The Way Back

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Summary

Another Carmilla HSAU. One in which Carmilla and Laura used to be best friends until they got to high school and Laura became popular, ditching Carmilla along the way. The story picks up mid way through their junior year. After a year and a half of avoiding each other, they have been pushed together--- forcing them to face their feelings and either reconcile or...well you get it.

Notes

Just had an idea for another HSAU and decided to run with it. Not entirely sure where I'm going to go with it but I have a pretty good idea of where to start it. Let me know if you like it or if I should continue. Feedback is always appreciated. And thank you for taking the time to read. I hope you enjoy :)
Introduction

Why did she have to go to school? It’s not like she needed the shitty education that the American school system publicly provided, solely at the expense of the tax payers hard earned money (which she was one of). She was smarter than all these other dimwits combined. Well except for maybe the Ginger twins and Laura, of course.

She seated herself in her usual seat towards the middle of the bus. Seat 12 to be exact. It was located by an emergency exit window, which she thought one day might come in handy. You know, if the bus were to flip in an accident or if one of her classmates tried to start small talk. She’s grateful it’s not like an emergency exit seat on an airplane where you have to verbally agree to help other passengers in case of an emergency because she’s not sure she would help any of these cretins. Well, maybe just one. Okay definitely just one. One who definitely isn’t a cretin. Okay maybe a couple but no more than a handful! A very red-haired dominated handful with a honey brown-haired beauty and an oversized labrador making up the minority.

As she was about to put her headphones in and drown out the incessant asinine conversations of her prison mates a bellowing laugh echoed in the back of the bus. She turned to glance at the cause of the beautiful disturbance, even though she knew damn well who that laugh belonged to.

She saw Laura sitting in her usual seat, number 23 all the way in the back of the bus. Sharing her seat with the insufferable Elizabeth Spielsdorf, a.k.a Betty the Bestie, Captain of the cheerleading team. Uggghhh, she can’t possibly imagine what that cruel mannequin of a human being said in order to make Laura laugh like that. She probably told Laura her I.Q. As Carmilla slightly chuckles to herself at the petulant joke she just made, she’s kind of grateful for whatever that bimbo said that caused that melodic reaction. She puts her headphones in and stares out the window watching the dusk turn to dawn while blaring “Half Mast” by Empire of the Sun.

God she loved the sound of that laugh. Loves, the sound of that laugh.

She thinks back to the first time she heard it, that day in their new tree-house. (Well, technically it was an old tree-house that the previous owners of the Karnstein’s new home had built but never put to proper use.) That of course changed when her nosey neighbor Laura Hollis welcomed her to the neighborhood.

The Karnstein’s had just finished their first meal in their new home. House, really. Carmilla would never consider any place other than the quaint three bedroom abode, at the end of Mulberry lane, her home. She was halfway up the stairs to her new bedroom (hoping to get more acquainted with those four unfamiliar walls as well as reacquainted with one of her favorite books, South of the Border, West of the Sun) When there was an unexpected knock at the door.

“Carmilla sweetheart, can you get the door?”

“Will, get the door!” She shouted as she continued climbing.

“Mom told you to get it!”

“Carm, please? Your brother is helping me with the last of the dishes.”

“Fine” she sighed as she came to a halt and took her time making her way to the door; being sure to make her footsteps as heavy as possible, guaranteeing they would hear her frustration.

“Thank you sweetie!”
There was another assertive knock at the door. Only this one was audibly more impatient.

“Coming!”

Finally reaching the door Carmilla took a peek through the peephole but it was too scratched up to see through.

“Who is it?” Her mother shouted while packing away the glass dish she used to make her world famous lasagna. It’s Carmilla’s favorite.

“How should I know?” Carmilla unlocked the door, keeping the chain lock intact. Pushing her face up to the six inch space of slack the chain would allow, Carmilla saw her standing there---eagerly awaiting an introduction. She was a tinier girl with sun-kissed skin, wearing capris with a white v-neck that had a drawing of a cupcake on it, bearing a smile that shone brighter than the porch light.

“Can I help you?” She asked wearily.

“Hi, I’m Laura Hollis!”

“Hmm. I really don’t have a moment to talk about your Lord and savior Jesus Christ”

With an adorably confused expression on her face that made her nose scrunch up, hiding some of her more prominent freckles, Laura responded “Umm, huh?”

“Is there something you needed, tiny stranger danger?”

“Oh, ha. I um, just wanted to introduce myself. Like I said I’m Laura, your new neighbor! Well technically I’m not really new, I’ve lived here my whole life. You’re the one that’s the new kid on the block. Like the only other kid, besides me, on the block actually.”

She was cut off by Carmilla’s tested patience.

-”You talk a lot”

“Yeah, I, I’ve been told.”

A little off-put by the girl’s curtness.

“So whose at the door honey? It’s not another Jehovah’s Witness is it?” Her mom asked as she made her way to the front door.

“No, thank God. It’s just the neighbor.”

“Oh!” her mother replied, quickening her pace to make her new neighbor’s acquaintance.

“Sweetie open the door.”

Carmilla obliged removing the chain and opening the door fully. Upon receiving a beaming smile (that Mrs. Karnstein, and secretly Carmilla, thought was just about the cutest thing) she returned her expression with warming politeness.

“Well hello dear! I’m Karen Karnstein, and this is my daughter Carmilla.”

Carmilla’s eyes never leaving the girl, gave her a quick nod and slight smirk.

“William! Come meet our lovely neighbor” she said over her shoulder at the younger boy, who had
just gotten comfortable on the couch catching up on the latest Dew Tour action. He jumped up eagerly and made his way to the door.

“And this is my youngest, William”

“You can just call me Will!” He said with a friendly smile.

“Hi, I’m Laura Hollis! I live in the house to the left of yours.”

“Oh how wonderful!” Mrs. Karnstein exclaimed.

“I didn’t mean to disturb you or anything, I just wanted to introduce myself. I wanted to come over earlier but my dad suggested I wait until you were at least done unloading the truck.”

Carmilla’s chest tightened at the mention of Laura’s dad.

“I waited a couple extra hours just for good measure.”

“Oh you’re not disturbing in the slightest. Would you like to come in? The house is still a wreck, but you’re more than welcome to come in for a drink, or a snack.”

“Oh, well thank you but I just had dinner myself. I would however like to go into your backyard, if you don’t mind?”

“Why?” Carmilla asked more rudely than she had intended to.

“I was, um, throwing my frisbee around with my friend earlier and being as uncoordinated as I am, it went flying over the fence and into your yard” She said sheepishly.

“Oh well of course! Kids why don’t you show Laura here outback?”

“Follow me neighbor!” Will excitedly exclaimed as he began walking through the hallway into the living room, past the kitchen, and out to the yard. Laura followed closely behind while Carmilla kept her distance finally making her way out to the yard by the time Laura had already retrieved her frisbee.

“So how do you guys like your new house?”

“It’s a house.” Carmilla replied with indifference.

“Yeah, it’s a pretty cool house. I mean you have a tree-house for goodness sake!”

“What?” Will asked in surprise.

“The treehouse.” Laura replied as she pointed to the huge oak tree that stood tall and wide, just off center in their yard.

“We have a tree-house?! How did we not see that!” Will said excitedly.

“Huh” Carmilla shrugged as she began to make out the figure of the semi-decrepit wooden house, hidden by leafy branches and the night sky.

“Awe man, let’s go check it out!” Will said as he made his way to the rope ladder that was entangled by vines.

“Shall we?” Laura asked looking pointedly at Carmilla.
“After you, Cupcake”

Carmilla replied with a gesture of her hand. Laura slightly blushing from the unexpected and random nickname looked down only to realize what shirt she was wearing and gave her new neighbor a lopsided smile. Carmilla’s chest warmed from the sight and a small grin crept her face. Laura turned and made her way to the tree-house with Carmilla not so far behind.

The inside of the tree-house was riddled with vines that had made their way through the slits in the wood; as well as dust and cobwebs. Cozy, Carmilla thought.

“Obviously it needs some work, I mean it’s no TARDIS, but it’s pretty darn cool”

“Yeah it is!” Will replied looking through one of the drawers in a small desk that was pressed up against the far right corner.

“I think it’s fine the way it is” Carmilla said gently.

“Really? But it’s covered in cobwebs and the wood has started to crack.”

“It gives it character.” They share a glance for a moment and Laura can appreciate the sincerity in her voice and the fact that Carmilla can still see the beauty in the breakdown.

“We should start a club and make this our clubhouse!” Will suggested, breaking their gaze.

“That’s a great idea! What kind of club exactly?” Laura inquired.

“A NO BOYS ALLOWED club” Carmilla retorted as she threw a rather large stick she found on the floor at Will, who ducked to miss it--only to fall off the stool he was sitting on.

Laura laughed and quickly threw her hands up to cover her mouth. She didn’t mean to laugh and certainly did not want to get off on the wrong foot with her new neighbors by laughing at their embarrassment. But Carmilla began to chuckle, probably the closest she’s come to an actual laugh in a while, which made Laura throw her head back and join her in amusement. Carmilla looked at Laura, her own chuckle dying down a bit to better hear Laura’s echoing bellow. It was the one of the most genuinely beautiful sounds Carmilla had ever heard in her short fourteen year existence. Next to her dad singing, of course.

“Wake up loser” Carmilla heard over her headphones. She opened her eyes just in time to dodge a spitball, that missed her face by mere inches and stuck itself to the emergency window.

“Fuck off douchebag” she spat out with a middle finger at Alec “the phallic” Spiesldorf, Betty’s equally devolved twin brother.

“What’s that? You want to fuck me off?”

“That doesn’t even make sense you inbred.”

“You don’t make sense, lezbo!”

“Hey why don’t you shut up Alec. No one wants to hear your homophobic ignorance at 6:47 in the fucking morning” chimed Danny Lawrence, co-captain of the Silas High women’s basketball team.

“Awe how cute, the BI-onic woman is sticking up for her girlfriend”

“Dude NOT cool!” piped up Brody “Kibbles n’ Bits” Kirsch.
“Chill out Kirsch, it’s just a joke.”

“Not funny bro and if you keep this shit up I’ll tell coach. You know he has no tolerance for that kind of stupidity.”

“Okay bro, chill out. My bad or whatever.”

Danny shoots a thankful look at Kirsch who is seated diagonally across from her and his eyes match her gaze. He gives her an almost apologetic smile that makes her turn her head and slightly cringe. She knows he feels sorry for her. The last thing she wants is for anyone to take pity on her. She is seated behind Carmilla and as they both stare out the window their eyes lock in the glass’s reflection. Carmilla shoots her an exaggerated eye roll and Danny just smiles. Thank you, she thinks to herself.

Laura of course privy to the entire argument, remains silent at the back of the bus consumed with guilt for not defending her best friend. Instead Betty just laughs off the situation and her brother’s antics with a nudge to Laura’s shoulder. Laura returns her laugh with a contrived half-smile that contorts her face in the most unnatural way. When did she become like this? When did she become the kind of person that turned her back on her best friend and swallow her morals? What? All for the sake of “popularity”? Whenever it was, she has never wanted a TARDIS more desperately than in this exact moment. Actually, she can think of a time she’s wanted one far more desperately. And at that thought, she too puts in her headphones and begins to listen to Plumb, counterproductively trying to keep her eyes from that all too familiar sting.

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Carmilla makes her way to her locker after the fourth period bell. It’s lunch time and thank whatever deity that does or does not exist because she is fucking starving. And for some idiotic reason she was scheduled Home Ec. after lunch. Like why? That helps no one. She’s starving by lunch time because she’s not allowed to eat in any of her other classes and then the one class she is allowed to stuff her face with delicious classroom cooked meals (at least when she has Perry as her partner anyway) she can’t because she’s stuffed from lunch!

“Hey Carmilla!”

“Hey LaF.”

“Sorry Per and I didn’t interject in Tweedledumb’s “I Don’t Have a Dream” Speech. We honestly had no idea any of that went on.”

“Yeah I know. You two were so enveloped in each other’s grossness, what with sharing your Ed Sheeran playlist and exchanging disgusting displays of affection and all.”

“We were just holding hands!”

“Like I said” she replied with a smirk.

“You’re one to tal--!” Realizing the definitely painful memories they might have just forced Carmilla to recall they immediately shut up.

“Well, not anymore.”

“Sorry dude, I can be an idiot sometimes.”

“Sometimes? It’s almost as if you enjoy the taste of your foot.” She snarks at her friend.
“Whatever. So you want a ride home from practice today?”

“Is your mom not working today?”

“No she gets off early so she can come pick us up.”

“Oh, okay. Then yeah. I guess I can try to tolerate you for a little bit longer today.”

“Hey it’s better than taking the Extra Curricular bus home.”

“Very true.” She states matter of factly, recalling the neanderthals (a fraternal pair of primitive dimwits in particular) that take it home.

“Cool, I’ll go grab us a booth. See you in the cafeteria.”

“Yeah.”

Just as she is almost done digging out her Calculus book from the incredibly disorganized abyss that is her locker, the locker to the left of hers creaks open. Dammit. She tries her best (not really) to avoid this interaction at any cost (again, that’s a lie) on a regular day basis, even though it’s secretly her most favorite part of the day (that’s the sad fucking truth). Although today’s interaction takes an unexpected turn. There actually is an interaction.

“Hey” Laura says weakly and uncharacteristically.

Carmilla, completely shocked by this turn of events, says nothing. She just freezes and stares at the girl she once could not go a single day without talking to.

“I, uh, I wanted to apologize for what happened this morning on the way to school.” She says with a guilt-ridden face. Still the most exquisite face Carmilla has ever had the pleasure to lay her eyes upon.

“Look, cu---Laura, it’s not your fault. No worries.” Carmilla assured her doubtfully.

“But I didn’t...stick up for you.” Laura says meekly glancing down towards her feet.

“I can take care of myself, sweetheart---” She tried to stop herself from using the once welcomed nickname, but only after she carelessly lets it slip. Her eyes widen slightly and she takes her eyes away from Laura’s. She desperately looks away, searching for anything to rest her gaze on. Anything but those Honeysuckle eyes and constellations of freckles.

Trying to distract from what Laura knows that she is really doing, Carmilla makes a cut and quips, “Besides why would you? It’s not like we’re friends.”

Seeing the flicker of hurt in Laura’s celestial eyes, a hurt that she is obviously terrible at trying to hide, Carmilla immediately regrets what she said. She wishes she could physically pull the words back into her mouth and swallow them down, never to regurgitate them again. Laura remains frozen, eyes never leaving Carmilla’s dark and gorgeously brooding eyes. Internally pleading for mercy under her pained gaze, Carmilla is about to open her mouth in apology when she is knocked off balance by a clumsy giant pup. She is pushed into Laura who, for a tiny girl has surprising strength, and steadies Carmilla in her arms.

“Sorry hotties, lost my footing. Catch you dudes in AP Lit!”

Kirsch walks away without so much as an acknowledgment of his existence because the two girls
are so wrapped up in their own worlds. *Once a singular world.* Carmilla’s hands are clutching onto Laura’s shoulders and her face entangled in Laura’s hair. Hair that still smells like strawberries and evergreens. Laura’s hands are firmly grasping Carmilla’s waist, not releasing her steadying hold. She feels just as warm and soft as she remembers. Carmilla reluctantly begins to pull away steadying herself and regaining her footing. Her arms remaining on Laura’s shoulders and Laura’s hands still cradling Carmilla’s hips. The world around them seems to slow as they reacquaint themselves with each other’s eyes.

*Her eyes look tired. I don’t remember them being tired, Carmilla thinks. Is everything okay? Oh don’t start this you idiot. You’re not friends anymore. You were once, best friends that is. Maybe even more towards the end. You were closer than you ever thought you could be to someone in your entire life. You had no intention of letting anyone in like that. Well, Laura kind of forced herself in, but you didn’t stop her. And she broke your heart, just like he did. Don’t do this to yourself! You spent the last year and a half trying to suppress the memories you know you will always treasure. Memories you know that she won’t. Remember what she said. Those painful words like tiny cigarettes burned into your brain leaving scars on the memories you shared. Stop this.*

*REGURGITATE.*

Laura looks at Carmilla with the most apologetic and wistful gaze, that breaks Carmilla’s heart just a little bit more, and before empathy takes over she regurgitates those words she had previously swallowed.

“We were never really friends. Not for a moment, right?”

*Those tiny cigarettes. Lit with pain and put out with intention.*

And at that Laura’s mouth is left slightly agape, as she hangs onto the memory of those spiteful words she spat at Carmilla’s face that dreadful night over a year ago. Carmilla stuffs her books in her bag and slams her locker shut, avoiding any further contact. She walks past Laura with purpose on her way to join her actual friends. Before she turns the corner she pauses for a moment and looks back to Laura. She remains frozen with her head staring at her feet and clutching her binder tighter to her chest.

*Fuck. Fuck. FUCK! Why did you say that. Just go over there and apologize. Tell her you didn’t mean it and that you never could.*

Just as Carmilla is about to pivot her feet in the direction back to her locker Betty skips over nudging Laura on the shoulder quite forcefully.

“Hey Laur-whore! Did you do the AP Lit homework?”

Managing to snap out of her most recent state of self-loathing, Laura manages to flash a contrived smile at the girl and begins to speak in a voice that isn’t hers.

“Toats Betts. Why? Wanna copy it?”

“You know it!”

*Uggghhh.* She immediately forgets any plan of going over there and begins to walk towards the cafeteria. She spots the Weasleys and joins them in the corner booth, taking a seat next to her co-captain Big Red.

“Did you get stuck in the blackhole that is your locker?” Danny asked jokingly.

“Actually if you get sucked into a blackhole you can’t escape it. The gravity is the strongest in the
known universe so once you enter you can’t get out.” LaF says so matter-of-factly.

“Nerd.” Carmilla retorts as Danny giggles and Perry (hiding a small smile) rubs her partner’s back in comfort.

“Whatever Daria” LaF says throwing a piece of bread at Carmilla. The gang laugh and go back to eating their mysterious cafeteria food and chit chatting as per usual (with Carmilla being the least talkative. But she was a really good listener, so she made up for her lack of socializing in that regard.)

“See you later! And don’t forget to bring your ten dollars for new spanks to practice. I need the mulah ASAP!” Betty yells as she trots down the hallway with Laura’s homework in hand.

“Sure thing!”

The hallway is now empty as it’s currently Lunch A and 5th Period has technically already started. Laura, still reeling from the previous interaction she had with Carm, uh, Carmilla, she’s not in the mood for Bio at the moment. She grabs her purse from her locker and makes her way to the bathroom, skipping her lesson on ATP.

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AP Lit was uneventful as per usual. They were discussing *Pride and Prejudice*, a book Carmilla has read many times before so her interest was rather lacking. Thank God that class was over quickly enough. She had managed to spend the entirety of the class day dreaming. Of her tree-house, to be exact.

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As much as she hated to admit it, she loved practice. The initial thought of her being a part of a team used to make her gag. Now it kind of makes her heart swell. Even though she is Co-Captain with Danny, an honor bestowed on her by their coach against her will. That was another reason she loved practice, because of their coach. Coach Mark Hollis.

The sound of a whistle is blown.

“Alright team, huddle up.”

They make their way over to Coach Hollis. Danny is standing in front of him with her arm resting on LaF’s left shoulder. SJ and Natalie have taken occupancy on the floor, slightly tired after their warm up laps. Perry is refilling the water cooler and folding the clean towels. Carmilla is standing right next to Coach Hollis, as she always did.

“The quarterfinals are a week from Friday. As you know we’re playing Olympic Heights, currently the number one ranked school in our district. In several districts for that matter. And although you kids have been playing great and showing some real initiative out there we’re going to need to push a bit harder. So that being said we’re going to have two-a-days starting tomorrow morning.”

“What?! Coach you can’t be serious?” Natalie whined from the floor.

“I know it’s not ideal but I really want you kids to push yourselves and despite how well you guys play it still won’t be enough to beat those Jaguars.”

“So the plan is to wear us down and make us exhausted for the game by having us run two-a-days?” SJ mockingly asked through short breaths.
“Shut up, Weezing.” Carmilla snarked.

“Carm” Coach Hollis said cautiously as he placed a hand on her shoulder. A parental-like touch she never shied away from. Also a nickname she secretly more than welcomed. Only when it came to the Hollis clan, that is.

“So how early are we talking here coach?” Danny asked indifferently.

“Okay now you guys are really gonna hate me, 5 a.m.”

“OMG! Coach you CAN’T! You absolutely CAN’T!” Natalie and SJ both whined now standing in frustration.

“It’s not fair!!” Natalie added, again.

“Shut it Jessie and James!” Danny exclaimed.

“These Pokemon reference are great, by the way.” LaF chimed in, appreciative of the nostalgia.

“Okay enough! Not only do I not know what the heck you’re talking about but you kids are actually starting to give me a headache. Now I don’t know about you guys but I want to win. I haven’t spent my life coaching kids in the hopes to have an ‘okay’ season only to end in defeat. We’ve had a great season so far and I want that to continue.”

“Sounds fair to me!” Danny added with her captain-like mentality.

“Uh, coach?” Carmilla said, wearily.

“Yes Carm?”

“Not that I don’t love taking multiple showers a day, and spending more time than necessary in this hell-hole of a prison with less than pleasant company (as she gestured towards the Sisterhood-of-the-traveling-cant’s) but what about my route?”

“Oh shoot, I forgot.” Looking pensive and scrunching up his face in an all to familiar way that Carmilla can’t help but smile at.

“Oh! I’ll get Laura to help you.”

“What?” Carmilla asked; with an expression of shock replacing her small smile.

“Yeah, I’m sure Laura won’t mind. She’s done it before.”

“Yeah, but that was back when, back, before now.”

Sensing her apprehension Coach Hollis sends the rest of the team to get started with their suicides, so he can have a minute alone with Carmilla. A warm up that everyone except Danny dreaded doing. She loved pushing herself.

“What’s the matter Carm?”

“It’s just, it’s kind of awkward.”

“With Laura? You know I still have no idea why you two stopped hanging out. You guys were inseparable.”
She told me we were never really friends to begin with and she never wants to see my “stupid face” again?

“Yeah, I don’t know either.” She thinks it’s easier to lie him.

“Well I don’t want you to lose your job and as co-captain it’s not really an option for you to miss practice, so I’m afraid we really don’t have a choice.”

“Okay” Carmilla agrees, bowing her head slightly.

As she is about to join the others in finishing up suicides, the cheerleading team strolls through the double doors, pom poms in tow. They have to share the gymnasium but the cheerleaders always started late because Betty really didn’t give a shit.

“Perfect timing.” Coach Hollis tugs on Carmilla’s shoulder pulling her back.

“Hey Laura! Could you come over here for a moment, sweetheart?”

Laura looking over at her dad and Carmilla gives them a confused look and makes her way over to the duo. She’s wearing her Billie Piper shirt that Carmilla would always borrow at their sleepovers and a pair of black sophies that Carmilla noticed fit her oh so well.

“What’s up dad?”

“Hey I need you to do me a favor” He says as he pats Carmilla on the shoulder.

“Um, okay, what is it?”

“We’re going to start doing two-a-days--”

“Jeez, that sucks.” She said without thinking.

“Don’t start! Anyway, Carm here has her paper route before school, as you know.”

Noticing how he still calls her Carm warms her heart and makes her stomach do a little flip.

“And?”

“And if she had someone to help her get her papers delivered she could finish her route quicker and make it in time for practice. That’s where you come in.”

“Are, are you serious?” she asks in shock and terror. Carmilla is trying to decide which one she sees more in her face.

“You’ve done it before!”

“Yeah but, but, that was--”

“-before, and not now, I know. But whatever differences you girls seem to have you need to work it out because I really need you here Laur.”Almost pleading with his daughter. She thinks for a moment. Looking from her father’s desperate eyes to her former best friend’s worried expression. She can’t let him down. She can’t let her down.

“Okay, I’ll do it.” She says her eyes meeting Carmilla’s hopeful ones and then quickly moving to her dad’s thankful gaze.
“Oh that’s great sweetie, thank you” He pulls her in for a hug and plants a kiss on top of her head.

She walks back over to her squad where Betty greets her with confusion.

“What was that all about?”

“Oh my dad just wanted my help.”

“Help with what?”

“He needed someone to help Carmilla with her morning paper route so she’ll have enough time to make it to practice.”

“Eww you can’t be serious? You actually have to spend time with that freaky loser?” She says loud enough so that Carmilla can hear but Coach Hollis didn’t catch because he was watching Danny carefully. Making sure she wasn’t over doing it.

“Yeah, tell me about” Laura said with the most contrived and nauseating chuckle she could muster at her new best friend’s comment.

Ouch.

The girls have already finished their drills by the time Coach Hollis and Carmilla make their way over to the group.

“You know to be honest Carm, I miss having you around the house. I miss seeing Laura with you.”

“Well now she has Betty.”

“It’s different. I don’t care much for that girl, she’s too, too-”

“-much of a bitch?”

Suppressing a laugh, “Carm I’m a coach and teacher at this school so calling a student that would be completely unprofessional not to mention unethical-”

“-but you totally agree, she’s a raging bitch”

“You got that right.”

Their laughs echo freely in the gymnasium and fill up the space. Everyone in the gym glances over at the two, now in the middle of the court, and then returning to their exercises. Except for Laura. She spares a moment, taking in the sight of the once two most important people in her life exchanging a beautiful moment that she only wishes she could be a part of. She notices the sunlight hitting the girl’s chiseled face illuminating her best features. Her eyes linger on the expanse of the girl’s neck as she throws her head back in genuine melodic laughter.

God she loved the sound of that laugh. Loves, the sound of that laugh.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Laura helps Carmilla with her paper route, while Carmilla sort of kind of tries to distance herself (not really.)

Chapter Notes

Sorry for my little hiatus. Life and work got crazy but now all is good! I will try to have the next chapter out by next Friday at noon, it just might be a little shorter. Thank you all for reading! Your support and kind words have been pushing me to write more and I greatly appreciate you guys taking time to look at this particular story. Anyway thanks again buds and you dudes enjoy :)

***BZZZ BZZZ BZZZ BZZZ*** Carmilla turns over to see an annoyingly bright red “3:45 a.m.” flashing repeatedly on her alarm clock. The neon red is illuminating her pitch black room (because why would she not have block-out curtains? Any sensible human being would be wise to invest in only the most genius invention known to mankind; well second genius, next to the Toaster Strudel of course). She musters all of the strength she can, at such a godforsaken hour, and smacks the shit out of her alarm clock knocking it off of her night stand.

Just as she is about to roll over and go back to bed (a common occurrence that would typically result in either her mom or Will coming in to physically wake her up) she remembers what today is. She sighs as she remembers that today is the day she starts two-a-days. Not that she hates the idea of practicing twice a day--because in all honesty she loves basketball, almost as much as she loves reading. But because today is the day she has been both dreading and secretly anticipating. Today she starts her paper route with Laura.

She manages to stumble out of bed and makes her way to the bathroom. After peeing and brushing her teeth, she jumps in the shower. The steaming hot water always manages to do the trick and wake her up some. After a quick five minute shower, Carmilla throws on an old pair of black skinny jeans (the ones that are torn on the left knee), a white v-neck, and her favorite over-sized red flannel shirt that she wears open. That shirt feels so comfortable. That shirt feels like home.

She made her way to the kitchen and popped in a strawberry Toaster Strudel into the toaster (Mankind’s greatest invention. Period). As she waited the painstaking two and a half minutes it took to defrost and toast this one of a kind delicacy, her mom came jogging down the stairs.

“Hey sweetie, you’re up early.”

“I could say the same for you, mom”

“I mean earlier than usual. Don’t you normally start your route at 4:30?”

She makes her way over to Carmilla and places a kiss on her forehead then checks her watch as she
makes her way to the refrigerator.

“Yeah but Mark, I mean Coach Hollis, has us running two-a-days starting at 5:00. Hence the beginning of my vampiric transformation into becoming an almighty and powerful nocturnal immortal.”

“I will never understand your fascination with vampires.” Her mother says defeatedly before continuing. “That still doesn’t give you enough time to do your route though, does it?”

“Uhhh, well Laura is going to be helping me.”

Her mom pops her head from out of the fridge and makes her way to the counter with her Soy Milk in hand. She begins to pour the coffee into her thermos and there is a brief moment of awkward silence before she speaks.

“Laura is helping you?” She says in surprise.

“Yeah, you know, like she used to.”

Her mother raises an eyebrow as she begins to add the contents of the Soy Milk to her thermos of Folgers.

“Hmmm.”

“What?”

“Nothing, I just, I’m surprised. You guys haven’t hung out in, in---”

“---A year and half.”

“I was going to say a while.”

Fuck Carmilla. Don’t make it obvious that you’ve been counting every day of this misery.

“Oh, well, yeah it’s been a while.”

Just as they can feel the awkward silence about to set in again the toaster clangs and Carmilla turns around almost burning her fingers trying to grab the breakfast treat from its infernal metal mouth. She begins to trace intricate shapes over the strudel with the accompanying pack of icing (a serving size she feels is suitable for two, so she leaves half the packet behind).

“I’m assuming this wasn’t either of yours idea?”

“Nope. That would be Marky Mark’s. Guess he still feels the good vibrations.”

Carmilla stuffs the piping hot strudel in her mouth before she can say another idiotic thing. Realizing this must be hard for her daughter, knowing how close they used to be, Ms. Karnstein walks over to her daughter placing a comforting hand on her shoulder.

“And you’re okay with this?”

“Don’t really have a choice in the matter, do I?”

“I’m sorry, sweetie.”

Carmilla can’t stand pity, especially when it’s from her own family.
“Don’t you have lives to save and bed pans to empty?” Carmilla drawled.

Unaffected by her daughter’s defense mechanisms Ms. Karnstein checks her watch once again; her eyes widening at the realization that her shift starts in only eight minutes. She wraps Carmilla in a tight hug and kisses the top of her head.

“Mom, you’re stronger than a boa constrictor!” She muffles out with the last breath remaining in her lungs, that her mother hasn’t managed to squeeze out.

Ms. Karnstein releases her maternally instinctual grip on her daughter as Carmilla dramatically gasps for air.

“I’ll see you later sweetheart” Ms. Karnstein says over her shoulder as she puts her thermos in her lunchbox and scurries towards the door. She grabs a set of keys off the key holder and bolts out the door.

“Mom!” Carmilla shouts just before the door closes. Several seconds go by and Carmilla starts to walk towards the door. She grabs a set of keys off the wall and holds them up to eye level. This set of keys has an adorable key chain attached of Where’s Waldo dressed up as a doctor. She examines the tiny plastic disguised doctor and she begins to grin at the memory of when her mother received it. Just then the door bursts open. Ms. Karnstein rushes in and sees Carmilla standing in front of her holding up the proper set of keys. Her mother breathes a sigh of relief and trades keys with her daughter.

“What would I do without you?”

“Pay a fortune in spare keys?”

Ms. Karnstein slumps her shoulders and rolls her eyes. (Guess we know where Carmilla gets it from). She kisses her daughter’s hair one last time before she goes.

“Please be safe, and have a good day!” She says half way to the car.

Carmilla leans against the door and watches her mother get in and drive off into the fading darkness. She then closes the door and makes her way back to the kitchen. She sees the Soy Milk sitting on the counter and with a smile shakes her head. She takes a big gulp straight from the carton and puts it back in the fridge. She grabs her backpack off of the kitchen table and makes her way to door, fiddling with her rightful keys. She picked up the stack of rolled up newspapers she had to throw today and locked the door behind her.

---

She steps outside and picks up her bike off of her front lawn. They live in a really safe and quiet neighborhood. In fact, her, Will, and Laura are the only kids in the neighborhood. Well, aside from drooling babies and a couple of toddlers. They’re the only ones old enough to cause trouble and they don’t. At least not anymore, so she doesn’t bother hiding her bike away in the garage or in their back yard.

She sets the newspapers in the basket attached to her seat and brushes the blades of grass off the seat, hiking her leg up over it. She stops herself before her left foot touches the pedal. Shit. She was so used to her daily routine that she was about to get started with her route. Shit. If only this was just like any other day where she could just get her route over and done with by herself. She takes a minute and wonders if maybe she could get it done by herself. Maybe if she picked up her speed she could get the whole neighborhood done in half the time? Nah, who are you kidding Karnstein you’re
not Lance Armstrong and this isn’t Le Tour de Lawns. Maybe if she rode without hands? (A practice she had passed along to Will after him begging her for what seemed like an eternity.) Nah, let’s face it you’ll probably crash and mom will be furious especially since you so adamantly refuse to wear your bike helmet. Maybe if she used Will’s potato launcher and just stuffed it with newspaper. Are you fucking kidding me?! Just girl the hell up, walk over there (like you have so many times before) and knock on the fucking door! Carmilla rolls her eyes at her conflicting thoughts and begins to make her way over to the pale yellow house to the left of her own.

**Breath e. Just breathe.** She hesitantly raises her left hand out in front of her making a fist. After a slight pause, she knocks three times.

*Three’s a good knock right? That’s like a solid “hey” kind of knock. Three isn’t desperate at all. It’s a totally appropriate “hey I’m here, or whatever” kind of knock.*

There is still no answer.

*Maybe that wasn’t loud enough? I mean it was only three knocks and you didn’t want to bang on the door like a religious nut trying to convert the house’s inhabitants. Shit. Should you knock again?*

Her relentless asinine thoughts cause her to make a repetitive and painfully awkward up/down motion with her arm, debating whether or not she should knock again. Just as she has made up her mind and is about to knock again, she hears familiar footsteps bounding down the stairs.

**Breathe.**

**Jesus Christ, I said breathe not hyperventilate.**

Just as she is about to enter the beginning stages of a panic attack, the doors swings open and everything stops. Her thoughts, her breathing, her heart, *everything* just stops.

Laura always had that affect on her. You know the kind of affect that made a girl think she was dying on account of her mind and body malfunctioning every time she laid eyes on the beautiful tiny specimen before her? Laura was standing there half hiding behind the door, dressed in her Silas High Cheerleading sweatpants and her old, tatty, gray “The Used” band t-shirt. Of course she looks adorable at “4:00 o’clock in the fucking morning”!!! Carmilla bit her lip and remained silent, unsure how to continue. The two stared at each other for a moment before Mark came to the door.

He was wearing his favorite Bugs Bunny pajama pants and a plain white sleep shirt. (Bugs Bunny was his favorite cartoon as a kid. He loved that Bugs was such a wise ass). His hair was disheveled and he had a cowlick in the same spot Lilly would always pat down when they woke up together.

“Hey Kiddo”

Carmilla trying to bite back a small laugh replied “Hey Coach”.

Resting his hands on Laura’s shoulder he asked “Laura, did you forget your manners or are you sleep walking again?” (She actually has been caught sleep walking before. A trait she picked up from her mother Lilly.)

“Right, sorry, hey Carm-illa”. *Nice, Hollis* Laura thought to herself.

Carmilla raised her eyebrow ever so slightly at the cover up of her favorite nickname. She’s not sure what came over her but then she thought *Fuck it. You have nothing left to lose.*

“Morning, cupcake.”
Laura’s eyes widened slightly and her cheeks turned a light shade of pink.

“That’s more like it” Mark said with a half a smile and scratching his head.

“Well kids, I’m going to go hit the showers. I’ll see you back here in an hour Carm” he said pointing a finger at her.

“You kids have a good day and be safe!”

“See ya Coach”

He began making his way towards the stairs.

“Dad, wait!” Laura said pulling him back by his arm. She licked her fingers and smoothed out the persistent cowlick.

Carmilla stared at the tiny girl with hope in her eyes. Hope that she was still the girl she used to know, the girl well, you know.

Mark smiled at his daughter, thinking about how much Laura reminded him of Lilly. He kissed her on the top of her head and began to make his way towards the stairs.

Laura and Carmilla stood in between the doorway, Laura squirming under the brunette’s intense gaze. Halfway up the stairs Mark shouted towards the girls “Oh and play nice girls! And Laura you better pull your own weight out there. I don’t need Carmilla injuring her shoulder. She’s my three-pointer gal!” He said while physically mimicking making a basketball shot and then hooting and hollering because it imaginatively went in.

The girls both laughed, Carmilla a little bit harder than Laura.

“He’s such a dork sometimes” Laura said sheepishly.

“Sometimes?”

“Oh, all the time.” Laura admitted with a small laugh.

“Well now we know where you get it from.”

Laura’s expression was now serious. She looked at the gorgeous brunette she use to playfully banter with, searching her face for any malice or ill intentions. She obviously found none. After all Laura had done or not done to this girl, she still would never hurt Laura intentionally, or unintentionally for that matter. Laura bit her lip and felt her face beginning to flush.

“We should probably get going if we’re going to get done on time.”

“Right, right.” Laura was thankful the other girl remembered what they were supposed to be doing, otherwise they would have been stuck in the door way as if an earthquake were happening.

Laura grabbed her turquoise cruiser with the TARDIS basket attached to the front. Carmilla handed her half of the newspapers and they began walking out into the street.

“So I figured you could take the left side of the street and I’ll get the right? You know, how we used to do it?”

“Yeah, um, that sounds good.”
“Cool. Oh, and, thanks for helping.”

“Well I didn’t really have a choice in the matter.”

“Right, sorry, I know you don’t want to be here--”

“--No Carm, that’s not what I, I didn’t mean it like that” she said grabbing the other girl’s hand out of habit. Carmilla, taken aback looked down at the other girl’s hand on top of her own with a wistful expression.

“I just meant, that, you know--” Oh way to go Hollis, you’re mucking this up!

“--It’s okay Laura, no worries.”

Laura. Even though Carmilla called her by her name rather than an edible treat or other term of endearment, she still loved the way she said her name. No one said her name like Carmilla did. Well, Lilly used to. With the same adoring tone, anyway.

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The route went by rather quickly. Carmilla tossed the newspapers on the lawns of the houses along the right of the street, practicing her aim trying to hit door mats and doggy doors. Laura took a little more care with her papers tossing them gently from a shorter distance. Carmilla smiled as she watched the girl. Not much had changed in this regard. In fact, this route felt familiar and comfortable like it used to, only this time there wasn’t as much conversation. Okay, there was really no conversation. After they had agreed which houses to hit, they rode in silence. Keeping pace with each other, they rode side by side into the rising sun.

Their route ended at a cul-de-sac on Willow Tree Lane. Oddly there was only one house on the cul-de-sac, which belonged to an elderly couple, Mr. And Mrs. Jensen. Well now just Mr. Jensen. After every route they would usually sit in the tire swing that hung from the Jensen’s oak tree right by the lake. The girls would take turns pushing each other, watching the sunrise. They remained on their bikes staring at the place they used to laugh together. Carmilla felt Laura’s gaze turn from the swing to her and she looked back at the honey brown haired girl. Her hair looked especially honeyed in the morning twilight. It’s not fair how beautiful this girl was, especially the way the scattered sunlight illuminated her numerous freckles. Stop it Karnstein! Don’t do this to yourself, not again.

“Well we should probably head back, your dad and I have to get going soon.”

Laura’s heart sunk a little bit. She didn’t expect them to do the things they used to do together, but she just really wanted to swing right now. She’s not quite sure why but she has never wanted to swing so badly in her entire life, than in this moment.

“Okay.” Laura replied, slightly disheartened.

Carmilla didn’t seem to notice, or at least didn’t act like she did; which Laura was thankful for. They rode back to Laura’s house the same way they rode out here, in silence.

---

“Come on girls, two more laps and you’re home free!” Shouted Coach Hollis as the girls huffed and puffed their way around the gymnasium. They had already ran through their warm up drills, agility drills, and offensive plays. Now they were just running their cool down laps before stretching. Coach Hollis always made sure the girls ran their recovery laps and stretched their muscles properly to prevent injury. He was very protective of his girls.
“Ugggh, Coach we’re tired. Can we just skip the last lap and go?”

“You know the rules, SJ”

“But--”

“--No buts!”

“Except for Natalie’s big butt!” Danny jokingly retorted as the rest of the team giggled.

“Lawrence!”

“Sorry Coach”. She wasn’t really.

The girls stopped running and gathered in the center of the gymnasium to do their stretches. As they were stretching out their hamstrings, one of the double doors to the gymnasium opened. It was Laura holding what appeared to be a Bugs Bunny lunchbox. Carmilla looked up at the girl holding the children’s lunchbox. She remembered when Laura bought that lunchbox for her dad’s 42nd birthday. They had spent the day riding their bikes from store to store in search of the perfect gift. They hadn’t been able to find anything until they were on their way back home and Mr. and Mrs. Jensen were having a yard sale. Carmilla spotted the tin box and showed it to Laura. Laura gasped in excitement claiming that it was “perfect, Carm!” and gave the brunette a chaste kiss on the cheek. Her first kiss on the cheek; the first of what was many.

“Hey Dad.”

“Hey Laura!”

“You forgot your lunch, again” She said playfully.

“Oh, thanks honey! What would I do without you?”

“Probably starve?”

Carmilla laughed to herself, realizing she had a very similar conversation with her own mother this morning.

“Starve? Ha! I’d probably just confiscate someone’s lunch.” He joked.

“Or Mary the lunch lady would probably just give you free food, Coach” LaF interjected.

“What?”

“Yeah she’s totally got a thing for you” They say with certainty.

“They’re correct Coach, she most certainly has shown signs of adoration for you.” Perry chimed in. (Despite being the team manager, Coach Hollis assured Perry that she did not need to attend the early morning practice, especially with her hectic school schedule but Perry was insistent that she would support the team one hundred percent. Coach Hollis couldn’t argue with that, so his appreciation for her just grew.)

“You think so? Hmm, must be my charm and hot bod” He joked as he began flexing whatever muscles he had.

“Oh my God, Dad, stop!” Laura embarrassingly exclaimed.
The girls laughed through their stretches. Danny laughed so hard she lost her balance knocking into Laura. Coach Hollis jumped towards the girls trying to catch the tumbling giant but Laura, being awfully strong for someone so tiny, was able to steady the ginger giant by herself.

“Woah easy there lurch, don’t want to squish the leader of the lollipop guild” Carmilla joked.

Danny looked over at Carmilla with a raised eyebrow, surprised at the return of some candid banter she hadn’t heard in a while. Laura tried her best not to smile, but her best apparently wasn’t good enough.

“You alright Lawrence?” Coach Hollis asked with utter concern on his face.

Danny didn’t respond, blushing slightly with embarrassment.

“She’s fine dad, she’s a big girl, she can take care of herself.” Laura assured him.

“Thanks, Hollis” Danny replied with a small smile.

“Sorry Danny, I just worry--”

“--It’s okay Coach, I know.” Danny said understandingly.

Carmilla trying to rescue her Co-Captain and good friend, interjects. “Hey Coach, it’s almost 7.”

“Oh shoot, alright girls that’s it for this morning. Go ahead to the locker rooms and get ready for class. I’ll see some of you in AP History. Oh and please be on your best behavior today. Vice Principal Laghorn is sitting in on my class to evaluate me, so I need you guys to focus. The rest of you, I’ll see you at practice, again.”

Natalie and SJ sighed as they made their hurried way back to the locker rooms. Laura hugged her dad goodbye and headed to his classroom. (It’s where she would hangout sometimes if she got to school early). Perry and LaFontaine walked side by side arms brushing ever so gently against each other as they made their way back to the locker rooms. Danny and Carmilla started to head back walking a reasonable platonic friends distance apart. As they made it back to the locker rooms SJ and Natalie were already in the showers, most likely taking up all the hot water. LaF didn’t really like taking showers at school. Something about public bathrooms and germ colonies or something or other. They never really sweat that much though (lucky them) so it’s not like they really needed one. Carmilla began undressing, taking off her sneakers and then her jersey when she heard Danny let out a frustrated huff a couple of spaces away from her on the bench.

“Need help, Sasquatch?”

“No, I’ve got it.” Danny replied stubbornly.

Carmilla watched her struggle before walking over to the frustrated girl.

“You know, it’s okay to ask for help every once in a while Danny.”

“I don’t need help, Karnstein.” Just as she said that her hand slipped on the strap she was tugging at and hit the bench causing her to grimace in pain.

“Okay, that’s it.”

Carmilla bends over and manages to loosen the straps of the prosthetic leg attached just below Danny’s left knee. She manages to get it off and sets it on the bench beside Danny. Danny just stares
at her lap, feeling defeated and too ashamed to look at her friend. Carmilla reaches out and places a comforting hand on Danny’s left shoulder.

“Hey, you have nothing to be ashamed of Big Red. If anything I think you’re more badass with your titanium limb. You seem to even play better, like you have a super human advantage or something. Maybe I should get one of these.” Carmilla playfully teased.

Danny laughed and looked up at her friend.

“You know you’ve become so lame, right? Whatever happened to the broody, angst ridden, new girl that used to threaten me with big words and murderous glares?”

Carmilla shrugged and replied “She realized we’d be better off as acquaintances.”

“Acquaintances?” Danny says with an incredulous smile on her face.

“Don’t make me say it Pippy Tall Stocking.”

Danny swats at Carmilla’s shoulder playfully while both girls chuckle. “Thanks, Carmilla”.

“Sure thing, now go shower, you smell like a dog. Like Cl--”

“--Clifford the Big Red Dog, yeah yeah, I got it Daria.” Danny retorted.

Carmilla just shook her head and laughed to herself. She gestured to Danny to stand up; Danny complied wrapping an arm around Carmilla’s shoulder as the brunette led her towards the showers. She really can’t remember why she ever hated Danny, or at least acted hateful towards her. The girls were really very similar. Both stubborn and headstrong and protective...protective of Laura anyway. Oh yeah, that’s right, it was because of Laura. Because of their shared interest in the Coach’s daughter.

“So what was that earlier?” Danny said as she tried her best not to rely too much on Carmilla for support.

“What? Our conversation?” Carmilla asked confused and pretty sure she had just covered the fact that they were indeed friends and wanted to forget that it even happened in the first place.

“No, with Laura.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean ‘leader of the lollipop guild?”

“Do you not think there’s an uncanny resemblance?”

“Well no actually I don’t, Laura is way too beautiful-”

Well damn, that’s true.

“I mean the fact that you even said that. I haven’t seen you speak to her let alone banter with her in forever.”

“Oh, I don’t know. Guess it just slipped out.”

“Slipped out, huh?”
“Shutup.”

They have now made their way to the showers. Danny releases her hold on Carmilla and steadies herself against the wall to now face the girl. Danny’s expression turned serious and curious.

“So, whatever happened between you two anyway?”

“What do you care?”

“Oh you know, just acquaintances taking interest in acquaintances?”

“It’s a long story.” Carmilla rolled her eyes as she drawled. It actually wasn’t. To be honest Carmilla isn’t quite sure what happened. Just that something did, and it was the most painful moment in her life. Strike that, the second most painful moment in her life. Danny, sensing Carmilla’s unwillingness to open up, drops the matter.

“Whatever ever you say Broody McBrooderson.”

“Seriously go shower Stinky McStinkerson, you smell worse than someone with anosmia.”

“But, but isn’t that when you like, can’t smell at all?” Danny asked confused.

“You know for someone so tall I’m surprised jokes still manage to go over your head.”

---

It was fourth period, AP History. Mr. Hollis was rambling excitedly about the conquests of Genghis Khan as most of the class dozed in and out of consciousness, including Vice Principal Laghorn. There were a select few that managed to remain active participants when the time came. These few included Carmilla, Perry, LaFontaine, and Laura. As much as she would refuse to admit it, Laura loved having her dad as her AP History teacher. Not because nepotism would work in her favor, not at all. In fact Mr. Hollis was extra tough on her, which Laura appreciated. But because he never let her get away with anything and always made sure she stayed on top of her assignments. She loved that he was so passionate about teaching and was so good at it. He couldn’t help it that kids these days, and apparently Ms. Laghorn, have absolutely no attention span.

Carmilla's stomach had begun growling like clockwork. She used to be embarrassed about the monster-like rumbles that erupted from her empty gullet; but they happened so often that she and the rest of the students within her proximity had gotten used to it.

LaF, who sat diagonally behind Carmilla, found it familiar and comforting. Something she could always count on, actually. Like a Geometry Proof, if you will.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Carmilla is a growing girl</td>
<td>1. Given.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Her stomach is growling and the sounds coming from her empty stomach are reminiscent of an infamous scene from Dr. Ellen Ripley’s biopic masterpiece, <em>Alien.</em></td>
<td>2. She had breakfast over seven hours ago.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LaF what are you doing? This is History not Geometry. You had that freshman year! Focus dude...At least this isn’t Bio. You can’t get distracted in that class even if you tried, it’s way too interesting and informative. History is the past though and that doesn’t really matter. Not to you anyway, because you can’t change the past. You can only focus on the pres--DUDE FOCUS!

They snapped out of it, suddenly remembering that they had a granola bar in their backpack that their mom insisted they take. LaF reached into their bag and pulled out the delicious Nature Valley ‘Honey and Oats’ bar. They discreetly handed it to Carmilla who gave them the most appreciative look and lick of her lips.

A lick that Laura certainly did not notice. Even though, sitting behind LaF, she has the most perfect view of the hungry brunette; that there’s absolutely no way she could have missed that adorably sexy expression of eagerness she used to be so fond of. Still so fond of. Laura stop! What are you doing? You can’t look at Carm like that anymore. It’s not fair, to either of you, but especially her.

Laura’s thoughts must have physically manifested themselves because she found herself staring at Carmilla with a pained gaze. Carmilla, feeling someone’s gaze on her, turned only to see Laura staring back at her with the most peculiar expression on her face. Carmilla furrowed her eyebrows at the tiny girl before Laura broke their stare and put her head in her hands with a huff.

“Are you alright, Laura?” whispered Perry who was sitting diagonally in front of her, right next to LaF.

Laura tilted her head to look at the girl but kept her hands covering her face. “Yeah, I, uh, just have a headache.”

“Is it a hunger headache?”

No. It’s more like an ‘I’m a horrible person headache who doesn’t deserve the kindness of her former best friends’.

“Yeah, I think so.” She lied.

Without hesitation Carmilla opened the granola bar and handed the lying girl half of the bar. The sound of the wrapper must have woken up Vice Principal Laghorn because she was now looking around the room, in search of the culprit. Laura reached out to take half of the generously offered Honey and Oats flavored bar when her fingers grazed Carmilla’s. They both froze their eyes locking with each other’s. Carmilla’s skin was soft under Laura’s thumb and Laura’s touch felt so warm on Carmilla’s skin. Both of their breaths hitched, fingers still touching, and eyes still searching.

“Mr. Hollis!” Vice Principal Laghorn rudely interrupted just as he was getting to the conquest of Southern Song.

He snapped out of his story telling immediately and glared at the plump unpleasant woman seated in the furthest corner of the room.

“Yes, Vice Principal Laghorn?” She cleared her throat dramatically and pointed towards the other side of the room where the gang of girls were seated.

The girls, including Carmilla and Laura looked over to the Ms. Umbridge wannabe, trying to make sense of the reason for her interruption.

“It appears some of your students have mistaken this room for the cafeteria. I hope you don’t encourage this kind of behavior as you know eating in the classrooms is strictly forbidden.”
Mr. Hollis turns towards the girls and sees Carmilla and Laura attached by the hand to what appears to be a granola bar. Laura and Carmilla look down at their hands (not realizing that they still had been holding onto it) and pull their hands away. Carmilla not wanting Laura to get in any trouble tightens her grip on the bar to take it back from Laura’s hold. Laura, not wanting Carmilla to get in any trouble because of her, especially when she was just being so incredibly sweet to her (despite everything she’s put her through) also tightens her grip on the bar and they end up snapping it in half with a loud crunch.

*Really Cynthia? It's just a freakin' granola bar, who cares you sour prune?* “No ma’am, I certainly don’t.”

Ms. Laghorn goes to scribble something down on her notepad before asking, “Well is there something you’re going to do about it?”

Mark scratches his head and looks back and fourth from the girls to Ms. Laghorn. He knows what he has to do but doesn’t want to. He looks back at the girls and almost as though they understand his dilemma Laura gives him a small nod and Carmilla a roll of the eyes.

“Girls, I’m afraid I’m going to have to give you both detention.”

The rest of the class seems to be awake now as well because they’re all “oooh”-ing.

“Good. May this be a lesson to the rest of you. Rules are made to be enforced, not broken.”

The girls and Mark glared at the strict woman. Even Perry joined in on the glaring, although she did secretly (not so secretly) agree with the woman’s last statement.

“The two of you will have detention today after school, with Mr. Teeley.” She added before gathering her things and heading towards the door (apparently she had all she needed to complete her evaluation).

“After school?! Can’t we just give the girls their detention during their study period?” *Yes please.* Carmilla thought as she realized she would have to spend an entire hour alone with Laura in a classroom slightly bigger than a prison cell. Well, she wouldn’t be *alone* with her, Mr Teeley would be there. But he always sleeps through detentions, every student knows that.

“Well Principal Truman and I have decided that making the children spend an extra hour at school, rather than just taking away their study period, is a more effective form of punishment.” She said proudly. She had Principal Truman wrapped around her chubby little finger, all of the teachers knew that.

“But what about the girls’ practices?” He asked, afraid that he’ll have to go over their new defensive plays without one of their captains there.

“You and Coach Woodmore will have to do without them for today.” She said firmly.

Knowing that Vice Principal Laghorn was not one to budge, Mr. Hollis dropped the matter and nodded. She had now left the room and Mr. Hollis looked over to the girls. Carmilla was sitting with her arms crossed against her chest, her jaw clenched looking away from him towards the door that wretched woman had come and gone through. Laura was looking at her dad with apologetic eyes. He returned her gaze with an apologetic look of his own. He walked back around his desk and tried to get back to the lesson at hand. *What were we just talking about? Gosh I can’t remember where I left off before that vile woman--OHH that’s it!* Mr. Hollis jumped right back into the lesson with the same enthusiasm he had before, only this time students were actually paying attention, after all the
The rest of the day was rather uneventful. Home Economics went by as usual. The class made apple pies that Carmilla and Perry were both too full to enjoy; while Danny and Kirsch burnt theirs. (Actually it was Kirsch’s fault for setting the timer for longer than the recipe called for and Danny was sure to never let him live it down). Fearing that the fiery redhead would take out her anger (Danny really loves apple pie and she was rather famished after their morning practice and was looking forward to a serving of pie to get her through the second one) on other classmates, Perry and Carmilla offered their pie to the two of them. A gesture Danny couldn’t refuse and greatly appreciated as she scarfed down most of it by herself. Kirsch tried to get an even share but Danny scowled at him and swatted his fork away with her own half of the time, so he really only got a third of it. (Which he supposed was only fair since he burnt theirs).

AP Lit went by faster than normal. Carmilla expected it to drag on as she anticipated the detention that was awaiting her and Laura, her partner in crime. It was just a fucking granola bar for Christ’s sake. Hardly anything to put this girl through the torture she is about to endure with the only person (left) that could ever cause her any real pain. However, most of the class was highly attentive today and actually participating in class discussion; which in any other class would have irritated Carmilla to no end, but since it was about books, she was pleased to have opinionated classmates to debate with. It also helped that Betty wasn’t at school today. (Carmilla imagined that she was probably playing hooky with her equally idiotic and grossly affectionate quarterback boyfriend Chad Shanton). Why is she even wasting her thoughts on them, ew. Stop.

The bell rang and she felt her face drop and her heart sink. She realized in a matter of minutes she would be trapped in a room for an hour, with the first and last person she would ever want to be trapped anywhere with.

Detention was held out in Mr. Teeley’s classroom, which was now a portable behind the school. (The C building was being renovated so all classes held in the C Building had moved out into smaller portables next to the lacrosse field). Annoyed by the rather long walk to the portable, Carmilla finally made her way there with a huff. As she walked in she saw Mr. Teeley grading papers at his desk and Laura already seated in the middle row on the far left of the classroom. Fuck.

“Ms. Karnstein, pleasure to see you again.” Mr. Teeley said looking away from his work and up at the familiar face.

“Try as I may, I can never stay away.” She drawled at the middle aged man clad in corduroy, black suspenders, and donning his infamous coke-bottle glasses.

“Well it has been a while, I suppose it’s bittersweet that you’re back.” He and Carmilla had an understanding.

She used to get into trouble a lot with various teachers and she went into a bit of a relapse about a year and a half ago; however it’s been a couple months since the two have seen each other.

“So what is it today? Work on our assignments until the time is up?”

Usually he would give her the option to do homework or catch up on her reading. She figured with Laura here, he would have them do the former.
“Actually, neither.” He said as he stood up and walked over to the cabinet in the corner of the room.

“Vice Principal Laghorn thought it would be best if you gals did something more ‘productive’ and uh, ‘punishing’?” He said uncertain of her particular phrasing. (It was bitch work and he knew it).

“So, what are we doing?” Laura asked with mild anxiety.

“Well these are for you two.” He said as he pulled out two spackle knives.

Realizing what their task was Carmilla rolled her eyes slumped her shoulders. “You’ve gotta be kidding me?”

“What?” Laura asked confused. For an aspiring journalist (or at least a former aspiring journalist) sometimes Laura couldn’t quite fit the puzzle pieces together. No, sometimes she would try fitting a corner piece with a middle piece together, not realizing it was the wrong piece only after she had forced them together until they were stuck.

“V.P. Slaghorn wants us to get better acquainted with Juicy Fruit, Doublemint, and whatever other jaw exerciser our neanderthal classmates have so inconsiderately vandalized school property with.” Carmilla said with a tone of annoyance.

Laura furrowed her eyebrows (which Carmilla absolutely did not find adorable, nope no way) slightly lost at Carmilla’s long winded answer before she finally understood.

“Ugh, really? I have so much homework I would much rather get some of it out of the way.” She said almost pleading with Mr. Teeley.

“Sorry Ms. Hollis, as much as I wish I could let you do that, and trust me I do because these desks have been around since the late 80’s, ‘rules are made to be enforced, not broken’” He said in the most accurate impression of the plump woman that his deep voice could manage.

Both Laura and Carmilla giggled at the timid man’s uncharacteristic mockery. Mr. Teeley began to pack up his papers and pack them away in his briefcase.

“Why don’t you girls go ahead and get started. I’ll be back for the hour is over to make sure you’ve at least somewhat completed your task.”

“Wait, you’re not going to stay and, like, supervise?” Laura asked in a slight panic.

“Well to be quite honest Ms. Hollis, my car seat makes for a much more comfortable bed than this old desk chair” He said with a wink.

*Shit. Fuck. Shit, fuck!* Carmilla thinks to herself at the realization that her and Laura will be completely alone for the next hour. No one to save her, no one to kill her.

Mr. Teeley makes his way out of the portable with a slight bow and a tip of an imaginary hat. Laura and Carmilla stare at the door for a brief moment, both secretly hoping that he was just kidding. After about thirty seconds the girls realize that he was indeed serious and turn their gaze to each other. They silently stare at each other for what seems like an awkward eternity (it was literally three seconds) before Carmilla decides to cut the tension with a spackle knife.

“So, you want to start on the left side of the room and I’ll start on the right and we’ll meet in the middle, cutie?” *Fuck Karnstein, hope these new found balls don’t stretch out your skinny jeans.*

Laura, flustered at the unexpected return of a once (always) beloved nickname, takes a second to
collect her thoughts and her breath before responding.

“Uh, sure, yeah, that sounds fine.” She says as she gets up to grab a spackle knife.

They both walk over to their prospective sides and begin scraping at the petrified mounds of gum that cling to the bottom of desks twice their age. They remain silent, neither daring to break the not so uncomfortable silence. The only sounds to be heard are the knives scraping against the desks and frustrated sighs. Both girls have been unintentionally keeping relative pace with one another. They would switch off between being one or two desks ahead of each other, depending on how much gum they encountered on the bottom of each desk.

They were now working on the middle column of desks, Laura moving towards the middle from the back of the room and Carmilla making her way to the center from the front of the room. They reach the center desk simultaneously and stop, crouched on either side.

“I’ll get this one. If you want to start your homework, or something.” Carmilla offers.

Laura looks at the clock hanging on the wall in the front of the classroom before responding.

“We don’t have much time left, why don’t we just, do this one together?” Her breath hitches on that last word.

Carmilla’s eyes widen at the prospect of being crouched down under a desk, inches away from Laura “The Cupcake” Hollis.

“Umm, no it’s okay. Seriously, I can do it.” She offers once more, hoping the other girl will get the hint and say no. She has no luck.

“No Carm, Carmilla. I’m not going to let you do the brunt of the work especially when it’s my fault you’re even in here.”

“The brunt of the work? Laura, it’s one more desk. Besides it’s my fault we’re in here, I passed the paraphernalia into your possession, remember?”

“No, you were just being sweet. Please, either let me get this one or let’s just...do it t-together.” What the fuck is with that word? She couldn’t say it without almost choking on her own tongue.

“Fine, we’ll do it together.” Carmilla said with slightly less difficulty.

The girls crawled under the desk and realizing how close they were Carmilla turned her back towards the smaller girl. Laura mimicked her position and the girls were now seated back to back, under the desk, but careful not to touch. They became silent again scraping away at the dried gum on their sides of the desk’s underbelly. Occasionally the would graze elbows or lean ever so slightly into each other but as soon as one of the girls would notice the sudden contact they would pull away as fast as possible.

Laura was working on a particularly stubborn clump of what she guessed was Cotton Candy Bubble Yum when her hand slipped and she accidentally elbowed Carmilla in the side of her head, hard.

“Oh my God, Carm! I’m so sorry!” Laura said turning to the girl behind her grabbing the brunette’s face in her hands.

Carmilla’s ear is still ringing and she doesn’t realize what just happened until she feels warm hands cradling her face and opens her eyes to see Laura, mere inches from her. Her mind goes blank, gazing into the girl’s big hazel eyes that were filled with concern and apology.
“Carmilla I’m so, so sorry.”

Snapping out of whatever trance she was in Carmilla responds “It, it’s fine, cupcake.”

“No it’s not, I elbowed you really hard!” Laura continued in a panic, running her hands over the girls face looking for any damage she may have caused.

Carmilla stared at the girl, unsure that what she was seeing and feeling was actually real. She felt Laura’s warm fingers caress her cheeks then move to her jaw, tilting her head to the side to better access the damage. She closed her eyes as Laura’s thumb traced her eyebrow and rested at the top of her cheekbone. She was lost under Laura’s touch.

Laura stopped moving and remained staring at the girl who still had her eyes closed and seemed to lean into Laura’s touch. Her left hand was cradling the right side of Carmilla’s neck while her right hand rested on Carmilla’s left cheek. She began scanning the brunette’s face, not for damages, but for perfections. Laura’s eyes along with her thumb moved from Carmilla’s gorgeously sculpted eyebrows, to her architecturally flawless nose and accompanying high cheekbones, to her perfectly carved lips.

Laura had gotten lost in this girl’s other worldly beauty many times before; but not being able to appreciate it and be this close to it in over a year and a half has made her eyes grow fonder. Her eyes, her hands, her lips, her heart have done nothing but grown fonder for this metaphysically exquisite girl before her. Before realizing it, Laura finds herself leaning in towards this girl, her eyes fixated on those seductively crafted lips. She doesn’t try and stop it, because she knows that she can’t. She just continues to get closer and closer to her.

Laura’s lips are mere centimeters away from Carmilla’s when Carmilla feels a warm sweet breath flushing over her face. Her eyes blink open. Awakened from her hypnosis she instinctively raises a hand to Laura’s chest; stopping the tiny girl before her lips can touch her own. Laura’s gaze moves from Carmilla’s lips to her eyes. Carmilla’s eyes are wistful and pained and it breaks Laura’s heart, just as it had before. Carmilla’s eyes bore into the other girl’s own and she can see the guilt and regret in them as they slowly glaze with water, threatening to spill over down her sun kissed cheeks.

Don’t do this. Don’t you dare fucking do this! Look at her. Look into those eyes. Those eyes that told you that you were insignificant and small. Those eyes that told you you could never be loved. Those eyes that...those big, beautiful, honey hazel eyes. Those eyes that you spent hours staring into trying to examine every fleck of complimentary colors you could find. Those eyes that fluttered gently to sleep staring back at you in the countless nights spent in that treehouse. Those eyes that shone brighter than any star you had ever seen when you told her how important and special she was to you. Those eyes that smiled at you when she told you how fucking important and special you were to her.

Carmilla slid her hand from Laura’s chest up to her neck. Her fingers grasped at the nape of Laura’s neck, intertwining with her hair. She began to pull the girl towards her. Laura’s eyes moved to Carmilla’s lips while Carmilla’s eyes never left Laura’s as they began to inch forw---

“---Alright girls! Let’s see what you’ve done.” Mr. Teeley says as he bursts through the door not looking directly at the girls but rather fiddling with his umbrella. (It started to rain halfway through detention, unbeknownst to either girl). Fuck.

Laura and Carmilla pulled away from each other as fast as humanly possible and stood up in a jolt. They both stared at Mr. Teeley who finally returned their gaze with a smile.

“So all done, are we?”
“Yep!”
“Yes”

The girls answer simultaneously in a hurried panic.

“Well then, why don’t you girls skedaddle. It’s raining pretty hard out there so be careful on your way home!”

Carmilla and Laura grabbed their backpacks and scurried towards the door avoiding all eye contact. They both said their goodbyes to Mr. Teeley before stepping outside of the portable. Carmilla was headed back towards the bus loop to wait for the extra curricular bus while Laura was headed towards her dad’s office to get a ride with him. A thought crossed over Laura’s mind. Should I? No you can’t, do you not realize what almost just happened in there? Shoot, it’s raining really hard though. What would the Doctor do?

“Hey Carm!” Laura shouted towards the other girl over the pouring rain.

Carmilla stopped and turned back to look at the tinier girl.

“Do you want a ride?”

Is this girl serious? Does she not know what almost happened in there? You can’t say yes. That was too close of a call, you need to distance yourself. You used to be so good at that, what happened?

“Sure.” Carmilla’s words betrayed her thoughts.

Carmilla jogged over to Laura and the two girls started making their way to Coach Hollis’ office. Neither of them had an umbrella and were walking awfully slow in the pouring rain. Most people would try their best to run into the nearest building. Not these two. These two appeared to be taking a leisurely stroll through what can only be described as a Jumanji like monsoon.

Both girls were absolutely drenched from head to toe, and neither seemed to mind in the slightest bit.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Don't worry, there will be more.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for my extended hiatus. I promise to continue this fic until it's finished but I can't seem to stick to a regular schedule. I apologize because I know how it is wanting to read more. Anyway, I'm back in it so hopefully I'll be able to write more sooner rather than later. As always, thank you for reading. Keep on being awesome and just remember Life's a Garden, Dig it Man! (Sorry I just watched Joe Dirt...cool)

So the past couple of days have been interesting to say the least. Ever since Laura started helping Carmilla with her paper route (and that almost holy shit moment during detention) the girls haven’t tried avoiding each other as much. Perhaps it’s because they know that avoidance is futile but it’s almost as if they try to run into each other (when they’re not in class together or sharing the gymnasium, that is.)

It’s not that they’ve gotten back to how things used to be, not even close by any means; but they don’t seem as horribly distant as they were just a week ago. Between classes they run into each other at their lockers a lot more often now. Instead of completely ignoring each other’s existence, they now somewhat greet each other. Laura with a tight smile and Carmilla with a nod of the head and slightly raised eyebrow. They even use words occasionally. Laura with a small “hi” and Carmilla with a raspy “hey”. Their new found kindofplatonicquaintances/almostsomewhatfriendsagainiftheycanjustforgetthepastandgobacktobeingthemc has not gone unnoticed. (Sorry I know that was difficult to read).

They are both currently standing at their respective lockers, each taking their time searching for whatever books they pretend to be searching for. Their arms slightly grazing each other’s, both pretending not to notice and doing nothing to stop it from happening. Carmilla finds her Calculus book, which was right in front of her face (there is no way she had trouble finding it, it’s huge!) and begins to put it into her backpack, when it suddenly flies out of her hand and crashes onto the girls feet with a loud thud. Laura flinches in pain for a moment (not the best day to wear flip flops she thinks) and looks up at Carmilla. Carmilla looks from the ground to Laura and then to the obnoxious cause of the incident, Betty.

“Oooops. Did I make the loser drop her book?” Betty mocks in a nauseatingly faux innocent voice.

“What the fuck is your problem?!” Carmilla spits out as she turns around to face the dimwitted barbie doll.

“Oh no, I’ve angered Lestat. Please don’t hurt me!” Betty replies even more dramatically.

“Lestat was fucking blonde and a guy, if you’re going to insult me at least be accurate, Regina
George.”

Laura, still confused as to what the heck just happened, tries to hold back a laugh from Carmilla’s all too appropriate comeback. Betty glares at Laura (her supposed “best friend”) and then returns her gaze back to Carmilla, while stepping closer.

“Whatever you say Janice Ian.”

“Closer but no cigar.” Carmilla says, matching Betty’s step forward (but actually coming off as intimidating AF, instead of trying to).

The girls were a fighting’s distance apart. You know that awkward distance between platonic friends’ and kissing your soulmate’s distance apart. Somewhere right past the middle? Let’s call it the facing your nemesis’ distance apart. You know that awkward space where you can’t decide if you’re too close to punch them or too far to strangle them? Well Betty decided she was close enough to punch her.

As she lifts up her arm and pulls her bunched fist back to gather momentum, Laura’s Krav Maga instincts kick in and save Carmilla from a punch to the face. Carmilla sees it all in slow motion. She sees the pathetically, trashy and insecure queen bee lift her scrawny, Tiffany® clad arm and push towards her. Carmilla stands there with an impressed look of confusion on her face, as she tries to decide whether or not she should stop Betty the Yeti.

She thinks: Stop her you idiot! You can totally stop her. Kitty, why aren’t you moving? Shouldn’t you be moving? Just block her with your left hand and grab her by the throat with your right, just like Laura taught you. (When I said she saw everything in slow motion, I meant it. Like holy shit it’s slow. It’s like Clockstoppers slow.) Move! Unless you want to get hit? Hmmm. You want to get hit. Why? You’re numb to it anyway. It’s not like you’re going to feel it. Remember? That’s why your parents wanted to move you guys here in the first place. Because you were always someone else’s punching bag? Stick up for yourself!

She hears her dad’s voice saying those last few words. Just like he’d plead when she would come home from school with a ripped shirt and a black eye. Before she can decide to stand up for herself, Laura does it for her.

Her vision is blocked by a blurry tiny tanned (and perfectly toned) arm rushing past her face. Laura strikes Betty’s forearm with the palm of her open hand with so much force, that it redirects Betty’s momentum, causing her to tumble into the lockers right beside them. Betty looks back at Laura and with a scowl begins to motion towards the tinier girl. Carmilla, without thinking grabs Betty by the throat and smashes her against the lockers. A growl escaping her throat. A literal GROWL. Betty stiffens, her eyes fixed on Carmilla’s hungry glare but her hands still tugging at the iron vise around her throat.

“Put her down!” An approaching woman shouted.

“I’d love to. Got a number for a good vet?” Carmilla snarked, eyes never leaving Betty’s fearful ones.

“I said put her down, Karnstein!” Coach Woodmore commanded as she approached the surprisingly strong girl choking her niece.

Carmilla reluctantly obliged.

“Are you alright sweetie?” Coach Woodmore asked, concerned for the safety of her brother’s
‘beautiful princess’ (vom).

“I-I think so” Betty choked out between breaths, her hands massaging her throat.

“You two, follow me!” Coach Woodmore said pointing at both Laura and Carmilla.


“But Coach Woodm—” Laura chimed before she was menacingly cut off.

“I said, follow me” the tall, blonde, duplicate of Betty spat before turning on her heel and hastily walking away.

Fuck.

They knew where they were going as soon as she led them out of the main hallway. They knew they were screwed.

---

“Tsk, tsk, tsk. I expected better from you Ms. Hollis. Ms. Karnstein, not so much given her frequent trips to Mr.Teeley’s class. But after last week’s visit, I thought you would have at least learned your lesson, Lauren.”

“It’s Laura” Carmilla drawled as she sat beside “Lauren” defending her actions to Ms. Laghorn, the Vile Principal. Ooops, I mean Vice Principal.

Laura glanced over to Carmilla with a small smile on her face before dropping it as soon as she looked at the ornery woman seated behind the desk. She appreciated Carmilla sticking up for her but not if it got her into any more trouble.

“Forgive me Laura.” Ms. Laghorn said to the tinier girl before she turned back to the Brunette.

“Thank you for correcting me, Carmen” She drawled mockingly, staring straight into Carmilla’s dark eyes.

Carmilla glared at the woman as a smirk crawled across her face.

“Actually it’s—” Laura was about to do what Carmilla just did for her (out of pure reciprocity) before she was cut off by a knock at the door. It was Coach Hollis. Oh great.

“You wanted to see me, Ms. Laghorn?” Mark asked before recognizing the backs of the two girls’ heads.

“Laura? Carmilla? Why are you guys here, what’s going on?”

“Marcus, it appears Laura and Ms. Karnstein have gotten into quite a bit of trouble today.” She always called him Marcus because she thought that’s what Mark was short for and he never had the cojones to correct her. She’s signing his checks, so why bother?

“Trouble? What kind of trouble?” Mark asked as he moved directly behind the girls, standing protectively between them.

“A fight, kind of trouble.”

“Fight? Laura? Is this true?” He turned to his daughter. His beautiful, innocently sweet, kind little
squirt of a kid that took after her mother so much. She would never get into a physical fight with someone. Unless it was self-defense, he thought.

“Well, sort of but not really, you see---” Laura tried to explain before she was interrupted by the older woman.

“---You see Marcus, from what I understand, Carmen here---”

“Carmilla” corrected Mark. I guess he had cojones when it came to the people he cared about. Carmilla bowed her head with a smirk on her face, while Laura just looked at her father wide-eyed. She thought this probably wasn’t the best time to correct the wench.

“Carmilla, here got into it with one of their fellow classmates. She attacked the poor girl while your daughter here encouraged her.”

“What?!” Carmilla and Laura both shouted incredulously.

“Easy girls!” Mark said placing a hand on their shoulders.

“But dad that’s not true!”

“Yeah, she’s lying!” Carmilla chimed.

“Not according to Coach Woodmore, who saw the whole thing.” The woman retorted.

“Of course she’s going to take her niece’s side!” Carmilla groaned.

“Niece?”

“Yes, these two attacked Betsy in the middle of the hallway”

“It’s BETTY!” the three of them exclaimed as the woman stared at them in disbelief that she quickly brushed off. What the fuck is it with her and names? They all thought.

“Regardless, they need to be punished for their actions.”

“Wait, Laura I thought you and Betty were best friends? Why would you get in a fight with her?” Mark asked, confused.

“That’s what I was trying to tell you, we didn’t attack Betty, Betty came up to Carmilla and knocked her books out of her hands and then started insulting her, when Carm stood up for herself and insulted Betty back, she threw a punch at Carmilla but thanks to the Krav Maga classes you made me take I managed to deflect the punch which only upset Betty more and she lunged at me; that’s when Carm stepped in and defended me” Laura rambled out as fast as she could to insure she would not be interrupted again.

Mark stood staring at his daughter. Although he raised her and had become quite accustomed to his little girl’s ramblings, he was still impressed every time at the speed at which she spoke. She would make an excellent auctioneer he thought.

“Well that’s not what I heard.” The vile woman drawled. Not the least bit affected by the girl’s argument.

Just then there was a knock at the door. Only this knock was much more polite and the timing between the knocks were equally spaced. Almost as if this knock had been perfected.
“Come in!” Laghorn called.

The door opened carefully and in walked Perry.

“Ooh! Pardon me, I hope I’m not interrupting ma’am” Perry said after seeing Ms. Laghorn’s office rather occupied.

“Ahh, Lola! Of course not dear. Here to start your shift?”

There was only one student in the entire school that Laghorn didn’t vehemently dislike, and that of course was Lola Perry. Perry’s third period was spent as an office assistant. She would copy papers, file documents, sort the mail, and other such clerical work the administrators would need help with. Looks good on the résumé, ya know?

“Yes Ms. Laghorn, but I can come back if you’re busy.” Perry said as she glanced over at her friends and Coach with a concerned look on her face.

“No, no. Just taking care of some trouble makers. Won’t be but a few minutes!”

“Now hold on just a minute, my kids aren’t trouble makers. You heard what Laura just said.” Coach Hollis said defending the two girls.

Laura, Carmilla, and Perry didn’t fail to notice Coach’s use of the word kids. Especially Carmilla. She glanced over at him with a small smile and adoration in her eyes.

“Well who am I to believe, Marcus? A long time employee and trusted adult, or two kids, one of which has a rather marked record?”

“Woodmore is just covering her niece’s butt, and you know it!” Coach exclaimed.

“You mean much like you are right now, with your daughter’s?”

Perry, still unexcused from the room, has now caught onto the situation and has an interesting tidbit to share with the VP.

“Pardon me Ms. Laghorn, but are you talking about Betty?”

“Yes. These two got into a scuffle with her in the hallway.” She said dismissively.

“Well I don’t mean to pry, but on my way here I had to, uh...use the little ladies room and overheard Betty talking to Cindy Cromwell about, and, I quote ‘that freak Karnstein. I was just about to beat her’ forgive my language ‘ass before Laura stood up for her’.” Perry politely stated while slightly blushing for using rather vulgar language.

“See! Now who are you going to believe? It’s three against one, and Perr would never lie.” Coach argued.

Ms. Laghorn took a moment to mull things over and looked at Perry while she considered this new third party information. She knew all too well that Perry was indeed telling the truth.

“Fine. I believe you.”

Laura and Carmilla both looked over at their friend, thankful for her existence and impeccable timing.

“You three will be suspended for two weeks starting tomorrow”
“SUSPENDED?!” Coach Hollis and his equally horrified daughter shouted.

“Correct.”

“But you can’t do that! The girls will fall behind in their classes and junior year is the most important. Not to mention both Laura and Carm have games to attend. Do you really want our shot at Regionals to be thrown out the window over a little fight among friends?” Coach reasoned with her. Not that she cared much for sports. She actually despised them but she knew that the school board’s superintendent was looking forward to having a championship come out of his alma mater.

“Well then what do you propose I do? These girls need to be taught a lesson. They cannot run around my campus behaving like hooligans and threatening the well-being of the other students.”

Mark scratched his head, unsure what alternative punishment there would be until he came up with an idea. It was a ridiculous long shot idea, that both Laura and Carmilla would hate, but he had to try something.

“How about a sleepover?” He suggested with a shrug of his shoulders.

“Excuse me?!” Ms. Laghorn asked confused, unsure if she heard him correctly.

“The girls can have a sleepover, at my house.”

Everyone is fucking confused. Not to mention, slightly horrified. Realizing they need more of an explanation, Mark continues.

“It was a fight between friends. Friends sometimes get into fights and either stop being friends, or work through it. (Laura and Carmilla both steal glances at each other and bow their heads, knowing all too well how the former works out) Let’s work through it. I know Carm and Betty don’t really get along but Laura is practically best friends with her. I’m, sure if the girls got to know each other better they could put aside their differences and at the very least be civil towards each other.”

Now who’s the one rambling? Laura, Carmilla, and Perry just stare at Mark with their mouths agape in disbelief. Is he fucking serious? They all thought.

“So that’s your plan? To let the girls get off scot-free and sing Kumbaya over a bowl of popcorn while in their pajamas?”

Oooh, that sounds lovely Perry thought.

“I know it sounds ridiculous and this isn’t what you had in mind to reprimand them but think about it. If we get them to settle their differences the girls won’t have to miss any games and I’m sure the superintendent will be more than thrilled to hear we’ve made it to Regionals with our co-captain leading the team. And I heard it through the grapevine that the School District Coordinator position will be available soon; and I know you’ll be a shoe in with a winning team and kind rapport with your students...because you’re not a disciplinary tyrant who believes that corporal punishment should make a comeback? Right?” Damn Mark.

“I always said there’s nothing like a good caning to set a hooligan straight.” She muttered to herself, but everyone heard.

She considered her options and after what seemed like an eternity, Ms. Laghorn made up her mind.

“Fine. You can have this little slumber party-- I can’t believe that worked they all thought.
"Thank you so much--"

"BUT, if I so much as hear that these girls have uttered the *slightest* insult at each other or caused the *slightest* disturbance in class or on school grounds I will not hesitate to expel them. Not give them detention, not suspend them, but *EXPEL* them. Do you understand?"

“Yes ma’am. Right girls?” Mark chirped looking at the two girls seated beside him with a slightly threatening glare. They just nodded in silence, unsure if what just happened actually just happened.

“Well then, you are dismissed.”

The girls hastily get up to leave with Mark trailing behind them.

“And remember girls, the slightest misbehavior, and you will not be graduating with a Silas High diploma.” She reiterated with the most painfully drawn out tone so as to make herself excruciatingly clear.

The girls nodded once more and made their way out of the office. Once they were out of the administration building Laura decided to speak. She didn’t know whether to thank him or yell at him because now she had to spend an evening with Betty and Carmilla, in the same room. Together.

“Dad--"

“Don’t Laura. Not another word. Not, another, word.” Coach Hollis said as he walked the girls to their respective classes.

Fuck the girls thought.

---

It was now time for Lunch A. Carmilla, Perry, LaFontaine, and Danny were seated in their regular booth in the corner of the cafeteria. Carmilla broke the bad news to them.

“What?!” Danny and LaF exclaimed as they stared at Carmilla in disbelief.

“...Yeah.” Was all Carm could say.

“Duuuuude...” said LaF.

“I know” Carmilla drawled.

“Has Coach lost his fucking mind?” Danny asked.

“Figuratively, yes.” Perry chimed.

“So what are you going to do?” LaF asked.

“What do you mean what is she going to do? She has to attend the sleepover from hell with Laura and Satan herself” Danny said.

“Damn, that’s bogus” LaF sympathized.

“I have a suggestion” Perry piped.

“I’m all ears.” Carmilla said as she leaned further onto the table. If anyone has good ideas in the group it’s Perry. She’s the sensible one out of them all.
“I was thinking we should go too. You know to act as a buffer between the three of you.”

“Perr that’s a great idea!” Danny said enthusiastically.

“Yeah babe, smart thinking!” LaF cheered as they wrapped their arm around their beautifully sensible girlfriend.

“Are you guys sure? I mean you don’t have to. I know Betty is a nightmare.”

“And when Laura’s around her she’s, she’s--” Danny was struggling to find the right words.

---”she’s not Laura” Carmilla said averting her gaze to the trees outside the window.

“Exactly.” Danny said, placing her hand on Carmilla’s forearm, bringing the girl’s attention back to her friends.

“...I don’t want you guys to subject yourselves to that, just for me.” Carmilla said shyly.

“That’s what friends are for, Elvira.” LaFontaine said teasingly as they threw a crumpled up paper from a straw at the sad brunette.

Removing the tiny paper ball from her hair and unfurling it with her fingers, Carmilla replied in the most sincere tone she could muster “Thanks guys.” Typically Carmilla would come back with a quip of her own but instead she decided to appreciate the friends that she has. The friends she never dreamed she would ever have, much less deserve.

“Ah-hem” LaF suggestively cleared their throat. Taking a second before it registered...

“People” Carmilla corrected herself. “Thanks people”.

They all laughed and continued with their lunch until it was time for class. As she made her way to fifth period Carmilla thought how did I end up with these wonderful dorks as friends? Oh yeah that’s right, because of Laura.

---

It was now time for Lunch B. Laura had skipped Bio once again in favor of spending it in the bathroom, alone. She used to spend a lot of time in the bathroom alone, torturing herself, reflecting on how horrible of a person she was (thought she was). It began in middle school. There was a span of about two years though that she didn’t skip class in favor of sitting on a porcelain throne, crying to an empty stall. She thought she was better. She thought she would never have to hear her hushed sobs echo off the tile walls again. Until about a year and a half ago. That’s when she couldn’t help but go back to her old ways. As she stepped out of the bathroom stall and wiped whatever tears hadn’t dried yet off of her cheek, she took one last look in the mirror. She hated the person she saw. The empty, cold hearted, cowardly shell of a person she saw looking back at her.

The second bell rang, signaling the start of Lunch B. She hurriedly adjusted her denim shorts, tugging at the hems, careful to make sure the right shorts leg was pulled as far down as it would go. She washed her hands, grabbed her backpack, and walked out the bathroom.

Fuck.

When she remembered she would have to confront Betty once she made it to the cafeteria (because they obviously sat at the same lunch table with some other girls from cheerleading and a couple guys from the football team; which included sophomore kicker for the Silas High Sharks---William
Karnstein) she took her time, trying to decide what she was going to say.

"Hey Betty! Sorry about earlier, that was toats weird. It was just my instincts kicking in, nothing personal bestie!" Eww, Laura, no.

“Hey Bets! That was totally lame of that loser Karnstein to attack you like that! I was actually just trying to beat you to the punch? Get it? I guess my aim was just off and I hit you instead. My bad girlie!” Laura, come the fuck on. Girl the heck up!

“Hey Betty! Sorry Carmilla didn’t choke you until you blacked out because you’re a skanky bitch that deserves way worse for the disgusting way you treat people!!” There you go, girl.

No! Ughhh. I can’t say that. Even if I mustered up the courage to say that I wouldn’t use those exact words because that was actually really misogynistic, like don’t slut shame another girl for having what some may call an over-active sex life. She’s a woman, she can make her own choices and do what she wants, without society judging her. Oh my God. Laura what are you doing?! Just stick up to her, without being a raging bi-bad person.

There were a million thoughts running through Laura’s head as she made her way to the cafeteria. Just as she was about to berate herself for speaking so ill of someone else and at the same time berating herself for not having the courage to stick up to a bully, she found herself in front of their table standing directly behind Betty. Well it’s now or never, Hollis.

“Hey Laura!” Will said, diverting everyone’s attention to her.

“Oh, hey Will.” Laura said shyly as Betty turned around to the tiny honey-brown haired girl she considered her best friend.

“What the hell was that, Laura?!” Betty asked angrily as she began to stand up.

Laura suddenly became intimidated by the other girl and lost all of her nerve. Backing away slightly Laura began rambling.

“I, I ca-can explain!”

“Oh this better be good.” Betty said as she crossed her arms and tapped her foot.

“I, I wasn’t, it-it wasn’t what it looked like, I was just tryi---”

“---It looked like you were defending that freak Karnstein instead of your best friend!”

“HEY!” Will shouted, glaring at Betty with dark eyes.

“Ugggh, whatever Will, stay out of this! This is between me and Laura.”

“Then leave my sister out of it Betty!” Will said sternly as he took his seat again while one of his friends patted him on the shoulder trying to calm him down.

He and Laura didn’t understand why he sat with them. She knew he detested Betty and she’s pretty sure that after everything that happened with Carm, he hated her too. But I guess his football friends were his only friends in Lunch B, so it was either sit by himself or sit with them. Unlike his sister, Will hated to be alone.

“Well?” Betty asked impatiently.

“Well, I wasn’t defending Carmilla, I was trying to stop you from getting into trouble.”
“What?”

“I realized you were going to hit her and I thought if you did you would for sure get into trouble because the first one to throw a punch always does, so my instincts kicked in and I deflected your punch to avoid you getting in trouble!” She improvised.

“Well it didn’t work, now we’re all screwed.” Betty said defeatedly as she let her arms fall to her side. Her posture was nonthreatening now and so Laura took a step closer to the other girl.

“I take it you heard what our punishment is?” Laura asked cautiously.

“Yeahhh my aunt told me…a stupid fucking sleepover, like are you kidding me?”

“. . .I know right.” Laura said bowing her head. After an awkwardly long pause Betty spoke.

“Well I guess I can’t stay mad at you, especially if you really were just trying to look out for me.”

“I really was!” Laura whined almost begging the girl to forgive her.

“Fine. I guess we’re back to being besties.” Betty said as she opened her arms to embrace Laura. Laura slightly hesitated, but embraced the blonde nonetheless.

“That’s great” She muffled into Betty shoulder.

“So when is this creepover, oops, I mean sleepover anyway?” Betty asked, bored.

“It’s tomorrow night, my place, at around 8? 8:30?”

“Cool.”

“And again, I’m sorry Betty. I didn’t mean to hurt you or make you think that I was taking her side over yours.” Laura added, just for good measure.

“It’s fine.” Betty said as she inched closer to Laura, to whisper in her ear. “Besides, I know you don’t want to get on my bad side…especially since I know your dirty, little secret.” She said as she gently ran her finger down the right leg of Laura’s denim shorts.

Laura’s eyes widened and she felt her face drain of color. She stared at the other girl as Betty winked at Laura and slinked back into her seat. Laura froze momentarily her thoughts racing a mile a minute. Oh no. Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck. She can’t. She wouldn’t! Oh she totally would. Stay calm Laura. Just play it off and don’t piss her off. If you do, she’ll tell the whole school. Your dad would find out. LaF, Perry, Danny, and Carm will all find out. They can’t find out. Especially Carm. Fuck.

---

It was now Friday morning, the day of the dreaded sleepover. Luckily Coach had cancelled the morning practice, so Carmilla got to sleep in a little bit later. Also, she didn’t need Laura’s help finishing her route, so that was good…she guessed.

Laura couldn’t sleep. For the past week she had been getting up early to help Carmilla finish her route. Her internal alarm clock had already adjusted to the new schedule and despite her best efforts to fall back to sleep, she couldn’t. Instead she got up, got dressed and made her way down to the kitchen. She popped a toaster strudel into the toaster and waited for her breakfast. She squeezed all of the contents of the accompanying bag of frosting onto the strudel and reached in the box to grab another one. She squeezed half of the contents out and put the rest of the bag in the fridge for next
time. After she had eaten she decided to go for a walk. Although it was still dark outside, it was a beautiful darkness. One that Laura wanted to explore.

Carmilla took her time riding through the neighborhood feeling the cool breeze blow through her hair. She wasn’t thrilled to have a job (as most teens and sadly most adults aren’t) but she didn’t hate this one. Yeah it sucked waking up at the ass crack of dawn and physically exerting yourself at the sake of your neighbor’s enlightenment, but she secretly loved the morning world. Although she would never admit it, she loved listening to the world around her start to awake. She loved the slow fading of crickets chirping and the melodic rising of birds singing. She was a regular fucking Snow White.

Just as she was riding up to her last house on the cul-de-sac at the end of Willow Tree Lane, she saw a familiar silhouette in the distance. She stopped just about 20 yards away from the Jensen’s doorstep and about 40 yards away from the familiar figure. She remained seated on her bike, her feet steadying her on both sides. She couldn’t take her eyes off of her. All she could do was watch Laura gently sway back and forth, her head bowed down and her bare feet rocking in the same spot on the grass.

She looked so small. Obviously Laura was small, well smaller than Carmilla anyway—“Just by an inch!” as the shorter girl would always say. But she seemed so, tiny.

Tiny, like a helpless baby bird with a broken wing.

Almost immediately Carmilla was snapped out of her thoughts and realized that she had yet to deliver her last newspaper. Normally she would go right up to the front door and place Mr. Jensen’s paper halfway through the mail slot because she knew he had a bad back, so by balancing it between the slot he wouldn’t have to reach down as far to pick it up. However, she just couldn’t bring herself to get that close.

Instead she chucked the newspaper so that it landed on the top of the bush just outside the front door. High enough for him not to struggle and far enough for her to keep her distance.

Laura heard what sounded like something rustling in the bushes. She stopped swaying and looked around. Behind her she saw Carmilla riding off in the opposite direction back down the street. She turned back to the tire swing and ran her fingers over the heart carved into the worn out rubber. She took a deep breath, climbed out, put her shoes back on and began walking home. On her way home she thought maybe someday soon she wouldn’t have to swing by herself anymore. And she wouldn’t have to walk home alone anymore, instead she could get a ride on the pegs of a beautiful girl’s bike. Maybe someday, soon.

---

Friday went by as usual at school. Kids were talking about their weekend plans and praying that teachers wouldn’t assign homework. But they always did, no matter what god was (or wasn’t) listening. Laura and Carmilla somehow managed to keep their distance despite having three classes together. Not once did they run into each other at their lockers, which was good, right?

Are they avoiding each other? I mean not that it would matter because they would be seeing each other in a matter of hours anyway. No, not seeing, sleeping with each other in a matter of hours. Well, no, not like sleeping with each other, but like actual sleeping sleeping. You know the kind with dreams. Very dry dreams that don’t involve taking off your best friend’s shirt and running your hands over every inch of her body. Oh my god, okay shut up! Shut up. Stop. Anywho, they even got through practice without so much as glancing at each other. Okay well, like, overtly glancing at each other. Subtle little side glances didn’t count. I mean we’ve all got peripherals right? How are we not supposed to use them? What are we supposed to do, pretend we’re Clydesdales and put blinders on?
That’s disgusting and inhumane and every carriage driver should be shot (only if they get a broken leg of course). Anyway, where were we? Ah yes, practice.

“Alright girls, great practice. Natalie, nice passing.”

“I’m trying.”

“SJ, nice defense.”

“I know.”

“LaF, great three pointer kid.”

“Thanks Coach.”

“Danny, fantastic blocks as always.”

“Whoop, whoop!”

“Carm...what the heck happened out there sport?”

Carmilla obviously deflated, bows her head and shrugs her shoulders.

“Alright kids go get cleaned up. Remember there’s no practice this weekend so just make sure you stay flexible. Do your stretches and get plenty of rest because we’re picking it back up on Monday. Hands in. Sharks on three. One, two, three SHARKS!”

SJ and Natalie walk off towards the lockers while the tres gingeros and Carmilla stay behind with Coach Hollis.

“Sorry about practice Coach, guess I’m just having an off day.”

“Does this have anything to do with tonight?” Coach asked, knowing all too well what the answer was.

“Maybe?” Carmilla was always so honest with Mark. Had any one of the ginger-haired goonies asked her that she would have told them to “stuff it, Sloth!”

“Well don’t stress kiddo, it’ll be just like old times.”

“Yeah especially since we’ll be there” Danny said as she gently punched Carmilla’s shoulder.

“You will?” Mark asked, pleasantly surprised.

“Oh yes, forgive us Coach. We forgot to mention that we invited ourselves to the sleepover.” Perry chimed as she began collecting the sweaty towels and throwing them in the laundry bag.

“Is that right? So were you guys going to tell me, or just show up on my doorstep unwelcomed?”

“Oh come on Coach, we know we’re always welcomed.” Danny said.

“Yeah we know you love us. Don’t hide it.” LaF said with a smile.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever you twerps say.”

“So, what time are we supposed to come over?” Carmilla asked rather shyly.
“I don’t know. Isn’t that something you kids decide?”

“Well technically it’s usually the person who comes up with the idea to have a sleepover and then they typically ask their parents, and if their parents agree then whatever time that was suggested is the time that it begins.” Perry stated so matter-of-factly.

“And the genius who came up with this brilliant idea of a cliché sleepover would be you, Coach Einstein.” Danny said with a grin.

“Well I can tell tonight is just going to be a hoot. I don’t care what time you guys come over, so let me just check with Laur.”

Coach turned to the cheerleaders just as they were finishing up their practice. (There was some obnoxious clapping which often signaled the end of cheer practice.)

“Hey Laur!” Coach shouted from across the gym.

Laura looked over to her dad who was waving her over and then looked back to Betty. From what Carmilla could see, Betty gave her a disgusted face and Laura grimaced back at her before they embraced. As Laura began walking away, Betty smacked her ass and winked right at Carmilla before she ran out the gym.

_How dare she put her vile hands on my Laura_ both Carmilla and Mark thought.

Laura jogged over to her dad and former best friends, curious as to why they hadn’t all left yet.

“Hey dad, hey guys.”

“Hey Laur, what time do you want these hell raisers to come over?”

“Um, what?”

“For the sleepover.” He added.

“You guys are coming to the sleepover, too?” Laura asked turning to the other girls.

“Yeah, it sounded like fun.” LaF said as they placed a hand on Laura’s shoulder.

“Thought it could be like old times” Danny said with a wink. Causing Laura to blush and earning an elbow in the ribs from Carmilla.

_You see, the gang once played spin the bottle at a sleepover years ago and Danny always seemed to land on Laura. Which just made Laura blush and Carmilla convinced that the game was rigged. Being Carmilla’s first real sleepover, she swore to never attend another one again. Yet she had many times after that, and here she was again._

“Cool, umm. How about 7?” _Oh wait, shit I told Betty like 8._

“7 works for me. I’ll just make sure to pick up supplies on the way home. What do you kids want for dinner? Burgers? Pizza?”

_Well I guess an hour without Betty would be nice. We could just relax and have fun like we used to, right?_

“Burgers sound great Coach” Danny said.
“So does pizza” LaF added.

“Well then I guess it’s settled, burgers and pizzas it is.”

“You’re going to do both?” Laura asked incredulously.

“Why not? You haven’t had a sleepover in ages and I have those Piezilla coupons I’ve been meaning to get rid of. Not to mention I’ve needed a reason to fire up the old grill again.” Coach said subconsciously patting his stomach.

_Hmmm, she hasn’t had a sleepover in ages? Like not even with Betty?_ Carmilla mused.

“Okay dad, sounds great.”

“Great, see you kids at 7.”

“See ya coach! See ya L!” LaF said as Perry and them began to walk out the gym.

“Yeah see ya Hollis, Baby Hollis!” Danny said to Mark and then turning to Laura as she began to walk away.

“Yeah, later” Carmilla added as she followed behind Danny.

“Wait, Carm! You want a ride home?” Mark asked. Both Carmilla and Danny stopped and turned back.

“No-no that’s okay I, um” _Okay think of a good reason as to why you would rather take the bus than catch a ride with your next door neighbor._ “I, uh am going---

“---with me. She’s going with me. We were going to hang out at my place before the sleepover and go over some plays. You know, stay focused, Coach.”

Thank god for Danny. Carmilla can’t imagine what it would be like to still not be friends with Danny. Whatever made them stop hating each other she’s glad it happened because that fallen Charlie’s Angel just saved her ass.

“Oh okay. Have fun, and don’t overdo it girls.” coach warned.

“You got it Coach!” Danny said as Carmilla saluted.

_Did you just fucking salute? God, could you be anymore lame around Laura. Idiot._

_Did she just salute? That was adorable. Whoa, snap out of it Laura, don’t make this weird._

“Did you just fucking salute?” Danny asked as she and Carmilla made their way out of the gymnasium.

“Shut up.” Carmilla said as she pushed the giant red head playfully off of the sidewalk.

“Hey do you want me to go tell Coach he can give you a ride after all?” Danny teased.

“Danny, no _please_!”

“I’m kidding! Relax, you know I got you.”

“Yeah, thanks for that by the way. Not that I need _getting_ or anything.”
“Of course not. I just figured he wouldn’t take no for an answer if you didn’t have plans and I figured I could use the gas money.” Danny said with a grin.

---

“Okay, did we get everything?”

“Sweetheart if we got anymore the store would have to give us shares in the company.”

“I knowww, and thank you, but I just want to make sure we have everything we could possibly—“

“---Laura, it’s gonna be great! We have stuff to make burgers, we got sodas Pepsi AND Coke products, three kinds of chips two packets of cookies---“

“---Just two packets?!”

“Sweetie, there are fifty cookies in one package. Are you really going to go through a hundred cookies in one night?”

“Well there are five of us.”

“Six.”

“What?”

“Six of you. You, Danny, LaF, Perr, Carm, and Betty.”

“Oh, yeah, that’s right.” (She had totally forgotten about Betty. Uggh.)

“Now we definitely need anoth---“

“---Laura, it’s fine! We have everything you guys could possibly want and more. I even got chocolate chips for pancakes in the morning! And peanut butter chips for Carm as well.”

Laura looked at her dad. She may have lost her mom, and yeah that was absolutely the most painful moment in her life, but her dad did a heck of a job filling the shoes of both parents. He always made sure she (and her friends) were taken care of, no matter what. She knew she meant everything to him, and he sure as hell meant everything to her.

“I love you, dad.” Laura said as she tightly embraced her father. Her head resting on his chest and her arms wrapped tightly around his waist.

“I love you too, Laura.” He said, slightly taken aback but returning the spontaneous hug with the same amount of fervor.

“Alright, let’s get out of here before this turns into some kind of telenovela scene between father and daughter.” Mark said, resisting the urge to tear up.

Laura broke the hug and looked up at her dad confused.

“Telenovela?”

“It’s those shows Mary always watches, she was telling me all about it.”

A wide smile stretched across Laura’s face.
“Ahh, Mary, huh?”

“Oh quit it! She just mentioned it when I was passing through the lunch line.”

“Oh no yeah, that’s cool. I mean, Mary always talks to me about her favorite t.v. shows, hobbies, likes and dislikes, strolls along the moonlit beach, etc. when I go through the lunch line too.” Laura teased.

“---Alright, alright. Now let’s go pay for this stuff before my wallet runs away in fear for its life.”

---

“How look okay?”

“Are you serious?”

“Would you just humor me Blanka?”

“Hey! I am not that beastly!” Danny said as she smacked Carmilla’s arm on the way to Laura’s front door.

“Sorry. So, do I?”

“Oh my God, it’s a sleepover dude. How are you supposed to look?”

“I don’t know, just, just never mind.” Carmilla said with a huff as she walked passed Danny.

“Hey.” Danny said as she reached for Carmilla stopping her in her tracks. “You look fine. It’s a sleepover okay, and you’re gonna be with all your friends. There’s no one to impress.”

Carmilla rolled her eyes and looked at Danny pointedly.

“Okay, well, not really. Laura thinks you look amazing all the time, so it doesn’t matter.”

“I do look amazing all the time.” Carmilla said with the most dead pan expression.

They stared at each other for a second and burst out laughing.

“I idiot.” Danny said as she swatted at Carmilla’s head. The shorter girl ducked and ran towards the front door about to knock when suddenly the door swung open.

“Hey girls!”

“Hey Coach” Carmilla said with a small smile.

“Hey Coach!” Danny said slightly out of breath from jogging up drive way.

“You guys don’t have to call me Coach tonight. Just call me Mark, you know that.” Mark said as he stepped out of the way and gestured for them to come in.

“Sure thing Coach” Carmilla said with a smirk as she made her way into the familiar Hollis home.

“You got it Coach!” Danny said as she lightly smacked Mark on the shoulder in passing.

Mark rolled his eyes and let out a sigh.

“Thanks, team.” Mark said to himself as he closed the door.
The girls made their way into the kitchen where they saw LaF and Perry seated at the round kitchen table. LaF was scarfing down some Wavy Lays Hickory Barbeque chips while Perry was taking small bites of a pretzel stick.

“Hey, you guys made it! Took you long enough.” LaF said over their mouth full of chips.

“It’s literally 7:04.” Danny said taking the seat next to Perry while Carmilla sat at the seat next to her.

“Well these two love bugs have been here since 6.” Mark replied as he opened the refrigerator door, grabbing the patties he had prepared.

“6? Laura said 7.” Carmilla said as she grabbed some chips.

“Well you know Perr, she wanted to get here early to help Coach and Laura set up.” LaF said as they wrapped an arm around their thoughtful girlfriend.

“Where is Laura anyway?” Danny asked as she opened the bag of white cheddar popcorn and grabbing a handful.

“She ran up to her room to grab---“

“Twister! See I told you I still had it.” Laura said as she made her way to the kitchen staring down at the box, not realizing her other guests had arrived.

“Ooooh, I love that game! I always win.” Danny said with a smile, drawing Laura’s attention to the two girls now seated at the table with the others.

“That’s because you have an unfair advantage Stretch.” Carmilla said as she reached for some more chips.

“Hey Danny, hey Carmilla!” Laura said with a shy smile.

“Hey Hollis!”

“Hey, Laura.” Carmilla said with the hint of a smile.

“Hey L, can you get me another soda please?”

“Yeah, sure LaF. Anyone else want one?”

“You got any Dew?”

“Of course. Dad insisted and said it’s the only thing you’ll drink. Which by the way is incredibly bad for you.”

“This coming from the girl who replaced all variety of foods in the food pyramid with an assortment of Nabisco cookies and Swiss Miss?” Danny said in reply.

“Milo.” Carmilla said just loud enough for apparently no one else but Laura to hear.

She remembered.

“Well she’s got ya there kid!” Mark said as he piled the patties onto a plate and began heading towards the backyard.

“Laura could you get the door sweetheart?” Mark asked as he balanced the plate in one hand and his
“After you took Danny’s side?” Laura said with her arms crossed.

“Yep.”

“Fine.” Laura said before opening the sliding glass door for her dad and playfully kicking him in the butt.

“Whoa, watch it, that’s precious cargo, kid!” Mark said as he jokingly strutted away, burgers and drink in tow.

The girls laughed and for the first time in a long time, it felt just like the way it used be.

---

They decided to join Mark out on the patio and chat while he grilled. Their seating arrangements remained the same, except Laura sat down next to Carmilla (So she could easily hand her dad the plates without having to get up of course, that’s the only reason, duh). The pizzas arrived shortly afterwards and Mark told them to save room for the real food (his burgers). They talked about school, basketball (obviously), and whatever else came to mind. Mark told a lot of jokes, which of course everyone but Laura loved. (Secretly she loved it too.)

“Hey Coach, are those burgers almost done? I’m starving.”

“You just ate a bunch of junk food and half a pizza!” Perry said in disbelief.

“I’m a growing girl!”

“Don’t you think you’ve grown enough?!” Carmilla joked and everyone (including Danny) laughed.

Almost out of instinct, Laura reached out and placed a warm hand on Carmilla’s forearm while she threw her head back and laughed. Her touch burned like fire to Carmilla. Not the kind that makes you want to pull away and recoil in pain but the kind that makes you want to dance in the flames.

Feeling Carmilla tense under her touch, Laura’s laughter faded. She made contact with Carmilla’s dark chocolate eyes. Everyone else seemed to go about their conversations so all of this went on unnoticed by the rest of the gang. After about a minute of staring at each other, both getting caught up in familiar sensations, they were interrupted by the doorbell.

“Ah, perfect timing, that must be Betty. I’ll get it. Plate up girls, burgers are done.” Mark said as he made his way back through the house.

Laura and Carmilla never broke eye contact. Danny cleared her throat a couple times, still unnoticed by the two girls. They broke their gaze when Carmilla shrieked in pain.

“Aaagghhh!” Carmilla groaned as she rubbed her shin. Laura’s hand still remaining on Carmilla’s arm, tightening her grip when she heard the brunette cry out.

“What did you just kick me for?!” Carmilla growled at the warrior princess.

“Betty’s here!” Perry chimed as she looked between Carmilla and Laura and then down at their arms. Laura and Carmilla’s gaze drifted from Perry down to Laura’s hand on Carmilla’s arm. They both quickly glanced up at each other and pulled back as fast as humanly possible. As if they were
being burned and recoiled in pain.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

My apologies dudes, it's been far too long! There are probably some grammatical errors, please forgive those. I had a bit of writer's block for a couple weeks on this and then out of nowhere I wrote the damn thing last night and finished at 4 in the a.m. So again, forgive those pesky grammatical errors. Hope you dudes enjoy! And thank you so much for reading despite my unreliable posting schedule :D Y’all are cool peeps.

“Well you just gonna sit there Laur, or are you gonna greet your friend?”

Mark said as he walked through the doorway to the back porch with Betty a couple paces behind. Laura hastily got up from her seat making her way over to her fiend, pardon me, friend. She stood awkwardly for a moment in front of the girl before pulling her in for a quick hug.

“Hey Betty!” Laura said over the other girl’s shoulder. Carmilla kept her eyes on the two of them, which did not go unnoticed by Betty the petty.

Betty slid her right hand down Laura’s back and squeezed her derriere, while winking at the brunette. Laura squealed and pulled back in surprise. Carmilla clenched her fists and turned away, glaring at her empty plate. She had suddenly lost her appetite but needed something to distract herself and stop her from snapping Betty’s ass-grabbing wrist; so she got up and grabbed a burger with the rest of the dudes.

“Alright Betty, we got a bunch of snacks, a couple pepperoni pizzas, and I made some burgers. Feel free to help yourself!”

“Oh, I’m actually vegetarian now Mr. Hollis.”

“Since when?” Laura asked confused.

“Since like, yesterday.” Betty replied off-handedly.

“Well I guess we can fix you up a BLT then.” Mark suggested.

“Dad, she just said she doesn’t eat meat.”

“I know. I meant Bun, Lettuce, Tomato.” Mark replied with a wide grin. The ginger squad plus Carmilla tried their best to hold in their laughter. Well, the ginger squad did, Carmilla not so much.

“Umm, thanks Mr. Hollis but I guess I’ll just stick to snacks and soda.” She said while smacking her gum.

“Well if you decide you need more sustenance there’s a lovely patch of grass for you to graze over near the gate.” Carmilla muttered with her back turned to the blonde, while putting all the fixings on her burger. Her snarky remark fell on deaf ears, except for Mark’s, who was standing right beside her. He elbowed her in the ribs gently and she glanced at him giving him an apologetic smile.

“Play nice Carm” he whispered as he walked away.
“Back at ya Coach” she said as she walked back to the table, only to find Betty in her seat.

“Oh, sorry Carmmm, were you sitting here?”

*Oh no, please don’t start. You just got here, you all just kinda got here. Don’t tell me it’s already ruined.* Laura thought.

*Play nice.*

“I was, but that’s okay. I’ll just go sit with Mr. Hollis”. She said through gritted teeth.

Laura internally grimaced at the blonde and gave the brunette an apologetic smile. One she hoped Carmilla knew was sincere and one she hoped Betty didn’t see.

Carmilla walked over to the empty lawn chair next to Mark and plopped down with a heavy sigh.

“Geez kid how old are you? You’re starting to sound like me.”

“Apparently I’m too old to sit at the kid’s table.”

Mark glanced over to the girls sitting around the patio table and then glanced back at Carmilla.

“Don’t let her get to you Carm.”

“That’s kind of an impossible task.” Carmilla said as she bit into her burger and a blob of ketchup dribbled down her chin.

“Well that’s your mission should you chose to accept it.” Mark replied as he reached for his napkin and handed it over to her. “And you better accept it!”

“Quoting Mission Impossible? Really Marcus. Tsk.” Carmilla chided as she wiped the blob from her chin.

“Oh no, not you too.” He said as he took a swig of his Coke.

“What?! You said not to call you Coach.” Carmilla mocked.

“I’ll take Coach over Marcus any day.”

“Well you should tell Laghorn that. And while you’re at it, tell her she’s an imbecile for agreeing to go along with your idiotic plan to rekindle old friendships and forge new ones.”

“Hey if it wasn’t for my idiotic plan you’d both be suspended!”

“Yeah, because not having to go to school for two weeks would be a total *drag*” Carmilla drawled sarcastically. Mark scoffed and there was a brief moment of silence before he inquired.

“So, is there a chance that bridge isn’t totally burnt?” Carmilla cocked her head to the side and gave Mark a quizzical look.

“I mean between you and Laura.” He said as he took another bite of his burger. Again Carmilla let out a heavy sigh.

“I’ll take that as a no.”

*Shit did you sigh out loud? What the fuck, use your inside sigh not your outside sigh!* Carmilla thought.
“It’s, I mean…we just,” Mark, sensing her discomfort, didn’t push.

“It’s okay Carm. Forget I asked. I don’t mean to pry. I guess I just miss you hanging around kiddo.”

“Getting sentimental in your old age, eh?” Carmilla joked as she tried to ease her own discomfort.

“Me? Never.” Mark said before finishing off his burger and last sip of Coke. He then thought back to the first time Laura introduced Carmilla to him.

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Laura and Carmilla burst through the door panting and trying to catch their breath.

“I, won!” Laura exclaimed through labored breaths.

“No fair! You, cheated, cupcake.” Carmilla replied, trying her best to regulate her breathing.

“I, didn’t cheat! I simply suggested that we race back to my house, and you just stood there giving me a head start!”

“That’s because it took me a minute, to register what you were saying because you said it, as you were running away!” Still unable to catch her breath.

“It’s not my fault you have bad hearing.” Laura said now composed.

“It is your fault, that I need an inhaler though.” Carmilla said taking her hands off of her bent knees and placing one onto her chest and taking deep breaths, trying to slow her heart rate.

“Oh stop being so dramatic! You’re just a sore loser.”


“Laura? That you pumpkin?” Mark said as he walked towards the hallway with a dish towel draped over his shoulder.

“Yeah it’s just us dad!” Laura said turning towards her father.

“And I thought I told you not to call me that anymore!” Laura said as her face blushed an even more embarrassing shade of pink.

“Call you what pumpkin? Laura? I happen to like your name puddin’ but if you insist I don’t call you that anymore, you’re wish is my command schnookums.” Mark teased as he made his way towards the girls.

“Dad!” Laura pleaded with a stomp of her foot, which Carmilla and Mark thought was absolutely adorable…not that the former would ever willingly admit it.

“Sorry kid, couldn’t resist. So who exactly is us?” Mark said as he placed his hands on his hips and turned towards the brunette.

“Daddy, this is Carmilla. Carm for short. She’s our new neighbor and my new friend! Well, her and her baby brother Will. He’s not an actual baby, I meant like baby as in younger. He’s a year younger than us but just as mature. Not like physically mature, he hasn’t started growing a moustache or anything---
“---Laura, sweetie.” Was all he had to say.

“Right, sorry. Umm, yeah like I was saying this is Carm. Carm, this is my dad, Mark! And when he’s not making lame dad jokes he can be pretty cool.” Laura said with smile.

“Hi, it’s nice to meet you sir.” Carmilla said shyly as she politely extended her hand for him to shake.

“Nice to meet you too Carmilla.” He said as he took her hand. “Solid handshake you got there kiddo.”

“Thanks. A good handshake is the first step to a good first impression as my da…umm, thank you sir.” Carmilla recovered as she caught herself. She didn’t like to mention him, especially when making acquaintances with someone. It just often led to questions that she’d prefer not to answer, so she never talked about him. Until she met Laura of course. But that’s another story for a different day.

“So are you going to be staying for dinner Carmilla?” Mark asked trying to change the subject and actually get a chance to know Laura’s new friend and their new neighbor.

“Um, I was actually gonna order some pizza for me and Will. Our mom is picking up a double shift at the hospital so she won’t be home until later.”

“Nonsense. Bring the little sport over and we’ll have a proper dinner.”

“Are, are you sure? We don’t want to be a bother.” Carmilla said, surprised by his hospitality. She doesn’t know why she’s surprised. I mean, Laura is his daughter after all and she’s the nicest, most considerate dork she has ever met (which is saying a lot since she’s only known her for three days) so she must have learned it from someone, right?

“Don’t be silly. I’d love to get to know Laura’s new friends and our new neighbors. Besides I want to make sure we’re on your good side in case we need to borrow a cup of sugar, or that nice four-stroke engine, gas powered Hitachi weed whacker I saw your mom move into the garage.” He said with a wink.

“Okay, thank you sir.” Carmilla said just before she turned to go run and get her brother.

“Oh and Carm!” Mark called.

“Yes, sir?” She said as she turned back to face him.

“None of that sir talk. You can call me Mark or Mr. Hollis, whichever you’re more comfortable with.”

“Sure thing, sir---I mean, Mr. Hollis.” Carmilla said with a small smile as she headed back to her house.

They all enjoyed a nice home cooked meal and casual conversation. Mark was surprisingly a good cook. He made the best spaghetti and meatballs Carmilla and Will had ever had. Will to this day swears that nothing beats Mr. Hollis’ spaghetti and meatballs with cheesy baked garlic bread. Carmilla however thinks that his Shepard’s Pie with cream cheese mashed potatoes is by far his best dish.

When they were finished with dinner Will and Carmilla began clearing the plates to help Mark with the dishes. He immediately waved them off and dismissed them to the living room to watch some television.
“You guys are guests in our house and around here guests don’t do any work. They just enjoy themselves and hopefully my cooking.”

“Oh man Mr. Hollis that was for sure the best food I think I’ve ever eaten.” Will said as he patted his stomach, handing over his empty plate.

“Yeah, that was delicious. Thank you again.”

“Glad to hear! You kids are welcome over for family dinner anytime.” Mark said as he grabbed the plates and began placing them in the sink.

*Family* dinner. Yeah, they could get used to that.

As the kids made their way over to the couch Carmilla turned to Mark before sitting down next to Laura.

“Oh and Mr. Hollis, you’re more than welcome to borrow that cup of sugar…or weed whacker, anytime.” Carmilla said with a small smile.

“Thanks, Carm.” Mark said returning that same smile.

*Man I sure am glad the Roanes moved away. They didn’t have any nice tools I could borrow, or nice kids for Laura to make friends with. I don’t think I’d mind them hanging around. Heck, I think I’d like it.* Mark thought as he began to wash away the remnants of a lovely family dinner.

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“Hey Dad! We’re gonna go head down to the basement to hangout. You need help cleaning up?” Laura shouted from across the yard.

“No I got it. You kids have fun! I’ll be up here if you need anything.”

“You coming dude?” LaF asked Carmilla.

“Yeah, be there in a sec!” She said as she tried to get out of the ridiculously low lawn chair Mark had clearly broken in. The rest of the gang made their way inside.

“Having trouble there grandma?”

“Ha, ha. I see you’ve lost your hair but not your sense of humor. How lovely.” Carmilla retorted as she struggled to get up.

“Watch it kid. It’s only a spot. And at least I can get up out of a lawn chair without having to do the Can-Can.”

“Take this to the kitchen, would ya?” He asked as he held out his empty plate and crushed soda can.

“I thought guests weren’t supposed to do any work.”

“Guest?” Mark repeated incredulously. “You and I both know if your mom would let you, you’d change your last name to Hollis, kiddo.”

*Psshhh. Hollis. If anything I would get it hyphenated or combine them like Laura and I once talked*
about. Hollstein, was it? I wouldn’t just completely get rid of my last name…his last name. I
couldn’t. I have to have something to hold onto after the memories fade, right? Carmilla shook off
that thought and grabbed his plate and began to make her way inside.

“Thank you, Carm!”

“Anytime Coach!” She said over her shoulder.

As she made her way into the kitchen she smiled to herself and thought about the other man she used
to call coach. She thought about how similar they were. She couldn’t help but think they would have
gotten along great.

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“No more!” Carmilla exclaimed defeatedly.

“Come on just one more, sport. I know you can do this.”

“Dad, do I have to?” She asked exasperatedly.

“Hey, it’s Coach to you young lady.”

“Ugghh. Do I have to, Coooaaach?”

“Tell you what. You make this next basket, and I’ll let you have ice cream before dinner.”

“Are you serious?” Carmilla asked hopefully.

“I would never joke about ice cream.”

“Let me get this straight. If I make this layup, I can have all the ice cream I want before dinner?”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, slow your roll Kitty. I said I’ll let you have ice cream not ‘all the ice cream you
want’. Your mom would kill me.”

“She’s already gonna kill you.” She said with a smile.

“I know. But I guess I just love you enough to risk it, kit. Besides, what does your mom know?
She’s just a doctor, it’s not like she knows what’s best for you.” He replied sarcastically. Carmilla
laughed.

“Alright old man, you’re on!”

Carmilla had the most trouble with lay-ups. Two-pointers? Done. Free throws? Not a problem.
Three-pointers? Surprisingly her specialty. Layups? Fuck gravity. If Carmilla was Isaac Newton the
basketball would be an apple. Only, she’s not a genius that would make a ground breaking
discovery to enlighten mankind. She was just a thirteen year old girl who kept getting smacked in the
face with a fucking basketball.

She grabbed the ball, dribbled it twice, and running towards the hoop she made the perfect left-
handed layup.

“That’s my girl!” He said as he clapped his hands and picked her up, throwing her over his shoulder.

She yelped in surprise and after her laughter died down a bit she responded with “Looks like I’m
having mint chocolate chip for dinner, Coach!”
He set her back down. “It’s not a substitute for dinner it’s just *le appetizer*” He said that last bit in an obnoxious French accent and with a mischievous wiggle of his eyebrows. “And now that practice is over, it’s back to dad.” He said with a wink.

“You got it Coach!” She said with that famous Karnstein smirk.

He gave her a wide smile, the kind that touched his eyes, and ruffled her hair as they made their way inside.

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Shaking off one of her few treasured memories with him, she brought herself back to reality, remembering where she was. She looked out the sliding glass door over to Mark, who was now lying in the hammock, hands cradling the back of his head. She couldn’t help but smile.

*You’d like him, Dad. He can be a lame dork sometimes, but in the best kind of way. I think I don’t miss you as much when he’s around...Is that okay?*

Carmilla made her way down the stairs to the basement. She almost tripped down the last couple of steps when she looked up and saw Laura’s ass staring her right in the face. Okay so it wasn’t staring her right in the face; Laura was just bent over in a downward dog position, with her left hand on blue and her right hand on green.

*Oh dear Satan, they’re playing Twister. What the fuck. What, the actual, fuck!*

“Carm, you just gonna stand there like a pervy old dude and watch us play, or you gonna join?” LaF asked as they grabbed the spinner. They moved their left foot to the red circle next to Laura’s hand.

“I think I’ll pass.” She said as she made her way over to the sofa, taking a seat next to Perry. LaF shook their head and tossed the spinner to Danny.

“You don’t like Twister either?” Perry asked turning her head to look at Carmilla.

“I’m not much of a Bill Paxton fan.” Carmilla joked.

Perry furrowed her brow in confusion and looked to LaF for an explanation.

“She means the movie, babe.” They said waving a hand dismissively.

“That Helen Hunt though…” Danny said with a wiggle of her brow as she placed her right foot on yellow.

“Oh so you have a thing for stern scrawny blondes? Betty better watch out.” Carmilla joked.

“Eww, *as if!!*”

“Calm down *Cher*, it was just a joke.” Carmilla retorted.

“Well don’t go getting any ideas. This girl (pointing to herself) is strictly dickly.” Betty responded crossing her arms and taking a seat on a lonesome bar stool.

“Didn’t seem that way when you were grabbing Laura’s ass earlier.” Carmilla mumbled to herself, slightly louder than she had anticipated.

*She knows Betty was just doing it to get her riled up and doesn’t actually take an interest in Laura... butt still.*
“What’s the matter Tegan or Sara, jealous?” Betty quipped.

_Tegan OR Sara? Is this chick for real? They are a mother fucking duo. Like I know they are individual people and twins often get bothered by others not recognizing their individuality...but they’re a package deal_, Carmilla thought. As she was just about to explain to Betty why her retort was invalid and just plain blasphemous, Laura spoke up.

“Oh, okay guys, enough!” she said removing her hands from the mat and standing up to place them on her hips.

“Can you two please just get along for one freakin’ night! Betty I know you don’t like Carmilla because she’s—

—‘A loser? A freak? A---’

—‘A bit _difficult_’ Laura replied through gritted teeth. ‘And Carmilla, I know you don’t like Betty because she’s---

—‘A manipulative, sadistic, cunt?’

The room went quiet.

All eyes were on Carmilla and all jaws were on the floor.

“Too far?” She said as she looked around to everyone’s faces.

To her surprise Betty didn’t seem at all upset. In fact, she seemed rather proud as she sat up straight with her arms folded and hint of a smirk on her face. Betty knows what she is, at least she can accept that about herself the brunette thought as she awaited the verbal onslaught from the C.(I).A. Luckily for Carm, it never came. Laura looked over to Betty who looked as though she hadn’t heard what the ballsy brooding temptress had said (even though it was as clear as an after shot in a Claritin D commercial) so she decided to ignore the totally accurate insult and move on.

“Whatever...can you guys just please not attack each other for the rest of the night? If not for each other’s sake, then for my sake, please?” Laura looked at them both with pleading eyes.

_How could I say no to those eyes?

“Uh...yeah sorry, Laura.” Carmilla said in a quiet voice.

“...Ditto.” Betty said while picking at her fingernail polish.

“Great! Okay, so...who wants to go next? Betty?”

“Ughhh, look Laura I’ll try my hardest to be on my best behavior tonight and not tell your _former_ friends exactly how I think they should _off_ themselves, but I’m not playing this stupid game.”

Laura nervously glanced over at Carmilla awaiting her reaction and still in shock from the incredibly cruel remark Betty just made, when Danny stepped in.

“What the fuck is your problem Spielsdorff?!” Danny replied angrily as she stepped towards the scrawny antagonist.

“You’re my problem, Peg-leg!”

“That’s it!” LaF exclaimed as she stepped between the two.
Typically Carmilla would be coming to Danny’s rescue, however she sat frozen on the couch with a distant glaze over her eyes. Laura kept her eyes on Carmilla, wishing more than anything she could cradle her in her arms and tell her everything is going to be alright.

“This stops now! We get it Betty, you don’t like us. Well guess what? We’re not exactly fond of you either. We’re pretty much tinfoil and you’re toilet cleaner. Get it?”

“Umm…no. What the fuck are you talking about? Are you trying to say I’m the shit, because thank you.”

“Nooo. Those are the ingredients to make an acid bomb. As in two very reactive properties that when combined make for a dangerously violent product. Ugh, nevermind, the point is WE DON’T GET ALONG! We will NEVER get along. We only put up with you because for some unfathomable reason, you’re Laura’s friend. And as much as we dislike you, we really like Laura. And friends support their friends and the decisions they make, no matter how much you disagree with their choices—–”

“—–Unless of course their choices could potentially result in physical or emotional harm, then is it pertinent to intervene—–” Perry interrupted.

“—–right, of course. Anyway, what I’m trying to say is we’re done taking your crap! This is Laura’s house. And we are Laura’s friends, not former friends but current, and hopefully forever friends. And as long as we’re all together at this godforsaken slumber party, you need to respect the fact that even though you don’t want us here, Laura does. So no more Petty Betty bullshit. You can’t talk to people the way you do. It’s vile, and cruel. Now I think you owe Danny and Carmilla an apology. And Laura as well for that matter. For having to put up with you on a daily basis.”

LaF stood there breathing rather heavily (after a very uncharacteristic rant) staring Betty in the eye, waiting for the blonde’s response. Betty was standing straight, arms-crossed, and a scowl that could make Gordon Ramsay cry. Just as the blonde was about to respond—–

—–“Whoa feisty hotties, what’s with the Western style show-down?”

“…Kirsch?” Danny asked in confusion as to whereabouts this puppy came from.

“Kirsch what are you doing here? And how did you get in?” Laura asked finally taking her eyes off of Carmilla.

“We were hanging out at Karnstein’s and thought we’d come see what you hot—I mean, lady bros were up to.”

“We?” Danny asked, again in confusion. Kirsch’s gaze didn’t linger on Danny’s adorably crinkled nose and perfectly messed bun on top of her head. He absolutely did not think that is was just about the cutest face he’s ever seen her make. No way.

Just as she asked, Will had climbed through the basement window, stepping down onto the bar and then hopping onto the floor; with Alec not far behind.

“Yeah. Will, Alec, and me!” The mention of her brother’s name seemed to snap Carmilla out of whatever daze she was in as she turned to look at the intruding boys. Laura rolled her eyes and let out a frustrated groan.

“Why are you guys here?! My dad is going to kill me, not to mention you turds, if he finds out you snuck in!” Laura said as she made her way over to Kirsch, poking his chest with the last three words.
“Someone’s PMSing.” Alec said as he began to meddle with the locks on the cabinet doors behind the bar.

“How stereotypically misogynistic of you Alec. And what do you think you’re doing?” She said as she went to swat his hands away from the locked cabinet that contained her father’s liquor stash.

(Mark doesn’t drink. But when Lilly was still alive they would often entertain guests down in the basement and make drinks at the bar. But when she passed it sort of became Laura and her friends’ hangout spot.)

“I’m trying to liven up this lame ass party, duh!” he said as he finally managed to pick the lock.

“Nice, baby brother!” Betty said as she skipped over to him, snatching the bottle of Jameson from his hand.

“This is not a lame derriere party. This is supposed to be a fun, no-boys-allowed, sleep over!” Perry exclaimed as she got up to stand by LaF.

“Yeah Will, take your friends and get lost.” Carmilla added, as she went to stand between Laura and Danny.

“Carm, this wasn’t my idea. I suggested we play Xbox.”

“Yeah but all you have is FIFA and NHL. Those are like the two lamest sports video games you could possibly own.” Alec replied.

“I also have every Tony Hawk!”

“Who gives a shit?”

“Okay bros, chill. Look, Laura, we heard you dudes were having a sleepover and just wanted to come hang out for a bit considering we’re all friends. If it’s going to be a big deal and you really don’t want us here, we’ll totally go.” Kirsch said apologetically.

“Please do.” She said as she crossed her arms.

She hated being put in uncomfortable situations, especially by her so called friends. It’s not that she didn’t want to hang out with Kirsch or Will; it’s just that she didn’t really like the company they kept.

“Wait a second. Laura can I talk to you…in private?” Betty asked innocently.

“What is it?” She asked as she was being pulled by her arm over to stairs.

“You want me to stop bothering your little friends? Fine, I will. But only if the boys stay.”

“What? Betty no! My dad is going to flip if he knows we’ve been hanging out with boys unsupervised, not to mention raiding his liquor cabinet!”

“Laura.” Betty responded in a patronizing tone and taking a step closer to the tiny girl. “I think you’re forgetting something.” She said as she lazily dragged a finger over the top of Laura’s right thigh.

“Betty, please.” Laura pleaded.

“The boys stay, or else I tell everyone here what you’re really doing when you’re ditching class.”
I hate you. I hate you so fucking much you cruel, sadistic, cow. Carmilla was right about you.

“Fine.” She replied in defeat.

“Great!” Betty replied cheerfully as she clapped her hands and made her way over to the boys.

“Looks like the night just got a little bit more interesting. So what do you boys want to play first? Ring of Fire? Truth or Dare? How about spin the bottle?”

“Wait, they’re staying?” Carmilla asked as she turned to Laura.

“Yeah, they’re staying.”

“But, Laur—”

“---Don’t, Carm! It’s my house…my rules. Just, don’t…okay?” Laura said as she walked over to couch and slumped down, staring down as her hands as she fiddled them in her lap.

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They had just finished their second game of Ring of Fire. Kirsch, Danny, and Laura were seated on the couch. LaF and Perry shared the love seat. Alec and Betty occupied two bar stools. While Will and Carmilla sat on the floor, next to Laura. They started off with a good foot of space in between them but as the games progressed, so did their proximity. Occasionally Carmilla’s arm would brush up against Laura’s calf, and Carmilla could have sworn she felt Laura’s leg lean in to her arm ever so slightly.

For being coerced into letting the boys stay and hangout, Laura was actually having a decent time. With the exception of Alec’s foul sense of humor (if you could call it that) and his and Betty’s over all eagerness and volume. (Laura had to shush them several times during the first game and remind them that if her father caught them, they would not live to wrestle and cheer another day.) Everyone else seemed to be having a fairly good time as well. LaF and Kirsch were pleasantly buzzed. Danny was on her way there. Alec and Betty were borderline drunk. While Will, Carm, and Laura had just gotten to tipsy. Perry refrained from consuming alcohol, insisting that she will forever be an upstanding citizen and abide the law.

“Alright, I’m done with this game. In the words of Bey’s Bae, ‘On to the Next One’”.

“Okay, what game you want to play, sis?” Alec asked as he chugged the remainder of his whiskey and Sprite.

“Idk, what game would you rather play Kirschy? Spin the Bottle? Or Truth or Dare?”

Glancing over to Danny who had her shoulder flushed against his, Kirsch suggested Truth or Dare. Not yet drunk enough to deal with the consequences that the former could incur.

“Truth or Dare it is. Since you picked, you go first.” Betty chirped before refilling her drink.

“Shouldn’t we go over the rules?” Perry asked.

“Rules? It’s Truth or Dare. There are no rules.” Alec scoffed.

“Perry’s right. We should have rules, like boundaries.” Laura suggested. Not wanting the game to get out of hand.
“What do you suggest little hottie?”

“Well for starters, nothing naked. No one can dare anyone else to remove an article of clothing. No matter how small or insignificant that article of clothing may seem.”

“Where’s the fun in that?”

“Shut it Alec. Good rule, Laura.” Will commended.

“Oh and no kissing! That’s what Spin the bottle is for.” Danny said as she sipped her drink.

“Okay, no naked, no kissing…anything else?” Betty asked annoyed.

“Yeah no deep, dark, secrets.” Kirsch said with a furrowed brow.

“What?” Betty asked incredulously.

“Look for the most part we’re all friends, and I’m sure we know some stuff about each other that not everyone knows. For the sake of all of our friendships, and just not being a douche human being in general, let’s keep it light. No coercion, no betrayal of confidence. Got it?”

“Fair enough, Puppy.” Carmilla responded as she raised her drink to him.

“Aye, Aye, Cap!” LaF chimed.

“OKAY…are we going to play or keep making rules? Because at the rate we’re going this is going to turn into a game of ‘Mother, May I?’.”

“Alright, alright. Let’s start.” Kirsch said as he rubbed his hands together scooting forward in his seat.

“Willy boy.”

“Yes, Kirsch Mon!” Will replied in a horribly stereotypical Jamaican accent. That caused the group to giggle.

“Truth or Dare?”

“Hmmm…Dare!”

“Oooohhhhh. I dare you to…to…Wait.”

“Huh?”

Kirsch got up and ran over to the mini-fridge by the bar. Hoping to the Gods that it was still in there from the last time he hung out at Laura’s.

“Yes!” He said as he grabbed the bottle of Tobasco sauce.

“Oh, no.” Will gulped as he saw what Kirsch was holding.

“Oh, yes! I dare you to chug the rest of this bottle!”

Some “ooohed”, some “ahhhhed”. Laura looked terrified for him and Carmilla just laughed along with Kirsch.

“Ah, man, come on! What did I ever do to you?”
“Nothing, bro. This is what best friends are for!” Kirsch said as he uncapped the bottle and handed it over to Will.

With one last breath, Will closed his eyes and threw his head back downing the half bottle in a matter of seconds. Kirsch and Danny stood up and clapped while Perry and Laura grimaced, and Carmilla stared at her brother in disbelief.

“Oh my God, I can’t believe you just did that. Remind me to avoid the bathroom for the next week.” Carmilla said as she proudly patted her younger brother on the shoulder.

“Oh my God it burns. It’s so hot! I need water. Do you have water?” Will asked turning to Laura with tears in his eyes.

“Dude you need milk!” LaF said in a sympathetic tone.

“There’s some chocolate milk in the fridge—” Laura said as Will jumped up and ran over to the fridge nearly tripping over the rug on his way there.

“But I think it’s—” Just as Laura was about to inform Will that that milk had been sitting in the fridge for well over a month, he spat it out everywhere. This caused the gang to erupt in unbridled laughter which immediately stopped when they all heard Laura’s name being shouted from upstairs.

“Laura?!”

“Oh my God, it’s my dad. What do we do?” Laura asked in a panic looking around at her friends for some sage advice.

“Shhh, shhh!!!” Perry shushed as she threw a hand over LaF’s mouth, who was nervously giggling.

“Just calm down and shut up!” Carmilla harshly whispered at the group. “I’ll go take care of it.” She got up and made her way clumsily up the stairs. She cracked open the door, pushing her body up to the gap. Blocking Mark’s view of the unwelcomed house guests.

“Hey Coach, what’s up?” She asked rather quietly, hoping to the deities that her breath didn’t reek of alcohol.

“Where’s Laura?”

_Good thing she didn’t drink as much as the others._

“Oh, she’s indisposed at the moment.”

“Is she not feeling well?” He asked as he tried to look past Carmilla down towards the stairs.

“No! No, she uhh, well we’re just playing Twister and she and LaF are in quite a precarious pretzel. Sorry if we were being too loud. Danny spun left foot on green but her right foot was on red and when she went to move it she karate kicked me in the head, causing me to lose my footing and get disqualified. So in order to exact my revenge, I jabbed her in the ribs and she fell on top of Perry; causing Curly Sue to shriek and rest of us to laugh like banshees.”

_You’re one hell of a bull-shitter Karnstein._ They both thought to themselves.

“Well, alright. You kids be safe and don’t do anything to reckless.”

He could tell she was lying but they sounded like they were having a genuinely good time. He doesn’t think he’s seen Carmilla’s eyes that bright since the Laura & Carmilla BFF days. So why
push it?

“Will do Coach! And we’ll try to keep it down.”

“Alright, Kiddo.” Mark said as he made his way back to the living room and turned up the volume on the Lakers game.

Carmilla blew out a breath she didn’t know she was holding, closed the door, and headed back down the stairs.

“So what’s the verdict?” Laura asked worriedly.

“Calm down, Judge Judy. We’re in the clear.” Carmilla said with a smirk. Laura breathed a sigh of relief.

“Hell Yeah!” Alec exclaimed far too loudly.

“Shut up you nimrod!” Carmilla warned as Betty smacked her brother’s arm and Kirsch hurtled a pillow at his head.

“Owww! Okay. I’m sorry, shiiiiit.” He aggressively whispered.

“So the game is back on?” LaF asked.

“Yeah, if you guys still want to play?” Carmilla replied with a shrug.

Everyone nodded their head in unison.

“Alright guys, my turn.” Will began as he managed to tame the fire that burned from the tip of his tongue to the pit of his stomach.

“Kirsch!”

“Wait you can’t ask Kirsch!” Danny said.

“What? Why not?”

“Because then it would be an endless battle of revenge. No one else would get to play. You have to ask someone else.”

“Okay then. Danny!”

“I shouldn’t have said anything.”

“Probably not. Anyway, Truth or Dare?”

“I’m going to go with truth.”

“Alright. Who do you think is the most attractive person in this room?” Will asked, secretly hoping she would say him. He kind of has a crush on considering she’s practically best friends with his sister and sometimes hangout with just the two of them.

“Hmmmm….Definitely going to have to go with Laura.” Danny said as she winked at the now blushing dirty-blondie and gave Carmilla a knowing smirk. Kirsch and Will both deflated slightly, unbeknownst to anyone else.
Damn right about that Sasquatch. Carmilla thought as she took a sip of her drink.

“All right, Carmilla!”

“Damnit.”

“Truth or Dare?”

“Dare.” Danny began to laugh.

This can’t be good.

“Carmilla, I dare you to twerk!”

“…Excuse me?” Laura’s eyes went wide as she looked from Danny to Carmilla.

“You heard me. I dare you to twerk. For thirty seconds.”

“Twerk? That’s it?” Betty asked unimpressed.

“Oh my god, this is AU-gold!” LaF said with a huge smile plastered on their face.

“I’m not fucking twerking.”

“Come on dude, if you don’t do it you have to tell a truth and trust me, this will be way less embarrassing.” Danny said as she raised an eyebrow at the raven haired beauty. They shared a knowing look that made Carmilla realize exactly what truth Danny would ask her to reveal. One involving Laghorn’s oversized granny panties and the school flagpole. And the procurement of said unmentionables. (Again, that’s a story for a different day)

“Fine. Just no Miley Cyrus.” She replied through gritted teeth.

Danny grabbed her phone and went through her playlist. She came upon what she considered to be the most perfect twerk song of all time. She began playing it and Laura and LaF immediately began laughing hysterically while Carmilla tried her best to act angry but had to give it to Big Red. This was going to be hilarious. So as “I’m a Scatman” by Scatman John began to play Carmilla placed her hands on the edge of the table and began to awkwardly twerk out of rhythm to the ridiculously fast paced song. No one could contain their laughter. LaF and Kirsch even pulled out their phones to document this historic moment in time. When Carmilla shouted at them to put their phones away they insisted that they were merely using it to keep time. As awkward and out of character as this was, Carmilla couldn’t deny that she was actually enjoying this. Especially seeing everyone’s response. She loved her friends’ laughter, especially Laura’s. And to be the cause of that just egged her on more. Maybe it was the alcohol, or loss of inhibitions, or both as alcohol often did that; Carmilla became a little bit more adventurous. She adjusted to move herself to the side of the table, right in front of where Laura was seated. Laura’s eyes immediately shot up to stare at the back of Carmilla’s head. She just needed to look anywhere but…there.

Sensing Laura stiffen, Carmilla turned her head to look over her shoulder and locked eyes with Laura, a small smile on her lips. Laura stared at her wide-eyed and lips slightly agape. She felt as though time had stilled. Everyone’s laughter began to muddle together and fade into the background. Carmilla’s movements began to slow and Laura’s breath hitched. She had never seen a more beautiful sight. The pale beauty’s cheeks were flushed an otherworldly rouge. Her hair bounced in soft waves around her chiseled jaw carved from marble. Her long eye lashes fluttered in languid movements as the raven haired angel bit her bottom and locked eyes once again with the beside-herself, tiny gay.
“Time!” Danny shouted through laughing, snapping the girls out of their daydreamed tryst.

“Oh my God Kitty, who knew you could move like that!” Will said, his cheeks sore from smiling.

“Yeah Carm-sexy that wa---“

“---Girls?!” Mark called from upstairs. The group immediately silenced.

“Girls?” Mark called once again as they heard his footsteps approach the door. Laura shot up and ran over to Kirsch, pulling him up by the arm.

“You guys need to leave now!”

They heard the footsteps get closer until the floorboards right under the door began to creak. Will and Alec jumped up and followed Kirsch out the basement window. Perry and LaF got up to collect the liquor bottles and placed them back in the cabinets as they heard the door at the top of the stairs begin to open. Laura looked around in a panic making sure that there were not remnants of the boys and underage drinking that had occurred. As Mark began making his way down the stairs towards the girls Laura ran and jumped on the couch practically landing on top of Carmilla.

“Ohww, Cupcake.” Carmilla cried as she grabbed her ribs. “Act natural!” Laura said as she grabbed Carmilla’s thigh. Carmilla looked down at the girl’s hand and back up at her eyes. Realizing where her hand was Laura retracted it as immediately as possible and leaned back into the couch. Shoulder flush against Carmilla’s side. Both girls staring straight ahead.

“Hey kids?”

“Hey Mr. Hollis.” Betty chirped as she twirled a lock of her hair around her fingers.

“What’s up dad?” Laura said almost robotically.

“Nothing, just came to say good night. Your old man can’t stay up as long as you youngin’s.”

“Oh well, actually I think we were just about to go to bed as well.”

“We were?”

“Yeah Betts. It’s pretty late and I don’t know about you but I’m tuckered out. Right guys?”

“Yeah, totally.” Danny replied with a big yawn.

“Yes, bedtime indeed.”

“What Per said.”

“Yeah, I’m ready to call it a night, Coach.”

“Okay then, well you kids sleep tight, and if you need anything just wake me up. Or leave me alone and figure it out for yourselves. You’re smart kids.” He said as he waved a hand dismissively and began his ascent upstairs.

:::

They were all tucked in in Laura’s room. Laura, Perry, and LaF shared Laura’s bed. Betty occupied the twin sized air mattress to the left of Laura’s bed. Danny slept in her sleeping bag on the floor at the foot of the bed. While Carmilla curled up on the floor to the right of the bed, next to the window
that led out to the balcony. LaF and Perr were fast asleep cuddled up. Betty was asleep on her back with a sleep mask over her eyes. Danny was passed the fuck out arms sprawled wide, snoring ever so slightly. While Laura and Carmilla lay awake restless. Laura was tossing and turning trying her best to get comfortable and fall asleep. Whereas Carmilla was curled up facing the window, looking out at the stars.

She heard the bed creak and heard light footsteps trek along the carpet. She closed her eyes and pretended to be asleep when she heard them get closer. They stopped for a moment right beside her before she heard them walk past and heard the balcony door slide open. She peeked one eye open and saw Laura walking out onto the balcony and hoisting a leg up over the bannister. She got up to rest on her elbow and curiously watched the tinier girl.

Where the hell is she going?

As Carmilla saw Laura descend over the balcony bannister and out of view, she got up and made her way out onto the balcony. She saw Laura padding through the wet grass heading towards the wooden fence. Laura looked around for a moment which caused Carmilla to duck down out of sight so Laura wouldn’t catch her spying. She watched as Laura pushed on two of the wooden panels of the fence that led to Carmilla’s back yard.

What in Azkaban is this girl doing?

Carmilla made her way over the bannister and down the balcony, copying Laura’s movements on the vine-ridden terrace that acted as a ladder. She pushed the same to panels and crawled through the space the loose boards had created. She searched for Laura in the dark and finally saw two feet ascending into the floor-door of her treehouse. Carmilla paused for a moment, unsure if she should follow the tinier girl.

Should I? What the heck is she doing? She does know that is my treehouse, right? Wait. It’s my treehouse! Of course I’m going up. Why should I be reluctant to go up in my own treehouse. She’s the tiny trespasser, not me.

So with that settled Carmilla made her way over to the treehouse and climbed up. When she made it to the top she poked her head in and saw Laura laying on the floor staring up at the skylight. (The skylight was actually just a panel of the roof that was missing that they were too lazy to board up. It also happened to align perfectly with a gap in the branches of the large oak tree, so they dubbed it a sky light and left it as is).

“What are you doing?”

“Jesus Christ!” Laura said with a fright as she jumped to sit up properly.

“I prefer Carmilla, but that works too.” Carmilla said as she made her way into the treehouse.

“You scared the shit out of me, Carmilla.” Laura said with a hand over her heart.

Carmilla took a moment to seat herself across from Laura on the other side of the treehouse. Her feet planted on the ground, her elbows resting on her knees as she folded her arms. She observed Laura carefully before she continued.

“What are you doing up here, Cupcake?”

“I, uh, I couldn’t sleep.” Laura said with a sheepish grin as she tucked some hair behind her ear.

“So you decided to play Jack and break into my treehouse?”
“Because climbing up a rope ladder and pushing open an unlocked wooden floor-door to a decrepit old tree house is considered a B&E?” she asked sarcastically.

“Laura, what are you doing here?”

Laura sighed and looked away from the other girl’s gaze.

“I come up here sometimes, when I can’t sleep.”

“You, you do this often?”

“Just when I can’t sleep!” Laura defended trying to sound less stalkerish.

“How often can you not sleep?” Carmilla asked quizzically. Even in the dark, Carmilla could see Laura blush.

“Umm…almost every night.” Laura answered honestly.

Carmilla stared at the other girl in disbelief. Laura was looking down, fiddling her fingers in her lap. A nervous habit Carmilla always picked up on. She regarded the other girl for a moment before getting up to sit directly beside her.

“You mean to tell me you come up here almost every night? Because you can’t sleep?”

Laura didn’t say anything. She looked away from the girl and only nodded her head yes.

“Why?”

Laura turned to Carmilla with an unreadable expression on her face. “You’re not mad?”

“Mad? No. Confused? Yeah, but definitely not mad. Just, kind of concerned?”

_I can’t believe it. After all this time and after everything I’ve done, she still cares. She still gives a shit, when she has every right not to._

“Laura?”

“Hmm?” She snapped back to reality.

“Why do you come up here when you can’t sleep?”

“It’s going to sound strange.”

“Have you met our friends?” Carmilla joked. Laura laughed and nudged Carmilla with her shoulder. A comforting feeling all too familiar for the two girls. Carmilla looked at Laura in a way she hasn’t seen in so long. Almost as though the past year and a half hadn’t happened. Almost as though they were still fifteen, sitting in this treehouse, planning their future together.

“Seriously, Laura.”

“Remember when I would sleep over and after dinner you, me, and Will would come up here and hangout? And we’d talk about any and everything? About which Ninja Turtle we’d be? Which Pokemon was the coolest? Which---

“---Spice Girl we’d marry?” Carmilla asked with a laugh.
“I still can’t believe you picked Baby Spice.”

“What? She’s cute and innocent. She’s the most pure of heart. And what about you? Scary Spice?” Carmilla said as she knocked her foot against Laura’s.

“She’s the most badass! She doesn’t take anyone’s shit. She’s rough and tough on the outside but a big softie on the inside!”

“She’s still not good enough for you.” Laura looked over at the other girl and saw nothing but sincerity in those big brown eyes. Before she gets lost in her thoughts Laura continues.

“Anyway, we’d always come up here and talk until there was nothing else to say and we would---”

“---lay down on the floor and stare up at the stars.”

“And you would point out all the different constellations and tell me their stories, until I fell asleep.”

Carmilla looked over to the other girl as she held her breath.

“Well I come up here, and lay on the same floor, and look at the same stars, and remember the same stories….and try my best to forget that nothing is the same anymore.”

They stared into each other’s eyes. Neither moving, neither breathing. Carmilla knew exactly what Laura was talking about. Because she would do the exact same thing. Only she would stare at the plastic glowing stars that littered her ceiling that Laura stuck up for her sixteenth birthday. The day before they stopped being what they were. Carmilla’s eyes flickered down to Laura’s lips. Copying her movement Laura’s did the same, as she tucked her bottom lip between her teeth. Carmilla’s stomach clenched in an all too familiar way as she watched the movement. Wishing nothing more than for that lip to be tucked between her own teeth. Without realizing it, she was moving in closer to Laura. Laura did the same.

_Don’t Karnstein. You can’t get her back just to lose her again. Maybe your friendship can be salvaged but nothing more._

With that thought Carmilla quickly readjusted herself so that she was laying on the floor staring up through the skylight. Laura looked down at the girl beside her who refused to meet her gaze. Instead she felt a warm hand around her wrist, pulling her down so that she too was laying on the floor staring up through the same skylight. They lay in silence. Arms close enough to touch but not sure enough to make contact. Laura felt Carmilla’s pinky slightly graze hers and then still. Oh how she hated not being able to connect their hands and interlace their fingers, like they used to when they’d lay in this treehouse.

As they lay in silence and smile broke over Laura’s face. Her body began to bounce slightly as she tried to contain her giggles. She couldn’t help it.

“Hey Carm?” She said still not facing the other girl.

“Yeah?” Carmilla replied turning her head towards Laura. There was a moment of brief silence until--

“---Badubba dubba be bup bop bubba bop, bup bop dubbop dop!!!” Laura scatted while giggling as Carmilla broke out into laughter remembering the night’s events. The two girls lay there laughing and scatting loudly into the night until they drifted into a dreamless slumber.

Back to floor, side by side, with their pinkies laced together.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Not much Hollstein, but a lot of Karnstein. Sorry for the delay. If you're still reading, thanks! Enjoy, you beautiful human beings.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Alright guys, bring it in!” Mark shouted after blowing the whistle.

It’s now Monday, the start to their third week into two-a-days and the team is really shaping up. They all still hate waking up so early and having to exert themselves more than what sane people would deem humanly possible, but their hard work is really paying off. They just got done running defensive drills and executing new offensive plays. Danny, Carm, and LaF jog over to Mark, while SJ and Natalie slowly make their way over, trying to catch their breath.

“Great practice this morning. We’re really looking good out there.”

“We know.” SJ replied through labored breaths.

“Well, you guys also know this Friday is the Quarterfinals against Olympic. And I have to say, I think we’ve really got a chance here. I want you to know that I appreciate all the effort you guys have been putting forth day in and day out. SJ, Nat, your defense is insane. The fact that you guys can stay on top of your opponent like, like a---”

“---A remora on a shark?” said LaF.

“---A well fitted Patagonia jacket?” SJ asked.

“---A clingy ex-girlfriend?” Danny replied.

“---A snuggie that shrank in the wash?” Natalie retorted.

“---A cancerous tumor?” Carmilla snarked.

“---I was going to say like a really good defensive player.” Mark replied, slightly bewildered at their varying comparisons.

“Thanks.”

“And LaF, way to push forward. You only missed two shots. Keep it up.”

“I’ll try!”

“Dan-Dan, ---”
“Coach-Coach---”

“Great blocks out there kid. You’re like Queen Kong swatting planes out there!---”

Really Coach?

“---I’d be surprised if they can get a single shot in.”

“Tall privilege.” She said with a shrug.

“And Carm, those left-handed layups are gonna throw those kids for a loop. Not to mention how many assists you had.”

“Thanks, Coach.”

“With the improvements you guys have shown in these past two weeks, I know we’ll win this game.”

“So does that mean we can take a little break and maybe not run two-a-days this week?” SJ asked.

“Nice try but we can’t just stop the progress we’re making. With it only being four more days ‘til the big game we need to keep pushing and really drive home these plays.”

“But Coach we know all the plays; if we keep pushing we’re gonna break.” Natalie defended.

“Don’t be so dramatic.” Danny said.

“They’ve got a point Coach. I mean, it’s not like we wouldn’t practice at all. We would still have after school, and this way we can catch up on some much needed R.E.M, the sleep not the band. Whaddaya say?” LaF reasoned.

“Hmmm...I don’t know.”

“Oh come on!” Natalie whined.

“Oh come on!” Natalie whined.

“Tell you what, I’ll let your Captains decide.”

Carmilla and Danny looked at one another. They remained silent as they glared at each other and then at the rest of the team. As much as Carmilla hated waking up even earlier than she already had to, if they didn’t have two-a-days then Laura wouldn’t have to help her with her paper route. And since Laura couldn’t help her out this morning (because she apparently came down with some sort of “bug”) Carmilla was really hoping they would continue their new morning routine. Especially since they hadn’t talked since the sleepover a few nights ago and there are a couple of things *cough*feelings*cough* that need to be cleared up.

...But then again, she could sleep in more. And she really shouldn’t let herself get sucked into Laura’s orbit once again right? Protect yourself and your stupid heart, Karnstein. Alright. It’s settled.
Carmilla and Danny nodded at each other and then turned their attention to Mark. At the same time they both answered “Fuuuck two-a-days.”

The rest of the team whooped and hollered while Mark just hung his head and let out a defeated sigh.

“Allright, the verdict is in. No more two-a-days. But we still have practice after school, including today!”

“WHAT?! You just said no more two-a-days?” SJ shouted.

“Yeah, starting tomorrow.”

“Oh come on, Coach.” LaF said pleading eyes.

He took a moment to consider before admitting to himself that he would never win this battle.

“Allright fine! Take this afternoon off. But I’ll see you kids tomorrow at 3:00 PM sharp!”

“Sure thing Coach!” Danny replied.

“Thanks, old man.” Carmilla said as the team started to make their way to the locker room.

“Oh, and Caps?” Mark said before they reached the doors.

“Yeah?” Carmilla asked as she and Danny stopped to look back at him.

“Language.” He said with a warning tone.

Danny and Carmilla looked at each other with sheepish grins, thinking that they had gotten away with dropping a prolonged f-bomb.

“Sorry Coach, won’t happen again.” Danny reassured him.

“Unless you give us reason!” Carmilla joked as they made their way out the doors.

---

LaF, Perry, and Carmilla all made their way to AP History and sat in their assigned seats, waiting for class to start. Perry noticed the chair in front of her was vacant.
“Where is Laura? If she doesn’t hurry she’s going to be late.”

“She’s ‘sick’.” Carmilla said using air quotes.

“What do you mean?” Perry asked.

“Coach texted me this morning saying she was too ‘sick’ to help out with my paper route. Guess she ‘came down with something’. That’s why I was late to practice.”

“Why do you keep using air quotes?” LaF asked.

“Because I don’t think she’s really sick.”

“Why?” Perry asked concerned.

“I think the only thing she ‘came down with’ is avoidance. Obviously she’s pretending to be ‘sick’ so she doesn’t have to see me.”

LaF grabbed Carmilla’s wrists and put them down on the desk.

“Okay first of all stop with the air quotes, you’re giving off a Nixon-y vibe and I don’t like it. Secondly, why would you think that? Hasn’t she been helping you out for the past two weeks? Why would she suddenly want to avoid you?”

Carmilla bowed her head slightly and pursed her lips.

“...Unless something happened between you two?”

Carmilla ducked her head even further and slunk down in her seat.

“Oh my Nye! Something totally happened! Wait-did something happen at the slumber party?” LaF exclaimed a little too excitedly.

“Would you keep your voice down you megaphone!”

“So you admit it!” LaF whispered loudly.

“Sweetheart she didn’t admit anything.” Perry whispered as well.

“But she didn’t deny it!” They whispered again.

“Hey Ying Yang Twins, SHUTUP!” Carmilla whisper/yelled. “Look nothing happened...per se.”
“Per se? Please do say.” LaF retorted.

“Does this have to do with when you and Laura snuck off while everyone else was asleep?” Perry asked nonchalantly.

Carmilla’s eyes widened and LaF’s jaw dropped.

“You and Laura snuck off together?”

“How did you know about that?”

“I’m a very light sleeper and Laura isn’t the most graceful human being.” Perry said with a shrug.

“Who/what/when/where/why did this sneaking off happen?”

“What?”

“Humor me!”

Ugggghhh. After an exasperated sigh Carmilla “humored” them.

“Me and Laura---

“---Laura and I.” Perry interjected.

Carmilla glared at Curly Sue but continued.

“Laura and I snuck off/around 3 a.m./to the treehouse/because she couldn’t sleep.”

LaF and Perry stayed silent, staring blankly at Carmilla.

Just as they were about to open their mouth to speak the bell chimed signaling the start of class.

LaF and Perry turned their attention away from Carmilla and back to the front of the class just as Mr. Hollis walked through the door. He picked up his roster and began roll-call.

Oh thank Satan, saved by the bell. Carmilla thought as her mind wandered. Laura use to love that
“Karnstein!” Mark shouted.

Carmilla quickly snapped out of her “about to be inappropriate” day dream.

“You saw me at practice this morning Coach, obviously I’m here.”

“Just checking. And as always, thank you for your sass.”

“Welcome.”

“Lafontaine!”

“Present.”

They remained silent while Mr. Hollis continued to call roll. As he began his lesson on the fall of Dien Bien Phu, their attention was lost again.

Carmilla was actually trying to pay attention but LaF was making it nearly impossible. They kept dropping notes behind them onto Carmilla’s desk, which she tried her best to ignore. Until LaF stretched pretending to crack their back and literally shoved a note in Carmilla’s face. She grabbed the note and swatted their hand away with a growl.

“Duuuuude?!??!” was all the note read.

Knowing they would never stop until she finally told them something, anything, she wrote back.

“Nothing happened! I couldn’t fall asleep and apparently Laura couldn’t either, so when she climbed down the balcony I followed her. We ended up in my treehouse and when I asked her why she came up there she said it was because she couldn’t sleep. We ended up having a somewhat civil conversation and then passed out. That’s it!”

Carmilla tossed the note over LaF’s shoulder, landing in their lap. After LaF read it, they passed it to Perry and began to scribble a response on a new piece of paper.

“What do you mean a civil conversation? Like you two actually talked? About stuff? Or about stuff?
And passed out? Like together? Or together? And why would that make her want to avoid you if you claim nothing happened?”

*Jesus LaF, what, is your new alias Jessica Jones or something? (Or Jesse Jones? Something more gender neutral?)*

Carmilla scoffed after reading the note and began to angrily scrawl a response. She didn’t even bother folding the paper but instead took it in her hand and smacked it against LaF’s head and held it there until they shoved her hand away.

Mr. Hollis stopped his lecture and cleared his throat, staring at the three stooges.

“Am I boring you, kids? Are you really that uninterested that you would rather smack each other in the face with notebook paper than listen to me lecture?”

“Not at all Coach!” Perry responded for Moe and Curly as they just sat there with sheepish frowns on their faces.

“LaFontaine was fervently taking notes and ran out of paper so Carmilla was gracious enough to supply them with some.” Perry lied. She hated lying, especially to Coach Hollis. But then again, she would do anything for these nincompoops.

“Ahh, I see.”

Mark of course didn’t believe Perry but he wasn’t going to push. He knows they were passing notes. *I mean, could they BE any more obvious? Geez, I sound like that one goofy guy from that show F.R.I.E.N.D.S....that Jennifer Aniston though...* Mark thought and shook of the thought.

“Well I’m gonna get back to the lecture now if that’s alright with you guys?”

“Sorry, Coach.” Carmilla said.

“Won’t happen again!” LaF retorted holding up a clean piece of paper showing him that they got what they needed.

Carmilla and Perry returned their attention back to Mr. Hollis and began actually taking detailed
LaF however, just had to read Carmilla’s response. Which read:

“We talked! About random stuff, stuff we used to talk about when we were...friends? It was nice. It was a little awkward at first but then it kind of felt like old times. Like I had the old Laura back. We ended up talking for a couple hours and then fell asleep. Side by side. That’s it! And obviously she feels weird about it because she’s not the old Laura. She’s the new Laura. The one that isn’t friends with me and doesn’t want to be friends with me. That’s why I think she’s faking being sick, so she can avoid me completely.”

Mark has a strict no notes policy in his class. Whenever he sees kids passing notes, he confiscates them and usually reads them aloud in the best impression he can do of that student. Unless it’s a more sensitive issue, then he has the common decency to just throw it away without completely embarrassing the guilty students. The same holds true, even for his favorites. So when Mark sees LaF with the note and walks over to confiscate it, Carmilla practically shits her pants.

“What do we have here? Just a borrowed piece of paper, huh?”  As Mark clears his throat and prepares to read the note aloud in his best LaF/Carmilla impression, he scans the note and remains silent.

*Oh my God. Oh my fucking God. Please Mark! Jesus Christ, please don’t read it, please! Oh fuck, even if he doesn’t read it aloud he’s still reading it for himself. Oh my shit, is it possible to die from embarrassment? Like actually physically die?*

Mark furrows his brows and glances at Carmilla. The rest of the class is silent, eyes glued to Mr. Hollis. Some kids with grins on their faces, anxiously awaiting the embarrassment of their fellow classmates. He then clears his throat again and prepares to speak.

*Betrayal! Ultimate betrayal, Marcus!*

And in his best Carmilla impression says: “Why did Coach’s mustache cross the road?” And in his best LaF impression: “Idk dude, why?” Back to Carmilla: “Who f***ing cares, as long it’s gone because that thing is ugly.”

There was stifled laughter throughout the class as Carmilla just stared in awe at Mark.

“Well that’s not very nice. Thanks for the beauty tip though kids.” Mark said as he crumpled up the
note and made his way back to the front of the class. LaF glanced back at Carmilla with guilty eyes before returning to their notes.

Carmilla remained silent, eyes glued to Mark. *I can't believe he did that.*

“Remember kids, if you don’t want to be embarrassed, don’t pass notes in this class. Although I’m not so sure Karnstein and LaFontaine are as embarrassed as myself in this particular instance. Now, where were we?”

As the Kids returned their attention to their notes Mark glanced at Carmilla and winked before returning to his lecture.

*Always a fucking surprise, these Hollises.*

The rest of the class goes on as normal and before they know it the bell rings; signaling the end of class and the beginning of Lunch A. As the students pack up their things and begin to head out to the cafeteria Mr. Hollis calls out Carmilla’s name. Carmilla tells LaF and Perr to go on without her as she makes her way over to Mark’s desk.

“Coach I’m really sor---”

“--she really is sick, ya know?”

“What?”

“Laura. She’s not...avoiding you. She came down with some bug right after the sleepover. She said she thinks it’s because she left her bedroom window open and the draft was blowing on her all night.”

*Or she was in a decrepit old treehouse with no insulation or full roof to shelter her from the elements, for that matter.*

“Oh.” was all Carmilla could respond.

“Yeah.”

“Well, either way I’m really really sorry, Coach. You didn’t have to do that.”

“Yeah, wasn’t my best joke, but I thought it was pretty good considering I had to come up with something on the fly. Wouldn’t want to ruin your reputation as the residential badass.”
“That was a decent impression of me, no lie.”

“Yeah I think I got your broody snark down pretty well myself.”

“Your LaF impression could use some work though.” Carmilla teased as they began walking out of the classroom and heading down to the cafeteria.

“Oh really?”

“Yeah. You have to speak with more enthusiasm, and the crazier the eyes, the better.”

They both laughed picturing LaFontaine and the way they often spoke about anything with such fervor.

Just outside the cafeteria Mark stopped and turned to Carmilla.

“You know, I think Laura would really appreciate some of your mom’s chicken noodle soup. It always made her feel better.”

“You mean Chef extraordinaire Marcus Hollis can’t make a decent chicken noodle soup?”

He scoffed at the nickname before replying, “You know damn well I make a hell of a chicken noodle soup but Laura for some reason still swears your mom’s recipe is the best!”

“Yeah well I can’t blame her. Mom is a doctor after all. She would have the perfect cure to the common cold.”

“Ask her kindly to make Laura some, would you please? Or at least give me the recipe so I can make her some?”

“There’s no way she’s giving away the famous Karnstein recipe, handed down from generations to generations. I won’t let her.”

“Well then you’ll just have to make it. After all I think it’s the least you can do after that mean joke you wrote about my mustache.”

“Yeah I don’t know what got into me, that was pretty harsh. Accurate, but harsh.” She joked. Mark scowled at her.

“Kidding, of course! I’ll see what I can do about that soup.”

“Thanks, kid. Now leave me alone and go bother your friends.”

Carmilla saluted before turning on her feet and making her way to her usual seat next to Danny.

“Hey, LaF told me what happened! Did you get in trouble with Coach?” Danny asked.

“Nah.”
“What did he say after class?”

“What?”

“Oh don’t get quiet on me now Karnstein. LaF and Perr told me all about the note.”

“Of course they did. Well I went up to him to apologize and tell him that was really cool what he did and he told me that Laura really is sick. That’s all.”

“...So she’s not avoiding you?” LaF asked.

“Guess not.” Carmilla said with a shrug. She began to stuff her face with the delicious sandwich her mom packed for her.

“Eeeexcellent.” LaF said in an all too mischievous tone.

“What was that?” Danny said as she looked at LaF with a curious expression.

“Yeah?” Carmilla said with a full mouth.

“Nothing.”

“Didn’t sound like nothing. You sounded like Mr. Burns after finding a way to destroy Springfield.”

“Yeah!” Carmilla added through a mouth full of turkey.

“Whoa I’m not the real enemy here, Danny. Coach is.”

“How?” Danny asked.

“Yeah?” Carmilla said managing to swallow some of her sandwich down.

“Because he still hasn’t shaved that creepy mustache.”

They all laughed.

“Just kidding. It weirdly kind of suits him.”

“Yeah, he wouldn’t be Coach without it.” Carmilla added.

They all loved Coach (creepy mustache included) and he loved them. As much as he would deny it if anyone asked.
“Karnstein, wait up!”

Danny managed to grab Carmilla’s attention just as she was about to leave.

“What’s up, Dan?” She replied while straddling her bicycle and putting her chain-lock away in her backpack.

“Since we don’t have practice today the guys are coming over to my house to study for the AP Lit midterm on Friday. You wanna join?”

“By guys you mean...”


“So actual guys?”

“...Yep.”

“...Alright. Just please make sure they who shall not be named will not be there.”

“...the Spielsdorffs?”

“Shhh!!!! Don’t you know If you say their name, they’ll apparate.” She said as she jokingly looked around.

“What happened to you Karnstein?” Danny looked at her best friend with a fond curiosity. Laura’s dorkiness sure did rub off on her. “You used to be so cool.”

“I know. I’ve gotten lame in my young age.” Carmilla replied as she grabbed the straps of her backpack.

“No, you’ve gotten nicer, and less...macabre.”

“Oooooohhh, are you sure you even need to study for the Lit exam? What with your lavish vocabulary and all? Macabre, how erudite of you! Dame Merriam Webster would be so proud!” She joked in an obnoxiously haughty English accent.

“Shut up!” Danny said laughingly and she punched Carmilla in the arm.

“Ow, you ogre!” Carmilla said as she rubbed her shoulder.

“There’s the Carmilla I know and love.”

“Look Danny, I’m flattered but I’m not interested.”
With a scoff Danny replied, “Oh please. Everyone knows I’m sooo out of your league.”

“I know.”

“Oh you do, huh?”

“Yeah. You’re like 7’9”. You’re literally out of my league because you’re so freakishly ginormous.”

Danny laughed.

“Don’t worry, I think after the slumber party Kirsch knows better than to invite the cruel intentions siblings.”

“Good movie.”

“Yeah it is.”

“Alright I’ll be there...I, uh, I just have to do something first.” Carmilla said looking at her hands as they played with the torn grip on her handle bars.

“Does this something have to do with...Laura?”

Carmilla didn’t say a word. Instead she just looked everywhere but Danny’s gaze.

“Alright Karnstein. Well we’re heading over now but come over whenever you’re done doing whatever it is you’re doing.”

“It’s a plan, Dan.” Carmilla said as she finally met Danny’s eyes with a small, appreciative grin that her friend knew not to push the issue.

With that, Danny made her way over to her car where LaF and Perry were already waiting. Carmilla waved at them before heading home on her bike.

---

“Hey, sweetie. You’re home early. Don’t you have practice today?”

“Hey, mom. I did. Coach canceled it. We’re going back to just after school practice starting tomorrow.” She said as she dropped her backpack by the front door and made her way to the kitchen.
“No more two-a-days?” Her mother replied as she began grabbing pots from the cupboard.

“Nope.”

“Well that’s good. You can get a little bit more sleep now.”

“Yes, that’ll be nice.”

Although she doubted it considering she hasn’t been getting much sleep lately because she just spends the night thinking about the way things used to be; and what could have happened in that treehouse with Laura.

“Are you starting dinner?” Carmilla said as she took a seat on the bar stool and rested her elbows on the counter.

“Yes, figured I’d make lasagna.”

“Mmmm my favorite.”

“Just like your father.” She said as she shook her head with a small smile on her face.

She felt a pang of guilt and sadness at the mention of her father. She always did. Before she could let herself get lost in the memories of her father she remembered something else.

“Hey, mom?”

“Yeah?”

“Can you make some chicken noodle soup instead?”

Her mother looked up at her in confusion.

“Chicken noodle soup? Are you not feeling well?” She asked as she made her way over to her daughter and placed her hand on her forehead.

“No I’m fine, I just...want chicken noodle soup.” She said as she shook off her mother’s hand.

Her mother looked at her curiously but decided not to press the issue. It was a lot less effort than making lasagna and after working a sixteen hour shift, she wasn’t going to argue.
“Alright. Chicken noodle soup it is. You’re breaking the news to your brother though.”

Carmilla smiled. “Deal.”

Carmilla made her way upstairs to her room and plopped down onto her bed, face first. She lay there for a moment with her eyes closed. She wrapped her arms around her favorite pillow. It was covered with a pillow case her mom made for her out of one of her father’s old band t-shirts.

Not a band that he loved, rather a band that he was in. (Well he loved them too, but you get it). Her father was in a couple bands throughout his younger years but this one in particular, called “Charlie Macho and the Stewpid Dudes”, was her favorite. He would always play his old demos for her and Will as he would dance with them around the living room.

Katherine would often come home to the three of them jumping up and down in the living room and doing weird air kicks off of furniture. Carmilla would always play air guitar while Will would play the air drums as their father sang along.

Before she knew it she was drifting off to sleep, clutching onto her favorite pillow just a little tighter.

---

“Carm. Carm! Wake up!” Will said as he shook his sister’s shoulder.

“Hmm?”

“Dinner’s ready.”

“Oh.”

“I can’t believe you talked mom out of making lasagna. Are you sick?” He said as he placed his hand on her forehead.

“I’m fine, you twerp!” She said as she smacked his hand away. “I’m just, in the mood for soup.”

“ Weirdo. Wait...this doesn’t have anything to do with Laura being sick, does it?”

“What?!” She said as she sat up.

“Well I know Laura wasn’t in Bio today, not that that is out of the norm, she usually skips a lot, but I heard Danny telling Kirsch she was sick. And I know whenever she used to get sick you would
always bring her chicken noodle soup.”

“What is with everyone?! Why is everyone assuming I’m doing something for Laura? Maybe I’m just not in the mood for lasagna! Maybe I’m trying to eat better and have less red meat and more chicken! Maybe chicken noodle soup just tastes better than lasagna!” She yelled in frustration.

They both stared at each other in silence for a moment before breaking out in laughter.

“Okay, fine! You got me. It’s for Laura.”

“You got it bad, sis.” Will said as he sat down next to his sister and placed his arm around her shoulders.

“I do not. Coach asked if I could bring her some. I’m just following orders.”

“Mhmmmm.”

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“Oh come one, what? You don’t just Mhmm with no intention. There was intention behind that Mhmmmm.”

“I just, never mind.” He said as he shook his head.

“Spit it out, dweeb!” She said as she threw his arm off of her shoulders.

“I just don’t want to see you get hurt again is all.” He said as began to make his way to the door.

“It’s just soup, Will.”

“Yeah but, it’s just Laura too. Ya know?”

She did know. And she knew Will was just trying to be a good brother. After all, he was there for you when things fell apart with Laura. He was there for you when your dad died. Even though you were the older sibling who was supposed to take care of him and make sure he was okay. He was the one picking up your broken pieces, trying his best to put them back together. Giving you the super glue while his pieces barely remained intact, held together only by scotch tape. He’s always been there, making sure no one sees that you’re actually the fragile one. You see so much of your father in him.

“Hey, Will?” She said as she made her way over to him.

“Yeah?”
She placed her hand on her brother’s shoulder and looked him in the eyes.

“Race you!” She said before taking off running down the stairs.

“Hey!” He shouted as he followed behind her.

“Last one downstairs has to do dishes!”

“No fair! I did them last time!”

---

Laura felt like shit. She’s been sick before, plenty of times. She has the immune system of a grape, like it’s seriously pathetic. But for some reason this time, this cold is really kicking her ass.

She can’t breathe through her nose so she’s forced to breathe through her mouth, which she hates. She has a gnarly cough that makes her body ache from hacking so hard. And she can’t seem to keep any food down. She tried eating saltines, but that just made for some texturally displeasing up-chuck.

She just wants to feel better. She wishes her mom was here to take care of her like when she used to when Laura was younger. Her mother would comfort her and make homemade bread to go with some restaurant bought soup.

Her mother Lily was never great at cooking. Mark always seemed to have a knack for it. She would, however, drive to Mamma Cecelia’s to get some delicious chicken noodle soup and put on a Disney movie as the three of them ate their dinner together in the living room. It was the only time Laura was allowed to watch t.v. while eating dinner. Normally they would sit at the dining room table and have a nice family dinner.

When she was done eating, Laura would rest her head in her mother’s lap and Lily would play with her hair. Lily would sing along to whatever Disney song was playing (she knew all the words because Disney movies were secretly her favorite too). With her head in her mother’s lap and listening to Lily’s sweet and gentle voice, Laura would drift off into a dreamless sleep and wake up the next morning in her own bed, with Mr. Snuggleton tucked tightly under her arm, and feeling much much better.

As she lays sprawled out on the couch, covered with blankets and Kleenex, she wishes for nothing more than her mother’s caring comfort.
As she flips through the channels, finding nothing to watch, she hears a knock on the door.

“Ugghhh” she sighs as she tries to get untangled from her sickly fort of covers and tissues.

Another knock, this time louder.

“Jus a minuh! I’ll be righ der.” She says in the most congested voice.

She finally gets free but decides it’s too cold to make the walk from the couch to the door without a blanket, so she grabs the one on her dad’s lounger and throws it over her shoulders. (Whomever is at the door doesn’t need to see her sporting her old Spice Girls comforter covered in snot and potentially contagious germs).

She doesn’t bother looking through the peephole but rather leaves the chain on the door as she opens it.

“Carbilla?”

“Uh, actually it’s with an ‘m’ not a ‘b’, cutie.”

Laura closes the door. Before Carmilla can berate herself for saying that the door opens again, this time all the way as Laura had removed the chain. Carmilla looks Laura up and down and can’t help the smirk that grows on her face.

“Wha are you doin here?” Laura asks as she tilts her head and scrunches her face in confusion.

Heavens, she’s adorable.

Lifting up her right arm she gestures to the Tupperware container in her hand.

“I uh, I heard you were sick so I thought I would bring you some soup?"
“Carb, you didn have do.”

“I know. Your dad asked me to.” She said with a shrug.

“Oh.” Of course she didn’t come here of her own volition. Why would she?

“So...do you want it?” She asked hoping to break the silence and stop the weird look Laura was giving her.

“Oh yea, sure. Danks.”

“Anytime.” She said with a small smile before beginning to walk off.

“Hey, Carb!”

Carmilla let out a chuckle at her congested nickname and turned back towards the girl.

“Yeah?”

Laura paused for a moment. Hesitating whether or not to say whatever it was she wanted to say.

“Spit it out, cupcake. You’re far too congested to hold anything else in.”

“...You wanna cobe inside? Maybe, wach a mobie?” She asked as she wiped her nose with a balled up tissue.

Yes. Oh my Athena, I would love nothing more. But I shouldn’t.

“Actually, Will and I are going over to Danny’s to study for our Lit midterm.”

“Oh. Okay.”
Is she...disappointed?

“Well goo luck studyin.”

“Thanks, creampuff. Feel better.”

“I will afer I habe some soup!”

Carmilla smiled and walked back to her house as Laura watched her go.

---

“So let me get this straight. You brought her soup. Called her all those disgustingly sweet nicknames. She asked you to go inside and watch a movie with her. And now you’re here. Studying for your Lit exam that is in four days. A class you already have an A in and normally never need to study for because you’re naturally gifted in all things literature?”

“Yeah?”

“Duuuuude!!!! What is wrong with you?”

“What?”

“Helllooooo? Could she have been more obvious?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Oh come on!”

“What are they getting at?” Carmilla turned to Perry in the hopes that she could decipher their partner’s reaction.

“I think what LaF is trying to say is...what is wrong with you!? Were you smacked with a stupid stick!”

“Whoa.” Danny said as Carmilla just stared at Perry slack-jawed.

“Perr, sweetie. I wouldn’t go that far.” Even LaF was taken aback by her outburst.

“I mean really Carmilla! The girl who you have been best friends with since the day you met, the girl who stuck up for you and defended you when everyone in this room thought you were just a mean jerk, the girl who you were and presumably still are in love with, invited you in to watch a movie on her couch while her dad is gone covering the boys lacrosse practice, and you said...no?”

Everyone remained silent and stared at Perry.
“Well, technically I didn’t say the word no I just said I had other plans.” Carmilla tried to reason calmly.

“Oh come on!” Perry said in frustration as she walked over to the bean bag chair in the corner of Danny’s room and plopped down.

“Okay, hold on.” Will said as he closed his textbook and got up from the desk chair.

“Perry I think you’re forgetting that this is the same girl that turned her back on Carmilla. The same girl who dropped her when she started hanging out with the popular girls. The same girl who doesn’t stick up for Carmilla now or defend her when said popular girls call her names like freak, lesbo, and spaz! The same girl who told my sister that their friendship meant nothing to her and that she never wanted to see her again. The same girl who broke my sister’s heart!” He said angrily.

There was a deafening silence in the room.

Perry got up and made her way over to stand in front of Will and Carmilla.

“Will, Carmilla, I’m so sorry I had no ide---”

“---That’s right, you have no idea! Because you weren’t the ones who comforted Carmilla every day that summer. You weren’t the ones who forced her to eat when she didn’t want to. You weren’t the ones who listened to her cry herself to sleep every night. You weren’t the ones who reassured our mom that everything would be okay because she was so worried that her daughter was so distraught! You weren’t the ones that thought you might lose your sister just like your dad, and never get her back!” Will hadn’t realized he was crying until he tasted the tears that ran down his cheeks.

Carmilla turned to her brother and embraced him in a vise hug as he cried into her neck. Danny signaled for the rest of the gang to give them a minute and they silently made their way out of her room. Leaving just the siblings.

She swayed him back and forth never loosening her grip. She whispered gentle hushes into his ear, trying her best not to cry herself.

“Hey. Hey, Will, it’s okay. Everything is okay. I’m here. I will always be here.”

“I was so scared, Carm.” He said through quieting sobs.
“I know, bud. I know.”

“I couldn’t stand to see you like that. You weren’t yourself. It, it reminded me of--”

“--I know sweetie, I know. I scared myself too.”

“I couldn’t lose you too, Carm. I can’t. Not after Dad.”

“Hey. Hey!” She said loosening her grip and grabbing his shoulders firmly so she can look him in the eyes.

“Listen to me. I will never do what Dad did. Do you hear me? I know what it felt like--”

Her voice was failing her as she began to let out the tears she had been holding in.

“--I saw what he did to us and I would never put you and Mom through that again. Do you hear me? I would never ever do that to you guys, no matter how hard things gets. I love you both too much.”

“I love you too, Carm.” He said as they embraced again.

After a while Carmilla decided they had done enough crying. She wiped his tear stained cheeks as he wiped hers.

“Now are we done having a Full House moment in Danny’s room so we can go back to studying?”

“Studying? Ughh I hate English.”

Carmilla laughed.

“No worries little brother. That’s why you’ve got me. Now let’s go let these dipshits in, shall we?”

“You think they were listening?”

Carmilla shrugged her shoulders and made her way to the door.

As she opened the door LaF, Perry, Danny, and Kirsch came tumbling down landing on the floor in a dog pile.

“Yeah, I think they were listening.” Carmilla said looking back towards her brother who was smiling.

They hurriedly got up from off of the floor, and each other.
“No we weren’t! We totally respected your privacy.” LaF tried to argue.

“Yes, absolutely!” Perry chimed.

“Totally didn’t hear a word Carm-sexy and Will-broski.”

Carmilla glared at each of them as they spoke her eyes finally landing on Danny, waiting to hear her excuse.

“Well I for one do not appreciate being referred to as a dipshit in my own house.” Danny said with her chin up and hands on her hips.

Carmilla chuckled and punched Danny hard in the arm.

“Ow, what the fuck Karnstein? That was a real punch.” She said rubbing her arm.

“That’s what you get for eavesdropping. You should all be ashamed of yourselves.” She said lightly.

“Next time, for sure! We’ll totally respect your dudes privacy. And if we don’t we’ll def be ashamed.” Kirsch said with a puppy-like smile.

They all hugged the two siblings before getting back to studying. Perry sat in between Will and Carmilla on the bed. She threw each arm around the siblings pulling them into a three person hug. She whispered “sorry” into their ears and they both squeezed her tighter, letting her know it’s okay. That everything will be okay.

---

After they had just about studied their brains out, Will and Carmilla rode their bikes back home. Will dumped his on the front lawn as Carmilla gently placed her’s next to his.

“Hey, sorry about earlier.” Will said as he grabbed his sister’s arm, stopping them from going inside.

“Don’t be.”

“No, I shouldn’t have exploded like I did. I guess I’ve just been holding it in for so long that I couldn’t anymore, ya know?”

“It’s okay.” She said as she patted her brother on back. “But just, why now? Why then at that
specific moment?"

"...I don’t know. I guess I’ve just been stressed about school and wrestling. I mean I’m a sophomore and I’m taking almost all the same AP classes you are, and Kirsch wants me to be co-captain with him next year when Brian leaves. I guess it’s all just added up."

"...what else?"

“What else?”

“Yeah. Will I’ve known you your whole life. You’re really good at keeping it together and handling all the stressors of life. You’re smarter than me, and if you ever repeat that to anyone I will personally make sure your dirty underwear flies at full mast on our school flagpole, so I know AP classes can’t be too bad. You’re a natural at wrestling because you’re weirdly muscular for a scrawny little shit who eats complete garbage--”

“Cheetos and Mountain Dew are not garbage, they are necessary boy-teen fuel!”

“Gross. Anyway, I know those things can be hard but it’s not like you’re failing any classes, so what’s up? You weren’t genuinely mad at Perry, were you? You know she’s just trying to do what she thinks is best. She just wants me to be happy.”

“I know.” He let out with a sigh.

“So, what is it?” She waited patiently for her brother to respond as he looked down at his feet.

“Well, it’s exactly that. I want you to be happy too. And I know Laura made you happy...but she also made you really sad. Like, really fucking sad. And the past couple of weeks I’ve noticed you guys, talking again...getting closer, again. I’m just worried you’ll fall back to what you guys were and she’ll do the same exact thing to you again.”

“Look what happened between me and Laura is in the past. It happened, I learned from it, and I moved on.”

He gave her an incredulous look.

“Okay, kind of moved on. Anyway the point is...it’s mine and Laura’s business. No one else’s. I’m sure she had her reasons. I mean I can’t completely blame her, it’s not like I was the greatest best friend either, but, regardless don’t let what happened between us change your opinion of her.”

“How could I not?! I saw how she left you, Carm. No matter how much I liked Laura before, she still did what she did.”

“I know...but don’t hate her for it.”

“Why not?”

“...because I don’t.”

He let out a loud sigh and shook his head.
“Alright sis, if you can forgive her I guess I can at least try to as well.”

“Good.” She gave him a final pat on the back and they made their way inside.

“Hey kids, how was studying?”

“Hey Mom, it was good. I might officially be brain dead though.” Will said as he made his way over to their mother to kiss her goodnight.

“Well you’re still somewhat functioning, so that’s a good sign.” She said as she wrapped him in a tight hug and kissed the side of his head.

“And you, my eldest baby?” She said as she let go of Will and looked at Carmilla.

“Mom, I’m like seventeen now...no longer baby nickname status.”

“You will always be my baby. Even when you’re seventy-three and an old, wrinkly bag and I’m long gone...you will still be my baby.” Her mother responded as she embraced her in a goodnight hug/kiss as well.

“Thanks, Mom.”

“You off to bed too?” Breaking off the hug.

“Actually I think I’m going to stay up for a bit, if that’s okay?”

“Not too late!” She said with the point of a finger.

“Never.”

“Alright then, ‘night sweetheart.”

“Night, Mom.” Carmilla said as she watched her mother make her way up the stairs.

Carmilla made herself a quick PB&J sandwich and made her way out to the treehouse.

She crawled up the rope ladder and made her way inside. As she began to get settled in what Laura and she dubbed as their “reading nook” she noticed a walkie talkie on the window sill with a folded piece of paper underneath it.

She unfolded the piece of paper and began to eat her sandwich while reading the note.

*Thanks for the chicken noodle soup. That was very nice of you, you didn’t have to (even if my dad*
bugged you to do so). It was delicious by the way (just like I remember). Be sure to give your mom my thanks and compliments to the chef! -L

Carmilla reread the note, written in Laura’s all too familiar bubbly handwriting, over and over again. When she was done with her sandwich she grabbed the walkie talkie and again made herself comfortable on the reading rug in the corner of the treehouse. She held it up in front of her mouth and held down the button on the side.

“How do you know it wasn’t me?”

*beep*

Laura was laying in her bed, rewatching Doctor Who, when she heard what was either a ghost, God, or a sexy radio voice. She paused the show for a moment and looked waited to hear which it was.

“Cutie?”

It was the latter.

Laura put her laptop aside and reached over to her bed side table and picked up the walkie talkie.

“How do you know it wasn’t me?”

“Ah. She’s alive. So how do you know it wasn’t me?”

Laura scrunched up her face in confusion.

“How?”

“The soup. How do you know I didn’t make it?”

Laura smiled and laid back in her bed.

“Because it was delicious. Obviously your mom made it.”
“Ouch, you wound me.”* She said in a faux hurt tone.

“You sound better by the way.”*

“I owe it all to your mom’s soup.”*

“I know her soup works wonders but I had no idea it worked miracles.”*

“Oh come on, I didn’t sound that bad.”*

“You called me Carb. You’re lucky I’m not a sorority girl otherwise I would have been offended.”*

Laura laughed and realized that Carmilla couldn’t hear her because she hadn’t pressed the talk button. Maybe that was for the best. Her laugh was really dorky.

“Well, I feel much better…thanks to your mom’s soup and A LOT of DayQuil.”*

“Glad to hear it.”*

She should say goodnight. She wasn’t even certain that Carmilla would even go out to the treehouse and find the walkies. After Laura ate the soup she felt so much better. She went up to her room and decided to spend the rest of the night watching her favorite show. She decided to restart with the Ninth Doctor so she dug around in her closet for her DVD set.

What she found right underneath the DVDs was an old decorated shoe box labeled “Top Secret”. She smiled to herself as she remembered making it with Carmilla just a couple months after the brunette had moved in next door. Laura was adamant about bedazzling the box but Carmilla talked her out of it and into drawing cool pictures on it instead. What they ended up with was a fairly well drawn picture of a large panther covered in black sequins and “Top Secret” written above it in pink and black ink.

She opened the box and sifted through forgotten memories. She found the two walkie talkies that they would often use to communicate with each other when they couldn’t hang out. Really they would just talk to each other in secret when it was too late to hang out and they were supposed to be in bed. On a whim she decided to drop it off with a thank you note for the soup, secretly hoping that she would indeed find them.

Luckily Carmilla did. She should really go to bed, shouldn’t she?

“So…how was studying?”*
Then again, she wasn’t that tired.

“It was alright. The company was less than desirable, though.”*

Laura laughed again.

“Come on Carm, you know you love them as much as they love you.”*

“Actually, I go by Carb now…”*

And that’s how Carmilla and Laura spent another night talking for hours, until they fell asleep together.

Chapter End Notes

This is not where I imagined this chapter to end up but it is what it is. Still don't have a solid plan, kinda just writing whatever comes. Pardon if there were any grammatical/spelling errors.
Today was the big day. Well, the first of hopefully a couple more “big days” to come. Tonight the Silas Sharks will be competing against the Olympic Heights Bobcats at the Quarter Finals.

The team had been training hard and enjoying these past couple of days of just afternoon practice. Except for Carmilla. She began to miss her morning paper route assistant. Even though they typically just rode in silence; since it was so early in the morning and you know, the whole, are we/aren’t we friends thing. Still, she missed Laura’s company. As quiet and distant as it was.

Laura also missed their morning bike rides. That’s what she would consider them. Although she had to wake up at an ungodly hour, to do work she wasn’t even getting paid for, she still missed it. She refrained from speaking much at all during their rides. Instead she would let her mind wander to earlier days when the two of them would ride their bikes around town.

During summer they would ride down to Quinnby’s Market every Friday and buy as much candy as their allowances could buy. Sometimes they would ride down to Patch Reef Park and play basketball. Well, they would play either H.O.R.S.E. or Around-the-World, because basketball wasn’t Laura’s strong suit. Laura’s favorite, however, was when they would ride to the end of the cul-de-sac and sit on that tire swing in the Jensen’s back yard.

Laura was almost back to normal after her cold. She still had a scratchy throat and a bit of a cough, but physically she felt great. She practically slept all day for the past two days so she got plenty of rest. So when she woke up this morning at 4:30 a.m. she wasn’t too surprised. After trying for twenty minutes to go back to sleep, so she can at least get in another hour of rest before her long day, she finally gave up. Then an idea came to her.

She got showered, ate some breakfast (toaster strudel), and grabbed her bike. She decided to pay a visit to that old tire swing hanging off of that oak tree, overlooking the lake. The air was a bit crisp outside as she made her way down the road and it wasn’t quite yet dawn, so it was a little difficult for her to see. When she reached the Jensen’s house she dropped her bike in the front lawn and made her way over to the swing out back. (Since the Jensen house was the only one at the end of the cul-de-sac all of that property was technically theirs so they didn’t bother to have a fenced in backyard.)

As she sat on that swing, listening to the quiet songs of birds and soothing rhythm of crickets, she let her mind wander to a specific memory at Quinnby’s Market:

“I win! You’re buying.”
“No fair! You cheated!”

“No I didn’t. You’re just mad that I beat you.”

“You stuck a branch in between my front spokes and then said ‘race you!’ I almost flipped my bike!”

“Oh please, don’t be so dramatic. You saw me put the branch in. You could have easily taken it out before you took off riding.” Laura said as she locked up her bike outside the store.

Good Point.

“Well…I was flustered. You were getting a head start and I wasn’t thinking. I just didn’t want you to beat me.” Carmilla said. Locking up her bike next to Laura’s.

“Because you’re always losing?” Laura said with a smirk.

“Because you’re always cheating.” Carmilla retorted.

“Or you can admit, that I’m just awesome at everything.” Laura said with a shrug.

Carmilla narrowed her eyes at the tiny human in front of her before responding “You’re lucky you’re so fucking cute because you keep cheating and you know it.”

“You think I’m cute?” Laura said with a sly smile.

“I think you’re beautiful.” Carmilla said as she took a step closer to the honey-brown haired girl. She placed her hands on her hips and pulled the tinier girl towards her.

They were…well they didn’t quite know what they were. They had been (inseparable) best friends for a little over a year now. Carmilla’s sixteenth birthday was in two weeks and whatever this is that they are, began a week ago. (In reality it began the moment they met, when Laura showed up on Carmilla’s front doorstep. But the more than friends/they sort of admitted how they felt about each other/they totally kissed a total of three times, all began a week ago after LaF’s party.)

They stared into each other eyes for a brief moment before their gaze flickered to each other’s lips. They hadn’t discussed whether public displays of affection were okay because they hadn’t really addressed the topic of “were they actually together or not”. They were just Laura and Carmilla. Best friends, and something more. However, there was an unspoken agreement that they could kiss each other whenever/wherever they wanted as long as they both leaned in (implying mutual consent).

Their faces were inches apart when the door to Quinnby’s suddenly opened, almost hitting the girls.

“Oh Heavens! Are you girls alright?” Mr. Jensen asked, worried that he may have injured the two of them.

Before they could respond Mrs. Jensen came right up beside him and hit him in the arm with her purse.

“Walter! How many times have I told you to be more careful?”

“I know, Rose. I know.” He responded with a shake of his head.

“You could have hurt our little Laura and Carmilla. Are you dears alright?”
Laura and Carmilla chuckled at the exchange.

“Hi Mr. and Mrs. Jensen, we’re fine!” Laura responded with a smile.

“Oh good, good! Wally, what do you have to say for yourself?”

“I’m sorry girls. You know an old man like me has a little trouble with simple things. So when I tried to open that heavy door I guess I just put a bit too much weight into it.” He said apologetically.

“No worries Mr. Jensen! No harm, no foul.” Carmilla said with a reassuring smile.

“Are you sure?” Rose asked again as she and Walter looked the girls up and down scanning for damage.

The two girls had looked down at themselves as the Jensen’s did, when they realized they were holding hands. In the rush of moving away from the door so as not to get hit in the face, they had jumped away as quickly as possible and somehow ended up holding hands. Once they realized this, they quickly tore their hand apart. It’s not that they were ashamed of each other or themselves, they just hadn’t come out to anyone, nor had they discussed whether or not it’s okay to tell people about each other yet. Also as adorable as the Jensen’s were, they were from a different time, so they thought it best to not raise suspicion.

Noticing their sudden movement Mr. Jensen furrowed his brows before continuing.

“Tell you what, why don’t you girls come over tomorrow morning and we can have some brunch and then I’ll take you out on my boat? To make it up to you for almost squishing you and whatnot?”

“Oh what a lovely idea!” Mrs. Jensen added.

“Oh that’s not necessary. Really, we’re fine!” Laura said with the shake of her head.

“Nonsense. It’s the least we can do. Besides, we’ve missed seeing you girls since we were away in Miami last week.”

Laura and Carmilla looked at each other and smiled. Carmilla winked at her before the tinier girl replied.

“Okay! Sounds great! We’ve missed you guys too.”

“Wonderful! Can’t wait to see you girls. Does 10:30 a.m. work for you?” Rose asked sweetly, looking between the two girls.

“Works for me.” Carmilla said with a shrug.

“Great! It’s a date!” She replied enthusiastically.

Laura and Carmilla chuckled softly.

Just as the girls were about to walk by and head into the store, Mr. Jensen stopped them.

“Oh, and one more thing, dolls.” He stepped towards them and with his left hand he grabbed Laura’s left hand and with his right he grabbed Carmilla’s right. He pushed their hands together making them intertwine their finger to hold hands. He gave them a wink as they just stared at him with wider eyes. Rose then looked at their conjoined hands and then up at their apprehensive/bewildered faces and pulled them both in for a hug. She kissed them both on the forehead leaving a bit of a lipstick stain before walking off towards their car.
Carmilla and Laura turned towards each other with slightly shocked expressions and then noticing the lipstick stains on their foreheads, burst into laughter. They each licked their own thumbs before beginning to remove each other’s stains. When the stains were gone and their laughter had died down, they took a moment to look into each other’s eyes. With a smile on both of their faces they leaned in for a chaste kiss and rejoined their hands, making their way inside the market.

“Whatcha thinkin’ bout?”

Laura was suddenly snapped out of her reminiscence by that all too familiar husky voice she’s missed so much.

“Carm?” She said as she stopped gently swinging and turned her head.

“Hey.”

“Hey. What are you doing here?”

“Guess I had the same idea you did.” She said with a shrug, taking a couple steps to stand beside Laura with her hands in her pocket.

“You finish your paper route already?”

“Yeah…I uh, couldn’t sleep, so got I got a head start.” She said looking out at the lake.

“I know how that goes. Well, actually this time I got too much sleep. I feel like I’ve just awoken from a two day coma and have a ton of lost time to make up for. I mean I know two days isn’t anything, and like coma isn’t really something to joke abo—…and I’m rambling again. Sorry.” She said cringing.

Carmilla stared at the tinier girl and smirked.

“Don’t worry, it’s cute.”

She thinks I’m cute? No…”I think you’re beautiful.” That’s what she said at Quinnby’s. Obviously she’s not implying the same thing now.

“What were you thinking about?” Carmilla said as she turned to face the girl.

“Huh?” Laura replied in confusion.

Dammit Laura she’s going to think that bug ate away at your brain cells and not just your immune system. Stop thinking!

“Oh, um, just stuff.”

“Like…?” Carmilla prompted.

Should I? I’ve never been the best liar. Oh, what the hell.

“I was just thinking about—“

I can’t.

“—about the game tonight.”

Nice save Hollis.
“The game?” Carmilla asked in confusion.

“Yeah, just going over routines in my head. Since I missed practice these past couple of days I was just refreshing my memory so I don’t do something stupid and make a fool out of myself.”

“Don’t you do that every day?” She said jokingly.

Laura rolled her eyes and responded with a “shut up” and a small smile.

“Just kidding, Cupcake.” Carmilla said as she looked back out towards the lake.

Laura felt her stomach squeeze at the familiar nickname.

An oddly comfortable silence settled between the two as they just stared out at the lake.

“Want a push?” Carmilla asked after a moment.

“What?”

“To swing?” Carmilla said gesturing to the tire swing Laura was sitting on. “Want a push?” She said as she took a step closer and placed her hand on the rope above Laura’s head.

Ummmmmm.

“Sure.”

Carmilla took another step to move directly behind Laura and placed her hands on Laura’s shoulders. The tinier girl tensed for a brief moment before relaxing into the brunette’s touch. Carmilla bent down slightly to whisper in her ear.

“Buckle up, Creampuff.”

Laura did her best to hide the shiver that ran down her spine as she felt Carmilla’s warm breath ghost over her ear and down her neck. Carmilla still noticed.

Carmilla then moved her hands from the other girl’s shoulders and placed them on her hips. She grabbed firmly and took a couple steps back, taking Laura and the swing with her. Laura realizing what Carmilla was trying to do, tried to stop her.

“Carm, don’t you dare!” She said sternly as Carmilla pulled her as far back as possible and then pushed the girl on the swing with all her might.

Laura let out a squeal as she swung forward, spinning uncontrollably as Carmilla laughed. When she swung back Carmilla did it again sending the girl into another dizzying spin. She shrieked again before begging for mercy.

“CARMILLA! PLEASE!!”

Having a soft spot for a damsel in distress, Carmilla caught the girl and pulled her to a stop, both hands firmly on Laura’s hips.

As Laura closed her eyes, trying to stop her head from spinning, Carmilla stared at the girl with a wistful smile. *It feels the same. This feels, exactly, the same.*

“You okay?” She asked with a soft chuckle.
She groaned and with a pout, she replied “Uggh, I hate you.”

*Shit. Shit. What was she thinking? You should know better, Laura.*

Hearing those words *again*, although said playfully, reopened the wound that really never got closed in the first place. Carmilla’s smile faltered and a painful look flashed across her face. No longer able to hear Carmilla laughing and feeling the other girl’s hands release their grip on her waist, Laura immediately opened her eyes and turned towards the other girl.

"Shit, Carm, I didn’t—"

“—I should go. Don’t want to be late for school.” She replied not looking at the other girl. She turned back and quickly made her way over to her bicycle.

*Fuck.*

“Carmilla, wait! Please! I didn’t mean it!” Laura said as she hopped off the swing and tried to catch up to the girl.

It was too late.

Carmilla had taken off down the street, standing on her pedals and not sitting on her seat, so that she could pedal faster. She just wanted to get away.

Laura was left standing on the Jensen’s front lawn staring at the girl riding off into the sunrise, without her.

*Why do you always have to mess everything up? All you ever do is hurt people. First your dad, then your friends, and always Carmilla. You’re fucking worthless.* Laura thought.

She grabbed her bike and walked it down the street. She didn’t care if she was late to school. One of the only things, or rather people, she actually cares about in this life she just hurt…*again.*

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Mrs. Karnstein had the day off today. Well, technically, she is always on call but the Hospital had more than enough staff on hand to handle any situation. Unless of course there was some kind of colossal accident or natural disaster. Off days get put on the back burner in those situations.

She could never sleep in though. No matter how hard she tried and would love to, her internal clock was always set on hospital time. After waking up and making herself a cup of coffee, she walked outside in her pajamas and robe to retrieve the mail. Just as she made it up to the mailbox at the beginning of the driveway, Carmilla pulled up on her bicycle.

“Hey, Sweetheart. You’re done early.”

Carmilla was a tad short of breath because she pedaled home as fast as she could.

“Couldn’t sleep.” She said shortly, getting off of her bike and letting it fall onto the lawn. She started walking towards the front door.

“Hey!” her mother said as she grabbed Carmilla’s arm. Carmilla stopped in her tracks and rolled her
eyes with a huff.

“What’s wrong?” Karen asked with concern.

“Nothing Mom! I’m fine.” She said pulling her arm out of her mother’s grip and crossing them over her chest.

“You don’t seem fine.” She said sternly.

“Don’t Doctor me. You’re a physician not a psychologist.” She said bitterly.

“No, but I am your mom and I know when something is wrong. So what is it?”

“Nothing! It’s early, I barely got any sleep, I just rode my ass off throwing stupid newspapers at stupid houses, and I’m tired! That’s it!” She said angrily.

Karen didn’t want to push her daughter any further on the matter, even though she clearly knew something was bothering her. At the same time, she wasn’t going to let her daughter think it was acceptable to speak to her that way.

“Watch it, Grumpypants! I’m still your mother, so do not speak to me in that tone!”

Carmilla let out a long sigh as her body slumped and her arms fell at her sides. She knew her mom didn’t deserve any of her pent up frustration.

“Sorry, mom…I just, don’t want to talk about it.” She said defeatedly.

“Are you sure it’s nothing serious? You can tell me anything sweetie, you know that.”

Carmilla sighed once more before taking a step towards her mom and embracing her in a hug.

“I know, mom. Sorry I was such a dick.” Carmilla said as she pulled out of the embrace.

Her mother rose her brow at her daughter’s less than favorable choice in words. (Guess we know where Carmilla gets it from)

“Pardon. I meant, male penis.”

Her mother smirked as she shook her head.

“Well then, male penis, would you mind putting your bike in the back yard instead of dumping it on our lawn, please?” She said in a motherly tone.

“I’m just running inside to grab my backpack and then I’m off to school so can it just stay here for a minute?”

“Ooookayyy. But remember to—

“—put it in the back yard and not dump it on the front lawn when I get home. Got it.”

Just then Mr. Hollis made his way outside in a white shirt, Bugs Bunny pajama pants, and slippers. He too was sipping on a cup of coffee, on his way to get the mail.

“Morning Karnsteins!” Mark greeted as he grabbed the mail.

“Good Morning, Mark!” Mrs. Karnstein greeted.
“Mornin’, Coach! You ready for the big game?”

“I should be asking you that you, twerp!”

Carmilla laughed while Karen just stared at Mark with narrow eyes.

“I meant that as endearingly as possible, Karen.” Mark said with a grin as he noticed her slight scowl.

“I’m sure you did, Marcus.” Karen said with a smirk.

Mark’s face fell in disbelief.

“You got her calling me that, too!” He shouted at Carmilla.

Carmilla laughed even louder.

“Guess she really is a twerp.” Karen said with a chuckle as she placed her arm around her daughter’s shoulders.

“Yeah, I wonder where she gets it from!” Mark said in a teasing tone as Karen guffawed at the implication and then quickly threw her hand over her mouth. Mark just smiled wider at the two of them.

Yeah, I’m pretty damn funny. Mark thought to himself.

“Well I got to go. I’ll see you in class, Coach!” Carmilla said as she turned to head back inside.

“You want a ride to school, kid?”

“Nah, I feel like biking.”

Not really. Her legs were sore and her throwing arm was kind of burning. She would actually love a ride. What she wouldn’t love is being squished in Mark’s pickup truck next to the girl that broke her heart, time and time again.

“Suit yourself. Just don’t wear yourself out. We need you in tip top shape, kiddo.”

“Sure thing, Boss.” Carmilla saluted before running inside to grab her backpack.

Karen and Mark stood by their mailboxes, dressed in pajamas, drinking coffee, staring in silence. Well this is kind of awkward. Mark decided to break the silence first.

“Hey, thanks again for making Laura that soup. Cleared her right up!”

Karen scrunched her brows in confusion before asking “What’s that?”

“I said thanks for the chicken noodle soup Carm brought over. Laura swears by it. Made her feel better almost instantly.” Mark said a little louder, thinking she hadn’t heard what he had said.

So that’s why Carmilla asked me to make it. So she could bring some to Laura. Are they hanging out again?…Could she be the reason Carmilla was so upset?

Not wanting to make this an even more awkward conversation, Karen played it off.

“Anytime!” She said with a forced smile.
Mark waved a goodbye before making his way inside his house.

Carmilla came running out with her backpack over her shoulder and a toaster strudel hanging out her mouth (her second one for the day). She ran up to her mom and took the toaster strudel out of her mouth.

“See you later, Mom. Have a good day!” She said before giving her mother a quick kiss on the cheek.

“Thanks, sweetie you too.”

“Hold this.” She said as she gave her mom the toaster strudel so she could pick up her bike.

“Hey! I said hold it, don’t eat it!” Carmilla said as she grabbed the toaster strudel out of her mother’s mouth. Karen chuckled before giving her daughter a playful swat on the arm.

“Be safe!” She shouted through a mouth full of strudel, while waving her daughter off.

“I will!” Carmilla shouted over her shoulder as she pedaled off down the street.

Karen was just about to walk inside with her mail when she saw Laura walking her bike towards the house. Coming from the same direction Carmilla came from.

Of course. The Jensen's. Karen thought as her suspicions were confirmed. Laura was walking alongside her bike with her head hanging low, kicking rocks along the way, and her face contorted with what looked either pain or anger…or both.

“Morning, Laura!”

Laura’s head snapped up at the sudden greeting. Her brows quickly relaxed and her features softened slightly as the sight of Karen.

“Good Morning, Mrs. Karnstein.” She said quieter than she would have liked. Her voice faltered slightly on the last word.

“You alright?” Karen asked, her face laced with concern. She subconsciously glanced down at the top of Laura’s right thigh, which was covered by her pajama bottoms, before looking back up to the girl’s face.

Laura came to a stop a few feet away from her and cleared her throat before speaking.

“Yeah, I uh, my throat is still a little scratchy but otherwise I’m fine.” Laura said with a small forced smile on her face.

“So the soup helped?” She asked taking a step towards the smaller girl.

“Yeah, it was lovely thank you.” Laura said with a genuine small smile.

“You’re welcome. Glad to hear you’re feeling better.” Karen said with a tight smile.

Laura nodded her head and began to walk over to her driveway when Karen put her hand on Laura’s arm.

“Hey, Laura. Did, uh…did something happen with you and Carm. Just now?”

Laura’s eyes grew wide as she began to panic.
“Why?”

“Well, she would kill me if she knew I talked to you about this, but she seemed…upset.”

*Of course she did. She has every right to because I’m a fucking idiot who always screws everything up and hurts everyone I love.*

“We just passed each other on our bikes in front of the Jensen’s place. That’s all.”

She said as she gripped her handlebars slightly harder, twisting them in her grip. Karen could tell she wasn’t being completely truthful.

“…so you guys didn’t talk, or anything?” Karen asked cautiously.

Laura shook her head.

“…you haven’t been, hanging out?” She asked again.

Laura’s heart began to beat a little harder. She remembered the conversation she had with Mrs. Karnstein the day of Carmilla’s sixteenth birthday.

“No ma’am. I promised you, I, I wouldn’t. I haven’t forgotten.”

She seemed scared. Karen’s heart squeezed as she tried to suppress the pang of guilt she felt, remembering what she so unjustly asked of this small girl a year and a half ago.

“Good.” Karen said with a curt nod before turning around and making her way inside.

Laura watched her go as she tucked a strand of hair behind her ear before making her way inside her own house. Mulling over everything.

She lied to Mrs. Karnstein. She said her and Carmilla weren’t reconnecting. Except she *has been* getting closer to Carmilla again.

Laura has tried so hard for the last year and a half to avoid Carmilla at all costs. She *really* did. But it was becoming more and more impossible to stay away. She memorized the other girl’s schedule and when Carmilla would go to her locker, just so Laura didn’t run into her. She made sure to choose a fifth period class that wasn’t held inside the A Building so that she would have Lunch B instead, just so she wouldn’t be tempted to sit with her. Laura would agree with Betty or laugh with Betty whenever she was obnoxiously bullying Carmilla, just so Carmilla would think Laura a bitch so that she wouldn’t *want* Laura as a friend anymore. She hated Betty with every fiber of her being but she *became* besties with her because she knew Carmilla wouldn’t want to be around that. Why? Why had she done this to Carmilla? Why had she turned her back on the one person she never wanted to hurt. The one person she *never could* hurt. She never called her names. She would laugh or nod in agreement when Betty would say the most hateful and absurd things about Carmilla but could never physically say those things herself, to or about Carmilla. It made her stomach twist and her bile rise every time they passed Carmilla in the hallway. She would hope and pray that Betty would look the other way or not notice the raven-haired girl. But her prayers went unanswered. Her prayers always went unanswered. Now she was stuck with a fake best friend that she hated more than she hates herself, all because she was pushing away her *real* best friend that she loves far more than she could ever love herself. Why? Because she was broken. And because Betty and Mrs. Karnstein held the same secret over Laura’s head, that hung like a black cloud, never letting the light shine in.
“Dudes, that test was mad hard.” Kirsch said as they walked out of AP Lit.

“I know! Why was Faulkner on the exam? Mrs. Kumpf specifically said that Faulkner would not be covered until the final!” Perry exclaimed in exasperation.

“So did you bomb the Faulkner questions?” Danny asked as she placed a hand on Perry’s shoulder.

“Well, no. I think I did alright.”

“Perr, you love Faulkner. You dressed up as him for our last ‘celebrity day’ during spirit week. You know you aced it.” LaF said as they put their hand on their girlfriend’s other shoulder.

“Still, I don’t think it’s fair for her to have put him on there because she said it would not be covered yet, so I understand Kirsch’s frustration.” She said as she placed her hand on Kirsch’s shoulder.

“Are you guys done forming a conga line? Let’s go hangout before the game.” Carmilla said as she and Will finally walked out of the classroom.

They all released their hold on whoever’s shoulder they were holding onto and began making their way outside.

“So what did you think of the exam?” Danny asked as she walked beside Carmilla.

“Eh, it was alright.”

“She totally aced it. She was done in like twenty minutes and then spent the rest of the class doodling on the back of it.” Will said as he caught up to Kirsch.

“I can’t help it I’m a genius.”

“Sorry bro, there can only be one genius in the group and I think LaF’s got that covered.” Kirsch replied.

“Shut up, Kirsch. We’re all geniuses. Well, except maybe for you.” She said teasingly.

“Hey, I resent that!”

“Resent? Hey, maybe you didn’t do so poorly after all dude.” Will said as he punched Kirsch in the arm. Kirsch then wrapped his arm around Will’s neck and pulled him into a headlock to give him a noogie.

The gang laughed as Will called for Mercy. After a minute he finally released the younger Karnstein.

“So, what do you guys want to do before the game?” Danny asked the group.

“Eat.” LaF said as they patted their stomach.

“Yeah, definitely food.” Carmilla added.

“Cool. You guys want to head down to Sonny’s?” Danny suggested.

“Mmmmmm, Sonny’s.” Kirsch said as he threw his head back.
“I’ll take that as a yes from Kirsch.”

“Oh it’s a hell yeah D-Bear.”

“Is everyone cool with that?”

They all nodded their head and made their way towards their cars/bikes.

When they arrived at Sonny’s they were immediately seated in a rounded booth towards the back of the restaurant. That’s often where hosts would seat a group of kids they expected to be rowdy.

They all settled in and began to read over the menu.

“You kids better not stuff yourselves before the big game!”

They all snapped their heads up, immediately recognizing the warm voice.

“Coach! L-Dude! What’s up?” Kirsch was the first one to greet the pair.

Coach Hollis was standing with Laura by his side, hand on her shoulder smiling down at the gang.

The gang exchanged a round of greetings to both Mark and Laura. Laura remained fairly quiet, waving at the group with a tight smile.

“What are you doing here, Coach?” Danny asked, putting down the menu.

“Guess we had the same idea you guys did, didn’t we Laur?”

She looked to her dad and nodded before looking back at the group.

“What are you doing here, Coach?” Danny asked, putting down the menu.

“Guess we had the same idea you guys did, didn’t we Laur?”

She looked to her dad and nodded before looking back at the group.

“Nice! You guys want to join us?” Kirsch asked before he felt a kick to the shin.

“Ow! What was that for D-Bear?” He said with a scowl as he rubbed at his shin.

“Sorry, foot slipped. Got a new prosthetic, still figuring out the kinks.” Nice, you play that card Danny.

“It’s cool, no worries.” He said with a smile, believing her fib. “So what do you say?” Kirsch asked looking up at Mark and Laura, obviously not getting the hint.

Danny rolled her eyes and glanced to her left where Carmilla was seated. She was quiet and seemed to be deep in thought. Danny chanced a glance at Laura and noticed that the girl’s head was slightly bowed as she stole glances at Carmilla. Carmilla however kept her eyes glued to the menu, her brows slightly scrunched.

“What do you say Laur?” Mark asked as he looked down at his daughter and squeezed her shoulder.

“Um, I don’t know I thought it would just be the two of us—

“—You should join.” Will said, looking at Laura.

Carmilla seemed to snap out of whatever trance she was in and looked over at her brother.

He was looking at Laura with a small smile on his lips. Laura looked up to her dad, she knew he wanted to join them. They were practically his kids too.

“Sure, thanks for offering.” She said with a tight smile, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear.
“Great! Now scoot over, Karnstein.” Mark said to Will as he began to sit down in the booth next to
him, with Laura following behind. From left to right sat Laura, Mark, Will, Kirsch, LaF, Perry,
Danny, and Carmilla all the way on the right. Because the booth was a rounded semi-circle, Laura
and Carmilla were seated directly across from one another.

There was a brief moment of awkward silence as they all looked over the menus again, deciding
what they wanted. Mark and Laura were looking over the menu while LaF and Danny glanced at
Carmilla and then at Kirsch narrowing their eyes at him. He looked up and noticed both LaF and
Danny glowering at him. He began to gesture at his face and hair wondering if they were trying to
tell him he had something on his face. Danny rolled her eyes again, obviously he’d never get the
point, so she just pointed to her hair. He took that as a sign, and patted down his own hair, smoothing
it out. He smiled up at her and raised his brows, as if asking “better?”. She gave a pained smile and a
thumbs up, which he accepted with a nod of his head.

The waitress then came by and took all of their orders. When she asked how the bill would be split,
Mark waved her off and told her to put it all on one. They all thanked Mark with a smile and began
to ease into conversation.

“So how was everyone’s day?” He asked as he took a sip of his sweet tea.

“Hard. That Lit midterm kicked my butt.” Kirsch said as he shook his head.

“Mhmm. Kumpf can be a tough test maker, that’s for sure.” Mark said in agreement. He would often
hear her talking in the teacher’s lounge about what and how to test her kids. She loved putting
misleading and roundabout questions on her exams meant to trick the kids. She told him it was a way
to truly test their knowledge and intellect. He thought it was just plain mean.

“Bio was fun. We got to dissect a frog today in lab.” LaF responded with enthusiasm.

“I thought you said you just had a boring lecture and not a lab today?” Coach asked Laura in
confusion.

LaF shared Mark’s confusion as they looked between Mark and Laura.

Laura’s eyes widened slightly and just as she was about to respond, Will spoke up instead.

“Those of us who didn’t want to participate in the dissection sat it out and had to listen to a virtual
lecture on the computer instead. Laura and I were the only two to sit it out. Suuuper boring.”

In actuality Laura had ditched Bio once again, in favor of sitting in that familiar bathroom stall.

“You know blood makes me queasy.” She said as she looked up at her father. He just nodded his
head and continued on with conversation.

That was a fucking lie. Blood doesn’t make her feel queasy. It just makes her feel. Whether it be
pain, or anger, or sadness…at least it makes her feel.

Laura looked over at Will and gave him a small smile and nod of the head (for saving her ass) which
he reciprocated with a wink. LaF just grimaced at Laura, feeling like an idiot for not catching on
sooner/almost busting Laura. They knew she wasn’t in class, but didn’t realize she was playing
hoaky.

Carmilla watched the exchange with a curious expression.

*Why is the Cupcake ditching Bio. Doesn’t she ditch that class like a lot? Why the hell am I still*
“What about you, Carm?” Mark asked.

“What’s that?” She asked as she was snapped out of her thoughts.

“How was school?”

“It was alright.” She said with a sigh. “Had this one godawful class though. Thought I was going to pass out from boredom and the teach’s monotone voice.”

“Let me guess, Lampman?” Mark said as he took another bite of his steak.

“Nah, I don’t know if you’d know him. He’s about 6’1”. Ridiculous moustache. Goes by the name…Marcus?”

The gang, including Laura, laughed at her joke. Mark just narrowed his eyes at the older Karnstein.

“You know I can just tell the waitress to put your order on a separate check.” He said teasingly.

“Whoa, that won’t be necessary. Unless of course, you want to lose the game because I’ll be forced to stay here and clean dishes to pay for my meal?”

“Oh please, restaurants don’t actually do that. Nowadays they just call the cops.” Mark retorted.

“Great! So now I have to come up with the money for my meal AND my bail?”

Coach just tossed a dinner roll at Carmilla as she laughed.

Laura watched the exchange between the two. It’s as if nothing has changed for them. They’re still the same old Coach and Kiddo. Laura felt a pang of jealousy. She wishes she could have that banter back between her and Carmilla.

She pardoned herself from the table so she could go to the bathroom.

Carmilla watched as she walked away.

Don’t. Just let her be. Something is up, she seems…off? Stop, it’s none of your business. She wouldn’t want you to console her anyway.

Ughh, screw it. What else could she possibly do or say to you?

“Nature calls.” Carmilla said before excusing herself from the table and making her way to the bathroom as well.

When she pushed open the bathroom door she saw Laura bent over the sink, splashing water on her face. It was a decent sized bathroom. There were four stalls and three sinks. They were the only two in there. Laura didn’t seem to notice Carmilla enter, so the brunette took a step towards the smaller girl.

“You okay?” Carmilla asked as she leaned her hip against the sink, body turned towards Laura.

Laura suddenly looked up in surprise and then grabbed some paper towels to dry off her face.

She looked back at Carmilla and nodded her head gently.
An awkward silence fell between the girls as they just stood in front of the sinks, staring at each other. Before the moment got even more uncomfortable Laura spoke up.

“I’m…I’m sorry about earlier.” Laura said looking down at her hands, now ripping up the damp paper towel in her hands.

Carmilla remained silent staring at the girl in front of her. She pondered for a moment before easing the other girl’s worries.

“It’s okay.” She said quietly, now playing with her own hands.

Laura’s head snapped up with an unreadable expression on her face. She looked, confused, surprised, and angry all at the same time.

“What?” She asked bitterly.

Carmilla took a moment to look at the girl before repeating, “It’s okay.”

“How could you say that?” Laura replied incredulously.

Confusion overtook Carmilla. *Shouldn’t she be happy I forgive her?*

“Carmilla, I have been nothing but cruel to you for the past year and a half. I don’t defend you when you get bullied. I refuse to acknowledge your existence when we’re in the presence of Betty and the rest of those superficial bitches. I’ve said things to you that, that I never…ever, would have thought pos—“

Laura hadn’t realized she began crying until she couldn’t speak anymore.

She suddenly felt warm hands cradling her cheeks and gentle thumbs wiping away her tears. She closed her eyes and inhaled Carmilla’s oaky, wintergreen scent that she had so desperately missed.

Her sobs were lulled by sweet hushes from Carmilla’s lips.

“Shh, shh, shh. It’s okay. Shh” Carmilla said as she pulled Laura into an embrace.

“Why are you comforting me?” Laura asked through gentle sobs, her face buried into the crook of Carmilla’s neck.

“Because you’re upset.” She said so casually.

Laura pulled back from the embrace but kept her hands on Carmilla’s shoulders. Carmilla’s hands fell from Laura’s face and moved to her hips to pull the girl back. Their bodies were flush together and their face inches apart.

“Carm, after everything I have done…everything I have said…you have *every right* to hate me. You have every right to yell at me, to push me, to hurt me like I have hurt you.” Laura said quietly. Her voice faltering from the bitterness of the words that left her mouth.

Carmilla leaned forward resting her forehead against Laura’s. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, breathing in the strawberry scent of Laura’s shampoo she’d been missing for the past year and a half.

“I could never hate you, Laura. *Never.*” She said in a whisper as she moved her right hand to tuck a strand of Laura’s hair behind the girl’s ear.
She opened her eyes and stared into the turtle-shell-hazel eyes of the tiny honey-haired girl.

*Nothing can keep me away from you, Laura.* Carmilla thought.

Both girls’ eyes flickered from each other’s to their lips and back. Carmilla slowly began to close the distance as Laura stood still, her eyes closing slowly.

*I can’t stay away from you, Carm.* Laura thought.

“Man those sweet teas went right through me!” LaF said as they burst open the bathroom door with Danny right behind them.

Carmilla and Laura jumped away from each other, just in the nick of time.

“Hey!...Everything okay in here?” Danny asked as she saw Laura and Carmilla standing an awkward distance apart at the sink. Laura’s face a little flushed.

“Yeah! Just needed to wash my face. All the greasy food was making my skin feel…icky.” Laura said with a grimace as she hoped that lie would suffice.

“I know what you mean. But that’s how you know you’re eating good Barbeque!” LaF said as they entered a vacant stall.

Danny eyed the two girls by the sink curiously before heading into a stall herself.

“Laura, I think your dad is trying to flirt with Beth to give him a discount on our meal.” Danny said as she closed the stall door.

“Oh, no. I better go stop him before he embarrasses himself, and us.” She said with a slight groan.

“Well it’s a little too late for that!” Danny said with a chuckle as she began to unzip.

Laura walked past Carmilla to the door before glancing back at her over her shoulder. Carmilla gave her a small smile as Laura ducked her head and made her way out the bathroom and back to their table.

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The gymnasium was packed. It normally was whenever the girls’ varsity basketball team played. Most people assume boys basketball would be the number one school sport to watch, right behind football, but not at Silas. The boys’ basketball team was actually better than their football team but they were still horrendous…which says a lot about their football team. The sport to watch as Silas were either girls’ basketball, men’s volleyball, or wrestling. Wrestling was the one sport that was unisex in the school, which seemed the most odd, since it was the most physically intimate.

The team was huddled in the locker room, gathered around Coach Hollis as he was giving his pregame pep talk.

“Allright kids. This is the Quarterfinals against Olympic. If we win this game we move on to the Semifinals against Pope John Paul. We’ve made it there before but we haven’t actually won the championship in over eight years. I think we have a shot to change that. To bring home the championship to the varsity team of ’09. And it all starts right here, right now. You guys have been
giving it your all out there during practice. Let’s see you give it your all out there come game time. Make me proud out there! Make Silas proud out there! Hands in.”

Everyone stood up and put their hands in the circle.

“Sharks on three. 1, 2, 3…”

“SHARKS!!!” The whole team shouted in unison.

They were pumped. Danny and Carmilla lead the way through the gym doors onto the court. Leading their team as co-captains. All the Silas students jumped up and began to cheer loudly as the visiting fans remained seated.

The Olympic Heights team was already seated on the benches on the other side of the court, finishing up their stretches. Carmilla looked over to the cheerleaders, where she saw Betty and Laura going over a cheer. Laura glanced up and locked eyes with Carmilla. She gave her a shy smile before Betty broke her gaze by cartwheeling in front of Laura.

Carmilla rolled her eyes and looked back at her teammates.

“Feeling good, Stretch?” Carmilla asked Danny as they all took a seat on the bench.

“You know it!” Danny said with a smile and a wink as she readjusted the socket of her prosthetic, making sure it wasn’t going to slip.

Before they knew it the game had begun.

Danny was chosen for tip-off, obviously, and got possession for the Sharks. She passed the ball to LaF, who then drove forward passing laterally to Carmilla who scored with a three.

They were off to a great start. Their new offensive plays that Coach had them practicing, threw the other team for a loop. They were able to score a couple of threes and get in several layups before the first quarter. However, their defensive drills were still lacking. Even with Danny’s height and SJ and Natalie’s persistence, they still couldn’t steal or block much of the other team’s attempts. So in the second quarter Olympic had caught up, and were only trailing behind by four points once they reached half time. The buzzer blew and the team headed back to the locker room for their half-time break/pep talk.

“Alright guys. Our offense is holding strong but our defense isn’t cutting it. Danny you could have blocked 29’s layup easily.”

“I know.” Danny said as she shook her head in disappointment.

“And Natalie, you’re lucky you didn’t get ejected with that elbow you threw.”

“Coach she was tugging on my Jersey! And besides the elbow missed her, so what does it matter?”

“Because we don’t play like that! We play with honor and integrity. I saw her holding, and I know that can be frustrating, especially when you have a blind ref who can’t call for crap. But we don’t play dirty, we play fair.”

“Coach, we’re trying. We’re doing everything you taught us in practice but their offense is just better than our D.” Carmilla said as she used a towel to wipe the sweat off her brow.

“I know. We’ll have to revisit our strategies at practice. But for now, I just need you guys to keep
giving it everything you got. Play to your strong suits. LaF, if you see a chance for a layup you take it. Carm, if you see an opportunity for a three, shoot it. Danny if you get a chance at a steal, you make like Winona Ryder and you run as fast as you can down that court! Alright you guys go get some water and take a five. Come back on that court ready to win! Break!” Mark said with the clap of his hands.

The team made their way out the locker room doors and down the hallway to the second set of water coolers. The cheerleaders were already there, chatting while trying to see who could do the longest handstand.

Carmilla was walking in the back of the pack when she felt a hand grab her elbow. She turned around to see Laura standing there.

Carmilla hated cheerleaders, but loved their uniforms. Laura was standing there wearing a blue, silver, and white, fitted crop top that read “Sharks”; a blue, skirt with silver and white lining that cut off just before mid-thigh; and her hair pulled back in a clean high pony-tail by a blue and silver ribbon.

Dayyyyyuuummm.

“Hey” Laura said shyly.

“Hey” Carmilla said back.

“Good game out there. You guys are wining.”

“Yeah, not by much though.”

“I’m sure you’ll keep it up!” Laura said with a slight bounce in her step.

“Hope so.” There was a brief moment of silence where Carmilla didn’t know if she should continue this conversation or quit while she is ahead and call it a victory. She decided to take her chances.

“Great job cheering out there. You’re a natural.” She said with a smirk.

“Well it helps when there is someone you have to cheer for.”

“Still got a thing for Danny, huh?” She said teasingly.

Laura rolled her eyes and then responded “Yeah…something like that”.

Carmilla smiled before deciding to head back to her teammates.

“Well, I’ll see you out there.” She said as she went to turn away.

“Wait!” Laura said taking a step forward. Nervous she began to rub her hand over the top of her right thigh.

“Ummm.” She said nervously still unable to look Carmilla directly in the eye.

“Spit it out, Cupcake.” Carmilla said with a knowing smirk.

“What are you doing after the game?” She said twisting her hands together.

“Well that depends. If we lose, I’ll probably go home and wallow in my own self-pity. If we win, your dad said he’s going to take us for some ice cream.”
“…And after that?” She said looking into the taller girl’s eyes.

Carmilla rose her brow questioningly before replying.

“Sleep?”

Laura shook her head with a smile. She bit her lip, trying to gain the courage to ask her next question.

Carmilla waited.

“Meet me in the treehouse?” She asked quietly.

Carmilla let out a breath. She was surprised to say the least.

What the hell?

“Umm, okay. Sure.” She said with a shy smile.

“Great!” Laura said with a smile. She looked past Carmilla’s shoulder, over to where Carmilla’s teammates were and where her fellow cheerleaders were. No one seemed to be paying attention to the two girls so Laura decided to take her chances. She quickly stepped forward and leaned up to give Carmilla a chaste kiss on the cheek. She then ran off to the rest of her squad without so much as looking back for Carmilla’s reaction.

Carmilla just stood there with her hand on her cheek and her heart beating a little harder than it was when she was playing. She looked back as she saw Laura now standing with her back facing her, talking with her teammates.

“Hey, Karnstein! You good?” Danny said as she game running up to a very pale and unmoving Carmilla.

“Huh?” She said as she looked away from Laura and looked towards Danny.

“I said you good? You look a little flushed. Why are you holding your cheek? You hurt or something?”

“No, I uh, just warm.” She said as she padded at her face with the back of her hand trying to make it convincing.

“Yeah, physical exertion will do that to you.” Danny said as she nudged Carmilla with her shoulder. “Come on, let’s get you some water.” Danny said as she draped her arm over Carmilla’s shoulders and walked with her to the water coolers.

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So they ended up winning, obviously. They stuck to what they were good at and instead of running plays, they just played on instincts. They ended up beating Olympic by twelve points. And Coach Hollis of course stayed true to his word and took the team out for some much needed and deserved ice cream. Laura however did not come with as the cheerleaders decided to go to Steak n’ Shake instead.
Coach gave Carmilla and Will a ride home, while Laura grabbed a ride with Betty and Alec. Mark and the Karnsteins were the first to arrive back home. As they pulled up to his driveway they thanked him and he gave Carmilla a pat on the back for playing a good game. They wished each other goodnight and headed their separate ways.

Carmilla and Will made their way inside and found their mom passed out on the couch, lightly snoring. She startled awake when Will set Carmilla’s gym bag on the floor.

“Oops.” He said, not meaning to wake his mother.

“Hey, kids. How was the game sweetheart?” She asked rubbing her eyes and starting to sit up.

“Good. We won!” Carmilla said as she walked over to her mom and plopped down on the couch next to her.

“Yay! I’m so proud!” Karen said as she wrapped her daughter in a hug.

“Sorry I couldn’t be there, baby. There was a huge pileup on the interstate and the hospital needed all the help they could get so they called me in.”

“That’s okay. I know saving lives is more important than a high school basketball game.” She said as she rested her head on her mother’s shoulder.

“How did I luck out with such great kids?” Karen said as she motioned for Will to join them on the couch. He plopped down on her other side. The two kids rested their head on their mother’s shoulders as she embraced them both and gave them each a kiss on the head.

“That’s enough family bonding time for me. I’m going to catch the last of the X-Games replay and head to bed.” Will said as he got up making his way to the stairs.

“Night, sweetheart.” Karen said over her shoulder to her son.

“You off to bed too?” She said looking at her daughter.

“Nah. I think I’m going to relax for a little bit and then head to bed.”

“Alright, superstar. Just don’t go to bed too late!”

“Mom, tomorrow is Saturday.”

“I know, but you’re still a growing young lady who needs her rest.”

“Yes ma’am.” She said with sigh.

“Alright. Goodnight, sweetie.”

“Goodnight, Mom.”

Carmilla waited until her mother was all the way upstairs before going outside to the backyard and climbing her way up to the treehouse.

She made her way inside and lit the little oil lamp they kept on the windowsill over the reading nook. She made herself comfortable as she waited for the other girl.

_Wow. I’m actually waiting for Laura in our treehouse because she asked me to. I wonder how long the ‘sugar and spice and anything but nice’ squad is holding her hostage. She looked so beautiful_
tonight. In that uniform…doing those flips. She didn’t even break a sweat. Omg, sweat. Oh shit, should I shower? I stink. I stink, right?

Carmilla thought to herself as she began to smell herself. She pulled her jersey up to her nose not really smelling any B.O. Then she lifted up her arms and sniffed her pits, again she couldn’t smell anything too bad.

Oh no, they say you can’t smell your own stink…I probably smell horrible. I should go inside and take a quick shower.

Carmilla got up and crouched her way over to the door when suddenly a head popped through.

“Whoa!” Carmilla said as she stumbled back onto her butt.

“Going somewhere?” Laura said a little disappointedly as she made her way inside the treehouse.

“Uh, I was just going to…uh.” Should I tell her? That’s kind of awkward. ‘Hey I was just going to go take a quick shower because I didn’t want you to be stuck up here with me smelling like the bottom of an abattoir.’

“Did you change your mind?” Laura said as she sat up on her heels and folded her hands on her lap.

“No! No, I mean. I just…stink.”

“What?” Laura asked with a chuckle.

Carmilla dusted off her hands and draped her arms over her knees.

“I was going to head inside and grab a quick shower. I didn’t want to you to have to smell me all night long.”

“All night long?” Laura said with a raised eyebrow.

“I, I didn’t mean, uh, I meant like for however long you wanted to hang out up here for.” She said fumbling over her words.

Jesus Karnstein, keep your fucking cool you dweeb.

“Well, I don’t think you stink. And if I’m not taking a shower, then you’re not either. We can be stinky up here together.” Laura said with a small smile which Carmilla returned.

“Cool.” Carmilla said as she scooted back against the wall.

“So…what did you want to do?” She asked hesitantly.

“I thought we could just, ya know, hangout?” Laura said shyly.

“Cool.”

“So how was—

“—Did you have—

They both started at the same time. They immediately stopped and awkwardly laughed.

“Is this totally weird?” Laura asked with a scrunched up face.
Carmilla shook her head before responding “Laura, we literally fell asleep together up here two weeks ago, and spent the other night talking to each other on those crappy old walkies for hours.”

Laura thought for a moment before agreeing “True.” She said as she crawled over to where Carmilla was seated.

“May I?” She asked as she pointed to the spot right beside Carmilla.

“Of course.” She said as she patted the spot next to her.

“Thanks.” She said as she took a seat next to the brunette. Their legs now touching.

“Listen, about earlier…” Laura started.

“Which earlier?” Carmilla asked.

“This morning.”

“Forget it.” Carmilla said.

“No, Carm. I shouldn’t have—

--Forget it, Cupcake.” Carmilla said as she placed her hand on Laura’s thigh.

“But I can’t forget it. I can’t forget anything I’ve said or done to hurt you.” Laura said as she placed her hand on top of Carmilla’s, squeezing it.

“Laura, don’t.”

“Why? Why won’t you let me apologize? Why won’t you let me explain why I’ve been so horrible to you.”

“Because that would mean you have a reason to be.” Carmilla said pulling back her hand.

“What?” Laura asked in confusion.

Carmilla sighed and shook her head. She turned her body so that she was now sitting criss-cross-applesauce facing Laura.

“Laura this past year and a half has been hell for me. Not because of the things you and your ‘friends’ said or did but because of the things you didn’t say and the things you didn’t do.” She turned her gaze away from Laura’s eyes, looking anywhere but at her offender. “I’m not hurt because those ‘friends’ called me names. I’m hurt because you haven’t called me by my nickname. I’m not hurt because they’ve pushed me or tripped me. I’m hurt because you haven’t held me or comforted me. I’m not hurt because they ignore me and hate me. I’m hurt because you haven’t acknowledged me or told me how much you care for me.”

Laura was staring at Carmilla with tears in her eyes, trying her best to not let them fall. She was subconsciously rubbing the tips of her fingers over her skirt at the top of her thigh. Each finger tracing a self-inflicted scar; one carved for every malfeasance committed against Carmilla. Carmilla shook her head as she tried to clear her thoughts and her throat.

“I have tried my best to ignore everything you have not done and everything you have not said this past year and a half because I’m convinced, it is not you. I am convinced that for some inexplicable reason, you have abandoned me…abandoned us. I think of it as evidence of absence, or propositional logic. If you don’t give it a reason, then it does not exist. If you explain as to why you
have acted the way you have, then there must be a reason. A reason you left me. Whether that reason is caused by me or not, I don’t want to live in a reality where that reason even exists. Because in my reality, there is absolutely nothing and I mean nothing that could ever make me abandon you, Laura. Abandon, us.”

Carmilla didn’t realize she had tears rolling down her cheeks until she tasted them. She looked up at Laura and saw the same broken image she had seen in her own reflection, in her own bathroom mirror, so many times.

They sat staring into each other’s eyes neither moving.

Then everything hit them like a wave.

Both girls lunged forward their lips crashing together. Both kneeling on the ground, bodies flushed against each other, lips moving in a frenzy. Their hands roaming and grasping at anything they could possibly get a hold onto. Laura balled up Carmilla’s jersey in her fists as Carmilla’s hands grasped at Laura’s waist. Laura’s hands moved to the hem of Carmilla’s jersey pulling it upward in a haste. Their kiss momentarily broken by the jersey lifting up and over Carmilla’s face. Laura threw it in the corner as their kisses regained momentum and Carmilla pushed Laura down on her back. Her hands roaming Laura’s torso before moving down to run along Laura’s thighs. Their kisses were feverish and unlike anything either girl had ever experienced. Every touch from one another was desperate and hot, almost burning their skin. Carmilla ran her hands up Laura’s leg starting at the bend of her knee. She ran her left hand up the side of Laura’s right thigh slowly making her way under Laura’s skirt. Inching closer and closer to the reason they have been forced apart. She had to stop her.

*She can’t find out, not like this.*

“Wait! Wait.”

Carmilla immediately stopped her actions and sat up hovering over Laura.

“Did I do something wrong? Did I hurt you?”

“No! No. I just think, we’re moving too fast.” Laura said through labored breaths as she sat up and placed her hands on Carmilla’s neck.

“I’m sorry.” Carmilla said, out of breath herself.

“Don’t be.” Laura said as she brought their foreheads together. Carmilla placed her hands on Laura’s arms as they still clung to her neck.

“Do you want to go?” Carmilla asked, looking Laura in the eyes.

She shook her head as she regained control of her breathing.

“No, I want to stay here. With you.” She said as she placed a hand over Carmilla’s heart.

Carmilla smiled before leaning up and kissing the smaller girl’s forehead.

“Oh, okay.” Carmilla said as she began to lay back down and gestured for Laura to come join her on the rug.

Laura crawled over and placed her head on top of Carmilla’s chest. She nuzzled into her neck and threw her arm and leg over the brunette’s body, holding her tightly. Laura was lulled to sleep by the rise and fall of Carmilla’s chest. Carmilla fell asleep with her fingers threaded through that honey-
brown hair, breathing in the smell of strawberries that she had missed so much.

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