. She wasn't stupid enough to think she was done being the center of attention. Not only was she new, she stuck out like a fake diamond.

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With each morning class that passed she got fewer wide-eyed stares, but the whispers and glances were rampant. She was tempted to hide out in the library for lunch, but eventually, she would have to face the scariest place for any new student at a school, the lunchroom.

The strategy was to pick something she wouldn't have to stand in line for and quickly find a corner table—hopefully, a dark corner, but she wouldn't be too picky. As soon as she turned the corner into the Dining Hall, she understood why it wasn't called a cafeteria.

There wasn't one big line where everyone got the same food. It was like a buffet restaurant with different types of food at each station. Greer spotted a station with fruits and vegetables and snagged a green apple. She stopped at one of the in-wall coolers with a glass door and selected bottled water. With her lunch in hand, she went around the corner and stopped. This was definitely not a cafeteria—it was fine dining.

Tall windows with Tudor arches lined three sides of the room and the view was the picturesque campus. Plush, burgundy carpet cushioned her feet. Wood tables, with white tablecloths, and upholstered floral cushioned chairs greeted her. Someone brushing her shoulder awakened her from her slack-jawed awe.

Greer started scouring the rapidly filling room for an empty two-person table when she slammed into Beckett's narrowed bronze eyes. Her breath came to a skittering halt. For once they weren't radiating hostility, but this was equally as disconcerting. What was he thinking? It was as if he was studying her, sizing her up. But why? Was she in some sort of test that she didn't know about? Panic started fluttering in her with the unknown.

One of his friends elbowed him and Beckett's attention left her. The breath she had been unaware she was holding left in a whoosh and she headed toward the first empty table she found. Gratefully, she sank down into the chair facing the window. Once her heartbeat was under control, and her hands were done shaking, she put earbuds in and picked up her phone. When her audiobook was playing, she closed her eyes and temporarily escaped from her new reality.

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The huge load from her shoulders magically disappeared as soon as she stepped on the other side of Oak High's wrought iron gates. She had officially completed her first day. Only nine months to go. Greer used the abundance of the aged trees to walk behind to escape the notice of the Porches, Maseratis, and Mercedes racing by her.

The work at The Coffee Shack was familiar and she sank into the routine. It was comforting to be in a place where no one was staring at or judging her. Everyone was working or making small talk between lulls.

When Lexi and Jenn stepped through the door, she scrambled around the counter and threw her arms around her best friends. It had only been a week since she had seen them, but it felt like years.

"Whoa, girl, it's good to see you, too!" Lexi whispered in her ear.

Greer gave them a final squeeze and then broke away.

"Thank you for coming."

Jenn shrugged. "We said we would. Besides we can't resist your caramel lattes."

Greer laughed for the first time all day. "I'm going to find Greg and see if I can take my break. Find a seat and I'll get our drinks. Iced or hot?"

"Iced. Thanks, Greer!" Jenn gave her a wink and went to snag a booth at the back.

"We can pay, Greer." Lexi was more reserved, like Greer, both in personality and looks.

Lexi and Greer found each other in the second grade. Neither one had jumped up to find a partner for their math game. After everyone else paired up they had drifted together. They had quietly worked together, and ever since, the two had been inseparable.

Jenn had joined the duo in middle school. She was adventurous and outgoing, the exact opposite of Lexi and Greer. Frequently, Jenn talked Lexi and her into things they normally wouldn't consider.

Greer squeezed Lexi's hand. "I know. I am just so happy to see you! It's my treat. Sit!"

Greer got her break and quickly made the drinks. She brought them over and noted the time. She needed this job and didn't want to abuse her 15-minute break.

Jenn put her pink lip-glossed lips on the straw and sucked down half the drink with one swallow. She moaned her appreciation. "I don't know what you do, Greer, but this is the best."

"Thanks. Any good gossip at school?" Greer wanted a dose of the familiar, but her girls were having none of that. They both shook their heads at her.

"Uh-uh, we don't want to talk about us. You are living with Beckett Dawson and going to school at Oak High. We want to hear it all!" Jenn leaned in and waited.

Greer looked at Jenn and marveled at how fresh she still looked, even after a whole day of school. "It would have been better if I were you."

Jenn's eyebrows furrowed and Lexi's eyes widened. Lexi asked what they were both thinking. "What are you talking about?"

Greer took in Jenn's beach blonde hair filled with loose curls. Her shiny brown eyes, high cheekbones, and lush lips. "You look like a model. How do you do that?"

"Greer, you know I love makeup and fashion. I am prepping all day!"

Lexi looked at Greer. "And what does that have to do with your day?"

"Everyone was like Jenn, only on steroids." Greer shrugged, but she could see from the concerned etched on their faces she wasn't fooling them.

"Greer, you are gorgeous!"

Greer smiled at Lexi's immediate defense. She knew she wasn't gorgeous, but she had never considered herself ugly. Greer went on to explain how all of the girls looked like they had just come off of a runway and looked at least 23.

"Wow! Sounds like another world. All of them?"

Greer nodded. "All of them."

"You know what you need to do, Greer?" Jenn's excitement made her scared to ask.

“What?”

“Fight fire with fire!” Now she was literally jumping up and down at the table. “I will be your makeup artist and stylist! I can teach you to be one of them.”

Greer had flashes of endless makeup lessons, eyebrow plucking, and uncomfortable clothes. She didn’t know if she had it in her, even if her brain was telling her it was a good idea. “Please, Greer! I know my blog would explode with your makeover!”

Jenn had both hands clasped and under her chin, literally begging her. Greer felt herself weakening, but knew she had to set limits. Otherwise, Jenn would go overboard.

“All right,” Greer gave in begrudgingly.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

Jenn started clapping her hands and Greer could already see the wheels turning, so she quickly finished her thought before Jenn got out of control.

“But,” Greer ignored Jenn’s downturned mouth and plowed on, “within reason. I won’t be able to sustain getting up every morning and spending a couple of hours getting ready.”

The joy returned to Jenn’s face. “Of course! Can we start tonight?”

“Give me a week or two Jenn.” She felt bad with Jenn’s crestfallen look, but she could only handle so much change in her life. She liked life to be consistent and predictable. Greer needed a little time for her new school to be ‘normal’ before she brought on more change.

“I need to settle in at school and figure out how much time I will have for this new look. Let me figure out my new life first.”

“Fine,” Jenn groused, but then lit up. “But at least tell me how wonderful living with hunky Beckett Dawson is!”

“Ugh, he is pretty much an asshole all the time.”

“What?” Jenn screeched out her disbelief.

“I’ll have to tell you guys later. I have to get back to work.”

Reluctantly Greer slid out of the booth and headed back to work for another hour and a half. Her boss had agreed she could work from 3:00-6:00 every weeknight and whatever hours they needed her on the weekends. Her mom got off work at 5:00, but usually stayed a little later to clear and clean her desk. Picking Greer up at 6:00 worked for both of them.

As soon as Greer punched out, she went to the parking lot and found her mom waiting for her. She slid into the familiar front seat.

“Hi, Mom!”

“Hi, honey. How was your first day of school?” Vivian asked as she merged into traffic.

Greer shrugged. “Okay. I’m just glad the first day is over.”

Vivian kept looking out the windshield, but Greer heard the concern creep into her voice. “Okay meaning bad or okay meaning okay?”

Greer laughed and made sure to keep her voice neutral. “Okay meaning nothing bad happened, just the usual first-day curiosity of everyone.” She didn’t want her mom worrying about her.

Her mom had never seemed unhappy, but when she started dating David Dawson, she glowed. Greer stuffed the ideas on why that might be deep down in her brain. Greer took it at face value and silently thanked David for it.

Vivian Smith had gone to a technical school for an Administrative Assistant degree. At the young age of twenty, she was seduced by her first boss. When he found out Vivian was pregnant, he announced that he was married and stated emphatically there was no way he could be the father.

Vivian’s mom had taken the view that Vivian had gotten herself pregnant, so she could figure out how to manage it. Since she had always wanted to visit the northeast Vivian just decided to move there and make a new start. Greer talked to her grandmother a couple of times a year but had only seen her a handful of times. The conversations she had over the phone were stilted and awkward. Greer marveled

that her warm, caring mom seemed to come from someone who was standoffish. She didn't even know her dad's name and at this point in her life, she had no desire to know it or him.

David was a partner in a prestigious law firm and had pursued Vivian right after the meeting she had sat in on to take notes. Her mother had resisted, but eventually, David wore her down. Now they were engaged.

While they were dating, David had come to their apartment for supper a number of times and Greer liked him more each time she saw him. He treated her mother with respect and tried to spoil her rotten.

He treated Greer the same way. He didn't pretend to be her father or her friend. David spoke with her, listened to her, and respected what she had to say. Greer knew David got frustrated with her mom because he wanted to do more for Vivian.

In fact, it had taken both her and David to convince her mother that it was okay to move in together. Vivian was determined to not take her relationship with David any further until Greer graduated. When Greer had overheard part of a phone conversation between her mom and David, she sat down with her mom and made her feelings known. Her mom had put her first her entire life, and she wanted this for her mom.

"Greer, you will tell me if you are having problems, right?" Vivian's concerned tone brought her back to the present and her first day of school.

She swallowed hard and for the first time, in a long time, lied, "Yes, Mom. I will tell you."

Greer was a big girl, she could handle nine months of this school and give her mom peace of mind. Besides, after a few weeks, she would be old news. And with Jenn's help, she would blend in more, rather than stick out.

Chapter 2

Greer helped her mom get supper ready, a comfortable silence between as they worked. As soon as Beckett walked through the door the easiness was gone. The tension in the air was palatable and her entire body tensed up.

He pierced her with a hard look, and she quickly returned her attention to the peppers she had been cutting and pretended she didn't know he was glaring at her back.

"Hello, Beckett."

Greer was thankful her mom took his attention away from her with the softly spoken, cautious greeting.

"Hello."

Beckett greeted her mom like he would a stranger on the street, impersonal, without an ounce of warmth in it. Beckett strolled to the cabinet where she was at. When he stretched to get a glass down the hair on her arms stood at attention. Her heart calmed to a dull thud when he walked away to the refrigerator and filled his glass with water.

Vivian broke the uncomfortable silence. "Supper will be ready by 7:00. Your dad is planning on being here. Will you be joining us?"

"I've got plans with friends," Beckett said, flatly, without even looking at Vivian.

"Okay, just know I'll plan on supper every weeknight at 7:00."

Beckett finished his glass of water, nodded sharply, and walked out of the room.

Vivian kept preparing the steak for fajitas, but Greer could see her shoulders slump. A spurt of annoyance ran through her. Vivian had been nothing but nice, and Beckett always answered her mom's overtures with barely concealed hostility.

David came home a few minutes later, kissed Vivian on the cheek and murmured something in her ear that had her blushing. Greer quickly turned back to her cutting, concentrating fiercely. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw her mom's smile reappear and David stepped back.

"Evening, Greer."

"Hello." Greer looked over her shoulder and smiled. She had been told to call him David, but it felt weird. Mr. Dawson seemed too formal, so she tried to avoid calling him anything.

"Supper is looking good, ladies. I'm going to change and come back down."

When David was out of hearing distance, she teased her mom, "Why are your cheeks all red, Mom?"

Vivian tried to sound stern. "Never you mind, Greer." But it ended as a laugh.

"Should I make some sudden plans for supper and disappear?"

Her mom turned to her and fiercely said. "You will never have to do that, Greer. You will always be welcome."

Greer kept the mood light and rolled her eyes. "I know, Mom. I just don't want you embarrassing my young, innocent eyes!"

"Oh, just keep cutting!"

Satisfied her mom's mood had improved she did as instructed and then set the counter. It didn't make sense to eat in the formal dining room and the round table in the kitchen was for eight. Not what Greer would classify as an intimate nook.

By the time everything was cooked, David was back in the kitchen and they all sat down. Vivian and David visited about their days and then David turned to her.

"How was your first day, Greer?"

"Good." She kept on eating hoping David wouldn't ask any more questions. Of course, she was hoping for the impossible. He was a lawyer.

"No problems?"

"No," Greer assured him.

David stopped eating and studied her with the same bronze eyes that his son had. His probing caused her to fidget and she knew she needed to elaborate.

"No problems. I got my schedule and found everything okay."

"Did Beckett help you?"

She paused for a second and then cursed herself for it. David's eyes narrowed. She quickly reached for the Mexican rice in an attempt to appear nonchalant. "Yes. He got me where I needed to be."

It was true, he got me to the point where I could walk.

"Could you pass the sour cream, please?"

She prayed it was enough of a distraction for David to drop the current uncomfortable subject.

He passed the sour cream and asked, "He didn't help you when you got to school?"

"I didn't want him to."

The probing stare continued, and Greer caved, "Beckett draws a lot of attention, Mr. Dawson, and I don't like that. I was fine on my own."

"Call me David, Greer. Did you sit with him at lunch?"

Shoot, she thought the Mr. Dawson 'slip' would distract him. "I saw him, but I needed some downtime. I ate and listened to my book."

David laid his fork down, shot a look at Vivian, and then with far more seriousness than she could handle said, "Greer."

She looked at the concern etched on her mom's face and then forced herself to look steadily at David.

As soon as her eyes were on him, he said solemnly. "I know Oak High can be a hard school to fit into if you haven't lived here since elementary school. Beckett can help with the transition. If there are any problems, promise you will tell me or him."

"I will, but I didn't have any problems today."

All day she had felt uncomfortable and out of place, but there wasn't anything David could do about it. She held his gaze and let out an internal breath when he nodded and turned back to eating.

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Beckett silently moved toward the front door and felt his tense body relax. Why hadn't Greer ratted him out? He'd given her the opportunity to try and put a wedge between him and his dad. She could've tried, but she wouldn't have succeeded.

It had always been him and his dad. His mom had exited his life at an early age, but David had never handed him over to a nanny, unlike most of his friends. His dad had always dated casually, but he had never introduced his dates to Beckett. Now, his fiancée had moved into his house, with her daughter. And Greer was going to his elite, private, *expensive* school.

The Smith women had no money. They had moved into their 5000-square-foot home from an apartment. Vivian still worked, but Beckett suspected it was part of some elaborate ploy to somehow get more out of his dad.

The streets of Manchester flew by as Beckett mindlessly drove to the local pizza joint, where he was meeting his friends. Vivian, and certainly not Greer, were going to hoodwink him as easily as they had

his dad. Beckett withheld the growl he felt crawling up his throat at the thought of David Dawson. He was just as frustrating as the Smith women.

David may not have introduced him to any of his former girlfriends, but Beckett had attended a few benefits with him. It had been nauseating how many women fawned over David, giggled, and acted downright slutty. His dad was one of the top corporate lawyers in the nation, an intelligent man, but Vivian seemed to be pulling the wool over his eyes.

Beckett had been lectured by David, more than once over the years, to be careful with girls, especially because their family had more money than most. Beckett had had his fair share of batting eyelashes and clinging hands starting in middle school to know his dad was right. He had become adept at figuring out who was after his money and who was genuine.

The one time he had thought he had found the girl who he thought liked him for him had proven him spectacularly wrong. And he was going to make sure his dad was not being conned, the way he had been. For his dad, he would give Vivian some respect, but she needed to earn the rest of it.

Greer, on the other hand, had earned no such leeway from him. He saw the curiosity burning in her every time he caught her gawking at him, but she wasn't any different than the rest of the female population. Sure, she had an innocence radiating from her and she was quiet. He had never known any female to not chat his ear off, even if he was blatantly obvious about not listening.

He was surprised that she hadn't ratted him out to his dad, but she wasn't stupid. There had to be something brewing in her brain. He just had to figure out what it was. His dad was right, he could make her life easier at Oak High. He just didn't want to. He didn't owe her anything.

She had annoyed the hell out of him all day, without even trying. Everyone at Oak High had been asking who the new girl was and why she was there. The amazing fact that she had been a transfer from Public Central High School was all anyone could talk about. A new student was always a big deal. A new student from a public school was something that had never happened. Everyone was determined to figure out her story. Including Beckett.

The girls didn't like her, which was an understatement. He could never understand why girls were so bitchy, but it worked out for him. They had a nasty comment for everything, from her hair to her shoes. The cheerleaders were leading the mean girl mantra and didn't care who heard them.

The guys' reactions pissed him off. They bought into her innocent, wholesome girl act, and took it as a challenge. Greer's conservative uniform had only fueled the curiosity of the guys. They stared hard at her white generic polo, trying to determine if the breasts were the perfect handful they appeared to be. They admired her toned, long legs and said it would be nice to grip her hair without getting stuck in it.

He had been so sick of them talking smack about who was going to be the first to break down her conservative, introverted personality. If he decided a different strategy was needed to break her, then he would be the one to do it. And it was only because he was looking out for his dad, not because he had any true interest.

Chapter 3

After studying the bus map, Greer realized the nearest bus stop was two miles away. She could easily afford to ride the bus to school, but it was going to be a long walk to get there. She sighed thinking of how early she was going to have to get up, but it beat the tension-filled, hostile ride she had experienced today.

With a plan in place, she took a couple of minutes to fortify herself. The trip to Beckett's room was like gearing herself up to get her wisdom teeth out. She knew she had to do it but dreaded every moment until she was put under. She marched down the hall reminding herself to simply knock, tell him she wouldn't be riding with him, and leave.

Her raised fist froze in midair. 'Just do it' she mumbled to herself. Irritated with her nervousness she quickly rapped on the door and ordered her feet to stay in place. The door swung open and the plan she had been reciting for the last five minutes tumbled out of her head and out of her slack open mouth.

Beckett's sculpted chest was right in front of her face and her wide eyes ate up the sight of the tanned perfection in front of her. Her blood was thumping and she could hear her choppy breathing. Her gaze roamed and her breath hitched at the six-pack. Her fingers itched to reach out and trace every delineation she saw. When she got to his jeans, Greer swore her eyes popped out of her head because, holy smokes, they were unbuttoned.

"I can take them off, but only if you reciprocate. And the parents are here, so we should probably go into my room instead of the hall."

The dry, sarcastic comment made her Beckett bubble burst. Her eyes slammed shut and her chin hit her chest. The blood that had been warming her body with arousal turned cold. She prayed with everything in her that the floor would open up and swallow her whole.

"No need to be embarrassed, Greer. Plenty of girls come panting my way."

Beckett's cocky drawl crawled under her skin. What the hell had just happened? She had admired good looking guys before but never had she lost her mind.

She opened her eyes but kept them glued to the floor as she spun around to barricade herself in her room, forever. With each step she took, Beckett's mocking laugh followed her, increasing her shame and embarrassment. Even when she threw herself on her bed, she could still hear him in her head.

Why did she become a stupid 'girl' whenever Beckett was around? She had been around cute guys before and even managed intelligent conversation without drooling on them. Right from the start, Beckett had caused all kinds of chaos in her.

After Vivian and David announced their engagement, they wanted their kids to join them for a celebratory supper. When Vivian had told her, Greer had felt the butterflies immediately swarm her stomach. She felt more nervous meeting Beckett than she had David.

Greer had known who David Dawson's son was the moment he had said his name. Beckett Dawson had been the subject of hundreds of conversations at Public Central High. It wasn't very often guys from New Hampshire were talked about being drafted into the NFL.

The Public Central guys viewed him as a football god. He had broken most of the state quarterback records and Oak High was on track to win its fourth consecutive state title.

The girls all wanted him and did anything to get him. If the rumors were to be believed, plenty of girls had slept with him, but none more than once.

Greer didn't want to acknowledge his looks, but there was no denying them. His ebony hair was short on the sides and faded into longer locks at the top. There was just enough length to run his fingers through it for a quick style, but not long enough to be considered pretty. His whiskey eyes glowed between his black lashes.

Beckett's presence always filled a room. He had to be at least 6'3", and his well-maintained body filled out every outfit Greer had seen him wear. But it was more than his physical presence. The energy spiked when he entered a room, and she had never seen him anything other than confident.

At their first supper, Greer and Vivian had gotten to the restaurant first and sat at the table waiting for them. David and Beckett walking in together had every head turning. It was as if their energy and vitality leaped from them and you couldn't help but stop to admire their confidence and aura.

As soon as she saw Beckett, she had felt distinctly middle class in her department store black dress. He strolled in with an untucked, white button-down shirt with a navy blazer. The whitewash jeans he wore were tight enough to appreciate everything in them, but not obscenely tight.

When they reached the table, David had bent down to brush a kiss over Vivian's lips and Greer looked away from the intimate moment. Her small smile dropped as soon as her eyes swung to Beckett's.

His bronze eyes were radiating coldness and her heart dropped to her stomach. It was obvious he was not happy to be here. When David introduced her to Beckett he nodded and picked up his menu.

It was an awkward supper, with the parents carrying most of the conversation. Every time she spoke, she felt Beckett's glare on her. Eventually, she just stopped talking and smiled in the appropriate places. She didn't want to have his eyes on her any more than necessary.

It was ironic that she had been doing her best to avoid Beckett and she ended up humiliating herself. The worst part was she hadn't told him that she didn't need a ride to school anymore and now she was back to figuring out how to do it.

Her brain scrambled to come up with a way that didn't involve talking to him. Sticking a note under his door seemed juvenile and she wasn't even sure he would get it. She didn't have his number, so she couldn't text him. Covering her face with her hands, she came to the harsh realization that she was going to have to walk back down the hall and face him again.

Two hours later, her homework was done. She'd showered, all of her social media was caught up, and her room was tidy. She still had energy to burn and pacing didn't seem to be helping, so she sucked it up and made her shaky legs go out the door and down the hall.

With her heart in her throat, she knocked on the dreaded door and tried to swallow past the lump in her suddenly dry throat. Her ears were on hyperalert and when she heard the unmistakable sound of feet crossing the floor, her hands started sweating. She held her breath, stared at the doorknob, and as soon as it turned, the words burst from her,

"I don't need a ride to school anymore."

Relief poured through her and she felt light-headed as she turned around and skedaddled away as fast as she could go without actually running.

"There's no need to deny yourself, Greer. Just say the word and I can fuck it out of your system, you know as an act of brotherly love." She gasped at his vulgar words.

Greer snapped her door shut and sank down to the floor. With her head in her hands, she took some deep breaths to calm the anger and humiliation rolling through her. No one had ever talked to her like that and she didn't deserve it. If it were anyone else, she would have snapped back, but she was determined to keep the peace. Well, peace was a strong word. She wouldn't make the tension in the house worse.