### ANGRY! LESBIAN! SPACE! PRISON!

**by gyruum**

**Summary**

After committing murder, Spencer finds herself imprisoned in...well. Spoiler: It's kind of gay.

**Notes**
This is a multi-fandom, femslash crossover, crack AU. It’s science fiction, it’s comedy, it’s murder mystery, it’s romance, it’s angsty drama, it’s horror, it’s smut. It’s basically everything. (Except clowns. There are no clowns.)

Hopefully it will be enjoyable regardless of your familiarity with the characters and sources, but even more so if you know them well. I’ve put a character photo index (in the order they appear) online, if you want to have that open in a tab for reference. There are 101 characters mentioned in this beast, so I do recommend it.

**Primary sources** (major characters, universe elements, and plot points): Pretty Little Liars, Glee, Battlestar Galactica, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Harry Potter, Orphan Black, Orange is the New Black, and The L Word.


Some characters are canonically queer in their sources, others are not, but it doesn’t matter. I wanted to play with them all in my big gay sandbox. Because I could. This fic also contains a lot of period talk, because that’s what happens sometimes when an author with a uterus locks sixty women together on a spaceship.

The story takes place when I started it, just after season 3 of Pretty Little Liars. If it makes you laugh out loud, it’d be really cool if you let me know.
A Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day

Spencer isn’t sorry she killed Toby. She’s just sorry she got blood on her favorite black hoodie in the process. Seriously, it was a bitch to wash out.

And it’s weird, because she remembers what happened—the croquet mallet and the cracking sound his skull made (...all eighteen times)—but after that, it’s a blur. She knows she’s missing time but doesn’t know how much, and where the hell is she, anyway? And why is there a fucking bag over her head?

If the two women dragging her around don’t let go soon and tell her what the hell is going on, she’ll be adding even more bodies to her count. That is, if she can get her strength back. Her senses are weakened, but Spencer can tell she’s groggy—fuzzy, like her brain has been stuffed with cotton balls—and seriously dehydrated. It scares her that she’s not sweating, given how damn hot her face is right now. Her throat is scratchy and dry, and the hot air she’s breathing inside this bag burns on its way down.

She hears what sounds like a heavy, metal door close behind her—but it’s hard to tell—and she’s slammed into a chair. One of the cops lets go of her arm and starts handcuffing her to something.

“Where is my mother!” Spencer yells. “This is bullshit! I’m a Hastings, goddamnit! You will never get away with treating me like this!”

There’s a sarcastic mumble from the cop furthest away, but Spencer can’t make it out over her grunting and the rattling against metal rings. The door opens again, and Spencer whips around even though everything is black. She’s going to run out of breathable air soon.


“It’s Rizzoli.”

A brief pause. “I hear no difference.”

The door in the distance opens and closes again. Soft footsteps circle Spencer as she jerks furiously against the chains. Her wrists are killing her, but she’s not giving up without a fight. “Where the hell is my mother!” It’s time for answers, now.

Without warning, the hood is painfully ripped off, and Spencer gasps, startled, at the rush of cool air against her face. Her pupils constrict suddenly, as all her senses adjust to the sharp contrast of her new surroundings. She’s in a gray room with a giant curtain on the wall to her right, doors on two of the other sides, a table a few feet from her, and a bright light overhead. But mostly, all Spencer can see is a tall, blonde woman in a navy-blue tracksuit, six inches from her face.

“So.” The woman’s voice is matter-of-fact, but friendly. “I hear you like to kill people.”

Spencer doesn’t so much as blink. No daughter of Veronica Hastings would ever respond to such obvious baiting. Still, something about this woman exudes power, despite the fact that she’s practically wearing pajamas. Through her haze—much milder now, thankfully—Spencer fixes on the woman’s eyes and just glares back. “Where. Is. My. Mother.”

The woman starts pacing around the room, and Spencer instantly feels the familiarity of a cat-and-mouse game.
"You're a tough girl, Hastings. Determined, ambitious, mentally unstable but with an arrogant flair and cheekbones that could cut glass. You remind me of a young Sue Sylvester. Only…” The woman leans in close again to whisper, “At least I had the basic sense to dispose of the bodies.” Sue holds her gaze for a moment to let that sink in, then glances down. “And a better rack.” She taps Spencer’s forehead with her finger three times as she says, “I guess good grades aren’t all they’re cracked up to be.” And she grins, clearly enjoying herself.

“Don’t touch me,” Spencer growls, trying to back away even though there’s nowhere to go. “You can’t keep me here!”

What the hell kind of police interrogation is this?

“Ohh, I don’t think you’re going anywhere…” Sue resumes her pacing with a small skip in her step.

“I know my rights. You can’t question me without my lawyer present, and you clearly have no idea who you’re dealing with.” Spencer gives her best Hastings glare, the one that makes babies cry and accidentally killed her hamster when she was eight.

Sue just laughs and says, “This is my favorite part,” like she’s sharing a special secret with an old friend. Walking over to the heavy, maroon curtain, she pauses and turns to Spencer. “Tell me again how your mother’s on her way here right now?”

And with a dramatic flourish, she throws the curtain back to reveal a giant window and the empty, terrifying vastness of space—still, dark, and infinite. A few distant stars shimmer against the black, but otherwise....

Spencer gapes in horror, frozen. There’s just...nothing.

Sue, meanwhile, looks like a kid on Christmas morning. “I’m sure she’s just stuck in traffic,” she says with feigned reassurance.

But Spencer can’t hear anything over the pounding in her ears, and if she had any food in her stomach, it’d surely be all over the floor right now. Her head is spinning, but she holds herself together. This isn’t real. It can’t be. She’s not in space. How would she even get into space? It’s just some CGI bullshit intended to shock her into confessing a murder. There’s even a fake asteroid floating by—a piece of Styrofoam on a string, no doubt—as an extra touch. Well, nice try, gym coach. Spencer’s seen better special effects at the Children’s Science Museum.

She steels her nerves and shoots back, “You really expect me to believe we’re actually in space? Do you think I’m stupid?”

“We’re not in space. There’s oxygen. And gravity.” Spencer knows how space works. Four-year-olds know how space works.

“I’ve pulled some strings.” Sue walks over to lean a hand on the table. “Can’t have my prisoners floating around all willy-nilly like balloons at a birthday party.”

“Prisoners,” Spencer repeats. Surely, she heard that wrong.

“Well, ‘prison bitches’ seems a little on the nose.”
The truth hits her like a ton of bricks. “This is a prison,” Spencer says soberly.

Sue leans forward a bit and smiles again, a twinkle in her eye. “Can’t get anything past you, can I?”

Suddenly, everything makes both perfect sense and no sense at all. They caught her, but how? Spencer had been meticulous in her planning and execution, except for the part where she smashed Toby’s skull to absolute smithereens instead of one generous thwap. The clean-up got away from her, but she did the best she could. And until this moment, she thought she’d pulled it off. Everyone gets away with murder in Rosewood. It’s kind of the town’s deal. Only, maybe this really isn’t Rosewood after all. The scenery’s a bit of a clue.

In that moment of acceptance, Spencer’s reality crashes down around her. She stares out the window again, but she’s not really looking at anything. Her brain is stuck on five simple words, which she says out loud if only to make sure she’s not dreaming, or dead. “I’m in prison. In space.”

“Right again, Hastings.” Sue points with a smile. “You’re on fire today!”
The next several minutes don’t really register with Spencer until she’s sitting on an exam table
dressed in only a paper gown. Her hands and feet are cuffed and chained to another metal loop on
the floor. For whatever reason, “regulation issue” here means “lined with black leather,” so they’re
fairly comfortable, as far as handcuffs go. Or maybe that’s still the drugs talking. She can still feel
them in her system (after the...space travel), so who knows what all transpired in that lost time.

Wait, how did I get changed? Was I strip searched?!

The door creaks open and in walks the most attractive woman Spencer’s ever seen, but still all she
can think is, How the fuck did I end up in space prison?!

“So, Spencer Hastings,” the doctor—last name Lewis-Burke-Robbins, according to her lab coat—
reads from a chart. “I’m just going to run some routine tests, check to make sure you haven’t
brought anything on board.”

Space?! Prison?!

“Just try to relax. I’d promise this won’t hurt, but some people get squeamish about getting blood
drawn. I’m sorry if this seems invasive, but I have to be sure. Disease can spread quickly here.”

Spencer glares at her and crosses her arms. “See lots of space diseases, do you?”

Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins just smiles. “Here and there. Nothing I can’t handle.”

“Alien flu?” She’s clinging to the familiarity of sarcasm like a lifeboat.

“Not typically, no.” The doctor seems resilient, yet gentle, like she deals with shitty attitudes every
day but they don’t get to her. “Mostly...” She pauses. “You might say our population can be...aggressively promiscuous, which presents its own complications.”

Fantastic. Spencer’s mind is reeling with the implications of all this. It just keeps getting worse and
worse.

As the doctor methodically checks her skin for who-knows-what, Spencer stares at the only color in
the gray, metallic examination room. A sign about two feet tall hangs at eye-level on the wall beside
her, a giant crest, like an old coat of arms or something. The emblem itself appears to be a large,
golden...uterus?...against a maroon background. And is it that...chains with a lock wrapped around
it? Clearly the drugs haven’t yet worn off completely. She’s almost too distracted by the design to
notice the large letters underneath.

**USCSS BSG 27 SSV UD-4X SA-23DD USS UTERIUS**

*Where prisoners aren’t rehabilitated, they’re reborn.*
A pinprick on the crook of her elbow snaps her attention away. “Uterius? Are you kidding me?”

“It’s a fitting name, given the nature of what we do here.” The doctor caps off the blood sample, labels it, and sets down the vial.

“Which is what, bleeding people for days at a time?” Spencer’s trying to make sense of it all. It’s not working.

“Not usually.” Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins shines a bright light in each of Spencer’s eyes, watching the pupils constrict, then checks in her ears. “If you see the ship from the outside, it makes perfect sense.” She grabs the Velcro cuff to take Spencer’s blood pressure.

Even with the drugs still in her system, Spencer feels her heart pounding hard. This all has to be a terrible dream. There is no such thing as space prison. Right? She’s a well-read and highly skeptical girl. She would’ve heard about it. An article somewhere, surely, documenting NASA’s own little Guantanamo. No way something like that stays out of public knowledge. Unless maybe that was the point. Ship away dangerous people with rich, powerful families who’d bail them out if they had the chance.

And that’s when she knows. Her mother has no clue where she is. And she never will.

Spencer fights back the tears to keep her voice strong. A Hastings never shows weakness, even now, even to someone who doesn’t know what being a Hastings even means.

Her voice cracks anyway. “I’m never getting out of here, am I?”

“I’m the doctor, not the lawyer.” A small smile. She sets down her tool and changes gloves. “Lie back.”

Spencer sighs and flops back on the table. “I’m in Hell.” She stares at the ceiling as her vision blurs. “In space.”

“Wait til you try the tuna casserole.” The doctor reaches over and grabs an intensely scary, metal contraption. “Spread ’em.”
She’s back in the first room—featuring the red curtain with space behind it—waiting for who knows what. She’s getting used to the restraints, and it isn’t lost on Spencer that handcuffs—not family — might be the permanent fixture in her daily life from here on out.

They’ve assigned her a black, second-hand jumpsuit with no pockets that is suspiciously threadbare in the crotch area. It’s not the first thing about this place that seems shoddy, now that’s she really looking around. The floors haven’t been swept. The walls are unpainted. The doors make an awful squeak when they’re opened. The table in here has one leg a half-inch off the ground. And thankfully, the wall with the large crack in it isn’t the one with the window. This facility, whatever it is, doesn’t seem to have the budget for basic repairs or amenities. Must not be many people out in space to tax, Spencer muses. But she prays they at least have a sterilization machine for the doctor’s tools.

A shrieking noise sounds from inside the wall—probably just steam pipes or something, but it’s threatening all the same. Everything about this shithole is a far cry from the spaceships she’s seen in movies; instead of clean, slick design, this is industrial and filthy. It feels real, and that’s rattling Spencer to her core. She’s never been claustrophobic before, but it seems like a great time to start.

After what feels like an hour, the far door opens and in walks yet another woman Spencer doesn’t know. She’s wearing a dark blazer and carrying a briefcase, which she slams on the wobbly table, sitting down across from Spencer without even looking at her.

“Spencer Hastings, I’m Melanie Marcus, your appointed attorney.” She opens the case and takes out several thick file folders. “And don’t even start about your goddamn mother, because she’s not here —I am. Got it?”

She looks up at Spencer now, and, whoa. There is clearly somewhere else she’d rather be. Maybe lying on a bed of nails, or washing down dinner with a gallon of bleach. Something cheerful like that.

Spencer shifts uncomfortably in her chair, chains clinking as she moves. “Yeah.”

“You’re here”—A file slams down—“on charges of first-degree murder and seventeen counts of excessive bitchery.”

Spencer blinks. “Excuse me?” Who the fuck does this lady think she is? “That’s not even a real—”

“MY job”—Another slam—She’s just moving them in and out of the open briefcase now, back and forth, for no real reason—“is to get YOUR sorry ass acquitted so I can get my first paycheck in eighteen goddamn months”—slam —“and feed my fucking wife and two-year-old child”—slam —“except, wait.” Angry Melanie stops and leans across the table, staring Spencer down hard. “YOU ALREADY CONFI...
“HE DESERVED IT,” Spencer yells back, arms struggling against the cuffs. “You don’t know! You have NO idea what he put me through, what he put my friends through. You know NOTHING.” But as she says it, Spencer realizes that she might be the one who doesn’t know anything. When the hell did she confess? She doesn’t remember getting here; it’s possible she was interrogated under the influence of sedatives or something. Or maybe this is all a trick to get her to confess now. This so-called lawyer doesn’t seem to be on Spencer’s side.

“Oh, boo hoo, poor little bi-curious girl with her boyfriend problems,” Angry Melanie mocks, pretending to cry. “God, for ONCE can you just keep your fucking mouth shut until we get to trial? Or, hey, NOT KILL PEOPLE IN THE FIRST PLACE? Would that be too fucking much to ask?”

“What-curious?” Spencer squints, confused. “Maybe you suck at your job because your gigantic files don’t have any actual facts in them.”

“Oh, please. You’re here.” She’s laughing, but she’s still spitting fire. “And hey, congratulations, now you’ve got all the time you need to work through your precious lady-feelings. You’ve got nothing but time.” She laughs again. “You stupid little shit.”

“What the hell kind of lawyer are you?” Absolutely nothing about this place is right.

Angry Melanie throws the stack of files into the case one last time. “One who can’t get you out of a life-sentence in space prison, or even a hope of parole, thanks to your big, cock-sucking mouth.” She slams the briefcase shut. “Enjoy your stay.” And with that, she storms out the rusty door.

Spencer sits motionless. Her eyes fall on the crack in the wall, and she absentely wonders if it’s leaking air, because she’s having trouble breathing.
Minutes later, she’s led through what seems to be the entrance to a giant vault. The acoustics in here are strikingly different—it’s loud, and voices of women boom and echo off the high, steel walls. Everything resonates, as there’s nothing to absorb the jeers and profane hollering. It’s a long hallway with barred cells on the right side and what appear to be scattered utility closets on the left. Spencer can’t tell how many cells there are, but the far end seems a mile away. There are more fluorescent lights high overhead but not in the individual cells. Enough light pours into them that Spencer can see the faces and living conditions of her new situation. Both are equally unsettling. And smelly. It’s warm in here, and quite ripe. *Isn’t it supposed to be cold in space?* she wonders. Maybe the engines run hot, burning rocket fuel that’s surely pumping carcinogenic toxins into their limited air supply. And air conditioning must not fit into the limited budget.

This place just gets better and better.

Her standard-issued black Keds squeak as a guard—a short, Asian woman with the name Boomer etched on a nametag—escorts her down the prison block. Spencer doesn’t know what the hell kind of name “Boomer” is or why the woman’s uniform has the letters P.M.S. stitched onto the pocket, but she doesn’t ask. All the answers to her questions thus far have left her more confused than before.

The first cell they pass, stenciled #20 painted above it, holds three older, seemingly well-adjusted women, who all watch Spencer as she shuffles by. They’re the ones in the cage, but she feels on-display like a damn zoo animal, and it’s horrible. Two of the women sit together on a bunk, but the third is standing up against the bars and leering at Spencer with a smile. Her short, dark curls match the black jumpsuit nicely.

“I have a tattoo.”

Spencer jumps at the woman’s gravelly whisper, stopping suddenly, but Boomer keeps walking.

“Nobody cares, Violet.”

Violet seems unfazed and licks her lips at Spencer, who is staring, frozen in place. “Would you like to see it?”

The woman’s fingers slowly start to unzip her jumpsuit, and at the first sight of side-boob, Spencer chokes on her own saliva and runs to catch up with that Boomer lady.

The population appears to consist largely of older women, all rough around the edges but surprisingly attractive, considering the circumstances. Spencer gives each passing cell a glance to scope out the scene but is mindful not to stare. If only Hanna, Aria, and Emily had helped her kill Toby instead of backing out on the plan like little bitches, then she wouldn’t be in this mess alone. Mostly, she regrets that his betrayal occurred after her eighteenth birthday. Any juvenile detention center would be preferable to this, even one on the damn moon.
There’s light coming from a cell up ahead, growing brighter as they approach. Once in sight, Spencer sees a huge sprawl of blazing candles in cell 16, what must be dozens of them. The heat emanating from inside is unbearable. The three occupants of the cell are younger than the other women Spencer has seen so far but just as intimidating. One girl is sitting on the toilet in the back, fully dressed and not using it as intended. Rather, her posture is very commanding, like she’s sitting on a throne. Her face is half-covered in black paint, giving her raccoon-eyes. She rises to her feet and watches Spencer pass by, expressionless as the flames flicker around her. It’s deeply unsettling, and Spencer’s all too glad to keep moving.

She can hear someone banging on the bars up ahead but can only see a pair of angry hands. As they approach cell 14, a short woman with a determined look on her face comes into view.

“Guard!” More banging. “I know you can hear me!” She’s just not stopping. “Why not put that skinny girl in here and move me to her destination? You know the number four is unlucky in Chinese culture! How can they do this?”

Boomer doesn’t stop to entertain the complaint or even look over. “No,” she says, loud enough for her to hear.

The woman punctuates each word with another clang as she screams, “I’M GOING TO DRIVE MY SHITTY VAN INTO YOUR HOME!” As Spencer moves on (gladly), she can hear more yelling behind her, “It will make your house look even worse than it does right now!”

Spencer says a silent prayer, grateful she’s dodged that bullet. This feeling lasts for maybe five seconds. A few cells later, she sees more girls closer to her age but significantly more terrifying. One seems to be on the worst fucking heroin trip of her life, with veins bulging from the sides of her ghostly face and curtains of pitch-black hair.

Please, god, no.

Another girl in the cell is watching Spencer from the back wall. Her head is tilted, like an inquisitive child trying to figure out their newest addition. She’s thin with big eyes and long, stringy hair that she hasn’t washed in three months at least. Possibly six.

“A is for accident,” the girl says, looking right at her.

Spencer stops in her tracks and stares, wide-eyed. This nut would have fit right in at Radley.

Boomer takes a few steps back and points as she yells into the cell, “And S is for shut the hell up!” She grabs Spencer’s arm forcefully. “Keep moving.”

Gladly, she thinks and takes another awkward step forward. Her shoes were broken in with someone else’s feet, and like everything about this place, they don’t feel right yet.

Over another squeak of the rubber sole, Spencer’s sure she hears the “A is for accident” girl add, “…but it wasn’t.”

That’s creepy as hell, Spencer thinks. Was there some kind of announcement about the more colorful points of her file before she arrived? A memo to everyone on official prison letterhead, perhaps? A fucking Powerpoint presentation?

Thankfully, the cast of characters in the next cell, number 10, looks almost familiar to her—a blonde (albeit with pink streaks) who oozes attitude, a cute, short brunette, and, well, a lesbian. It almost feels like home. You know, if Emily were black and they were all convicted felons.
So, naturally, this is Spencer’s stop. Of course, it is.

Amidst the random shouts from down the hall, Boomer barks, “Stand back! Stay up there, Quinn!” and unlocks the cell door, sliding the heavy bars just wide enough for Spencer to be shoved through. “Good luck,” Boomer laughs quietly as she turns the key.

Spencer quickly assesses the situation: Three sets of eyes, two bunk beds on opposite walls with the barest of linens, a wall-mounted sink with one toothbrush perched on the edge, and a silver bowl in the corner that, well, Spencer hopes at least has a flushing mechanism.

*Home, sweet home. In space prison.*

*Awesome.*

She can’t help but notice that her cellmates’ uniforms are also suspiciously thin and faded in the crotch area. Not that she’s staring at lady crotches. A Hastings would *never.*

Forcing herself to look away, she sees the word *Aphasia* scrawled in yellow chalk on the wall above the lesbian in the top-right bunk, surrounded by some green dollar signs, purple handguns, and a picture of what can only be...a blue giraffe?

*Sure, why not.*

“Where you been?” Aphasia snaps. She crosses her arms and gives Spencer a look that says, *Oh well, you missed it,* and says, “River’s got your book.” Then she turns back around and picks up an orange piece of chalk and starts drawing a friend for the giraffe.

Spencer just stands by the door, not sure what that means or what she should say or do. With all the shit she’s been through, teenage girls hardly scare her, but this is *prison.* Should she talk to these people? Would they beat her up if she didn’t? Was she supposed to have a shiv or a pack of Luckies to trade for soap? Were they going to pee in front of her in that bowl? Was one of the beds for her? It was, right? How do you jail?

“That was fast,” says the brunette on the bottom-left bunk. She looks an awful lot like Aria, but with crazy eyes and much less hair product. “Fucking Sylvester can’t give us one goddamn day without some new, sad bitch yapping away.”

Aphasia turns, confused. “Wait, this ain’t the same girl?”

The blonde with pink streaks, lying on the top left bed, flicks her lit cigarette at her cellmate. “No. Schecter got airlocked.” She looks Spencer up and down, licking her lips once, and smirks. “This is fresh meat.”

*Okay, TWO lesbians.*

Aphasia pats at the small fire in her hair like it’s a daily occurrence. “So, who the fuck are you?”

Spencer opens her mouth but stops to consider her options. She could try her usual tactic of boasting her family name and GPA, but she’s getting the sense that these girls may have never set foot in a high school unless they were selling drugs. Nor would they have ever heard of the Hastings family—or Rosewood, for that matter.

Plan B is to pretend she doesn’t speak English. So far, she’s leaning this way. She could pretend to be French for the rest of her life. *Ça peut pas être si difficile que ça?*
Plan C, kill them all and take the best bunk for herself. She’s already serving a life sentence for murder, so really, what would it matter? But if these girls regularly set each other on fire, it would probably take more than Spencer’s big brain and freshly trimmed nails to overtake one-against-three.

Plan D, let them kill her on the spot. At least before the tuna casserole does.

Or, Plan E, if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em. It’ll do for now.

“Spencer,” she says.
Four hours later, Spencer’s on the bottom bunk under Aphasia’s, replaying their earlier conversation in her mind. It turns out these girls all knew each other and came here together. They had tried to rob a bank (“because that’s where they keep THE MONEY,” Aphasia explained). Quinn was the brains, Mack was the muscle, and Aphasia had driven the get-away vehicle…right into the back of a parked police car around the corner. They hadn’t even gotten any money out, or come close. Mack shot fourteen people just because she was bored waiting for Quinn to hack the computer system.

Spencer almost misses the higher-order thinking skills of the A Team.

The metal bunk across from her squeaks and snaps Spencer out of her daydream as Mack climbs up into Quinn’s bed. Spencer’s not looking to get close to any of these criminals, herself, but she doesn’t want to feel like a fourth wheel in her new home, either. She’s used to being somewhat in charge of her little gang, or at least on equal footing. For a moment, she lets herself try to imagine running this crew, which is both hilarious and sad.

But we’d all be rich and free right now, you bet your ass.

Spencer watches innocently as Quinn sets her book aside, quietly welcoming the company, but then Mack unzips her jumpsuit and straddles Quinn without hesitation, pinning her hands against the thin mattress.

Make that three lesbians.

“O-kay…” Spencer quickly tries to find a Something Else to look at but fails. The thing about jail—not much in the way of decor. Passing over the toilet and sink, she settles for a blank spot on the wall to fixate on. Oh, what Spencer wouldn’t give for some noise-canceling headphones. Without even realizing it, her eyes drift left again.

Is that hand going where I think it’s going? Shit, yep, Mack totally catches Spencer staring.

“Do you mind?!” Mack growls. Her hand is still definitely there.

“Sorry.” Spencer quickly turns over to face the wall. Her hipbone digs painfully into the frame beneath the flimsy mattress, but her groan is lost in the sea of sex noise. She closes her eyes and pictures a field hockey game or something equally interesting and violent. Tuning out the debauchery eight feet away is harder than she realizes; she’s in a fucking jail cell—there’s no escaping this.

They eventually get so loud that Spencer wonders why the guards don’t think someone’s being brutally murdered. She lets out an “UGH” of frustration and pulls her pillow over her head, face down.

Aphasia leans over from the top bunk and says, “Girl, this ain’t nothing. Quinn spanks her on Wednesdays.”
Spencer has never missed her friends and her mother and her dead ex-boyfriend and even her unhinged stalkers more than she does right now. And no, she is not about to admit that the Quinn girl sounds really hot when she moans. That is clearly the space dementia talking, or the drugs, whatever they gave her to get her here. (Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins had conveniently failed to mention the possibility of medically-induced lesbian tendencies. What else would it be?) However, Spencer does have a guess to whom the doctor was referring with the whole “aggressively promiscuous” bit.

I mean, just look at them. Or, wait, don’t. Because that is rude. And also kind of gay.

She lies on her back and stares at the underside of the bunk above. It’s a solid gray sheet of metal, boring as the day is long. It has a nice effect, though, as it provides a blank canvas for Spencer to daydream. She stares at it, allowing her eyes to unfocus like it’s one of those hidden pictures of a sailboat, hoping to reach a zen place. All it does, however, is heighten her hearing and make the situation even worse. After twenty long minutes of trying, she sits up, frustrated, and hits her head on the metal frame. She curses loudly, but it just blends in with the string of smutty expletives across the way. This bunk bed thing is going to take some getting used to. Rubbing her tender head, Spencer sighs and wraps her arms around her knees.

But then, she notices something at the end of the bed that she swears wasn’t there before—a large spider web, spun between the vertical posts. Delighted to have something interesting to look at, Spencer scoots forward to examine the intricate design. Spiders are expert craftsmen, after all, and this web appears to go well beyond the standard fly-catching layout. In fact, unless Spencer’s dreaming, it seems to have writing in it. She angles her body so the light catches the threads just right. Sure enough, the words “FUCK YOU STACEY MERKIN” are there in clear, block letters.

A gray spider lurks nearby, looking quite pleased with herself. Spencer wonders why the fuck there are arachnids in space—ones who can write and curse, no less—never mind the insects to feed them. But who is she to question such things at this point? Nightmares aren’t supposed to make sense. For all she knows, the spider ate their previous cellmate…in this very bunk. And yet, staying put still feels safer than the violent lesbian sex-capades in the other.

Not that she’s still thinking about that. Really.

Spencer decides to take a chance on making a friend here in this bleak, new chapter of her existence. Thinking of her favorite childhood book, she says, “Hi Charlotte, I’m Spencer. We both seem like strong, intelligent women who deserve better than this run-down sex prison.” She sighs and admires the handiwork of the shimmering thread in the glow of the corridor’s lights. “Whatever Stacey did to you, I hope you had the last laugh.”

Charlotte says nothing.
Power Hour

Chapter Notes

Here’s the **character photo index**.

It takes every ounce of restraint Spencer has not to push past Mack and huddle up against Quinn as they step into the Mess Hall for dinner that evening. (She’s not sure why, exactly; it’s not like Quinn is any safer.) Spencer had thought the handful of fellow prisoners from before was terrifying, but that is nothing compared to the sheer breadth of inmate insanity before her. Teenagers and middle-aged women and everything in between crowd in line to get their trays of suspicious-looking food. Some appear on the verge of a homicidal outburst, snarling “Fuck you!”’s across the room every other second. Others seem calmer, but Spencer knows you have to watch out for the quiet ones. And frankly, based on what she’s gleaned of this place so far, Spencer’s surprised there isn’t a single mullet in sight.

She spots the women from her earlier entrance to the cell block—the scary, veiny-faced one is pouting for some reason or other; the vaguely unwashed one who’d chattered about A is...staring into space, unaffected by the fistfight that breaks out behind her; and the tattoo lady catches Spencer looking and greets her with a lick of her lips.

Spencer shudders and grabs onto the closest thing in reach for some sense of safety from the leering. Unfortunately, it turns out to be Mack’s jumpsuit sleeve, and Spencer just barely dodges the sharp elbow aimed at her side.

“Get the fuck off, weirdo.”

The tuna casserole turns out to be every bit as bad as the doctor said. Crunchy, for some reason. And a little spongy? Spencer tries to stick close to her cellmates, for protection more than companionship. They have their own table carved out in the middle of the room—a regular thing, it seems, just like fucking high school—and Spencer takes a seat facing the walkway so she can get a lay of the land.

There’s a single metal clock in here, like an old school bell system. It’s the first clock she’s seen since she arrived, but she doesn’t even know when that is—it’s still just the first day, right? She figures they’re keeping track of hours just to have a schedule and simulate the experience of still being on Earth, regardless of whether their location aligns with any specific orbit. God, what fucking solar system was she even in now? Was she in a solar system? No windows, no sunlight, no clue.

The inmates are all checking her out as they pass by, whispering to each other with little laughs. Spencer doesn’t want to know. She’s not in a mental state to deal with any bullshit. Nor does she want to deal with this “casserole,” but it’s either that or starve. Do they even get three meals a day?

Aphasia doesn’t seem to have any qualms about their meal, as that girl is just *inhaling* the stringy, gray mush without pausing for a breath. There are no utensils besides flimsy plastic spoons, and Spencer’s kind of amazed that Aphasia doesn’t snap hers clean in half as she saws through her food.

Across from her, Quinn hasn’t touched her dinner, puffing away on a cigarette instead. Spencer catches her eye once or twice, and Quinn smirks briefly before turning her attention back to whatever Mack is talking about. Well, at least Spencer’s not the only one suspicious of this tuna concoction.
Someone from another table hollers in their direction, and Aphasia pauses in her gusto to yell, “Bitch, I might be!” over her shoulder.

Quinn seizes the opportunity, taking one last drag and planting the cigarette butt deep into the remaining clump on Aphasia’s tray.

Before Spencer can say anything, however, Aphasia turns back with a grin. “She wants me so bad. Sucks to be you!” Without looking down, she shovels that last bit into her mouth—ashes, cotton, and all.

Spencer scowls, unable to stop herself. She’s going to need to keep an eye on this Quinn girl. It shouldn’t be too hard, considering they live in the same room.

At seven o’clock, the bell rings loudly, and the prisoners begin to make their way toward the garbage can on the far side, still shouting obscenities and threats in every direction. Spencer hasn’t even heard many of these words before, not even from Alison (and that’s really saying something). In fact, it hasn’t been quiet for a moment the whole meal—just a constant, dull roar of sexed-up profanity—and none of the authorities seem to care that these women might be about to kill each other or screw each other. Or both.

Wait, where are the authorities?

The crowd merges into a single-file line to dump their trays, and Spencer follows Mack as closely as possible without getting elbowed again. Thankfully, the more aggressive prisoners seem to have their sights set on other targets, at least for now. The thought that this terror is going to be part of her daily life—much less three times a day—is overwhelming. And everyone else here seems so... used to it.

As she nears the door, Spencer notices a new guard waiting there—a short, feisty blonde who looks like she should be in cheerleading camp, not a prison.

“Chow time’s over, ladies. We hope you enjoyed the tuna this evening.”

Someone shouts, “Yeah, your mom says hi,” from the back of the line, and the room erupts in laughter—everyone but Spencer, who would rather eat fire ants than antagonize one of these people.

“My mother’s dead,” the guard replies. “But I’m glad you found her so delicious, Vasquez.”

The whole line “Ooooh”’s and shuffles on, still snickering as they turn the corner. When Spencer gets close enough, she’s able to take a good look at B. Summers. The girl is absolutely tiny, and Spencer can’t imagine Little Miss Pom-Poms overtaking a puppy, much less any member of this population. Her uniform does say P.M.S. like Boomer’s, but it just seems crazy. Like everything else in this god-forsaken place.

And, wait, is that a wooden stake strapped to her belt? The fuck?

“Lights out in two hours, astro-nuts!” No corrections office should sound this excited about her job.

Much to Spencer’s surprise, everyone in line seems to be returning to her cell without protest. The noise has died down, too, she notices. The blonde’s the only guard in sight, standing watch at the end of the hall with her arms crossed, eyes daring someone to start something.

“Looking good tonight, Buffy,” Mack says, winking and licking her lips.

Buffy? What IS it with these names?
A loud buzzer sounds, and the cell bars slide shut in unison and lock with an echoing clank.

Spencer flops down onto her bed and barely misses getting kicked in the face when Aphasia takes a running leap up onto the top bunk. Settling into what must be their evening routine, Quinn pulls a book out from under her mattress, Aphasia starts freestyle beatboxing, and Mack draws on her left bicep with what seems to be a thick piece of charcoal. The result is more dirt smudge than intricate design, but she’s thoroughly engrossed in her process.

This is what passes for prime-time entertainment in space prison.

God, what Spencer wouldn’t give for a laptop right now. Or anything she could read. A newspaper. A cereal box. A shampoo bottle. *Something.* It feels weird not having a cell phone. They’re not a part of this new reality. She has only her thoughts, and right now, her thoughts suck. Does anyone in Rosewood miss her? Have they even noticed she’s gone? If so, they probably assume she’s as dead as Toby—which, at this point, she might as well be.

Suddenly, a paperback book hits her in the head. “Ow!” Spencer reaches down to pick up *Passion’s Burning Flame*—which features a scantily-clad woman in the arms of a ripped, female firefighter on its cover—and throws it back at Quinn, hard. She misses.

Quinn arches an eyebrow but doesn’t react any more than that. “Thought you’d want something to do.”

*I never realized how sexy an eyebrow can be.*

...Wait, what?

“So, you throw it at my face?” *Why does this girl like throwing things at people? And why lesbian romance novels?* Spencer would almost prefer a lit cigarette. “Social skills, much?”

Mack glances up from her full sleeve of “art,” which is just a solid black mess. “Is that the one with the spank inferno?” She turns to Spencer and says, “That one’s good.”

“I’ll pass.”

After a few quiet minutes (beatboxing aside), Quinn props her head up. “So. What’d you do?”

It was only a matter of time, but Spencer doesn’t want to answer that or any other questions. She’s still half-convinced she’ll wake up from this nightmare any minute now, warm in her bed back home on Earth. She’ll shrug off A’s latest text and ace a pop quiz and eat lunch with her friends and get away with murder, and everything will be right again. Nothing in that plan involves talking to these people. So, Spencer finds a deep scratch in the metal underside of Aphasia’s bunk and gives it her full attention.

She really wants it to be lights-out already so she can just hide in the darkness and pretend she’s not there. But the lights are still on, and Quinn is still staring. “None of your business,” she finally says, if only to get Quinn to stop, and rolls over to face the wall.

Mack sounds thoroughly unimpressed. “I bet she just cheated on a test or something.”

Spencer whips back around, fire in her eyes. “Hey! I don’t cheat!” (Well, except for that one time with Melissa’s history paper.)

Quinn looks down at Mack with a grin. “Went for a little joyride in Daddy’s BMW without permission.”
“And blew the butler in the back seat,” Mack adds. She’s pointing at Spencer with the chunk of charcoal, quite thrilled at the chance to be mean to someone.

“How scandalous!” Quinn laughs back.

“I KILLED SOMEONE!” Spencer shoots upright, hitting her head again. “OW! GODDAMNIT!” She takes a breath and rubs the sore spot, wondering if the pain will subside before she’s done with this damn conversation. “I killed my boyfriend with a croquet mallet.”

Aphasia tuts and waves a hand. “Girl, we know that. They just messin’ wi’chu.”

The other two girls snicker to each other like Spencer’s existence is their own little inside joke. Mack’s condescending stare is downright hurtful, while Quinn just looks amused by the whole thing.

Spencer still doesn’t understand. “How did you—”

Suddenly, a blue file appears in front of her face as Aphasia holds it over the edge of the bunk. The name HASTINGS, SPENCER is printed on the label. A giant, red stamp of “CONFIDENTIAL: PROPERTY OF USCSS BSG 27 SSV UD-4X SA-23DD USS UTERIUS” covers the entire white front of the folder.

Spencer instantly recognizes it as one of the same files Angry Melanie had earlier. Curiosity gnaws at Spencer’s insides; God only knows what it says. What all do they have on her?

“How did you get that? Give it to me!”

She reaches for it but Aphasia yanks it away and holds it high over her head, kicking a foot at Spencer’s face to keep her at bay. She looks almost offended by the question. “You know magic people never say how they do shit.”

Mack chimes in, “Girl’s got skills.”

Spencer stops jumping and turns to her, incredulous. “And yet you failed to actually steal any money from the bank.”

“Hey, that ain’t my fault! She made me wait in the car!”

Spencer only looks away for a moment, but when she glances back at Aphasia, the file is gone. And she’s twiddling her thumbs. And whistling.

“Oh, here we go again,” Quinn drawls. “I told you, I can’t—”

**COME ON, GIRLS!**

Mack groans.

**DO YOU BELIEVE IN LOVE?**

Spencer looks around for the source of the voice, but there doesn’t seem to be an intercom speaker anywhere in their cell. Aphasia, however, is now bouncing on her bed at this latest development.

‘CAUSE I GOT SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT IT! AND IT GOES SOMETHING LIKE THIS...

When the music kicks in, Spencer realizes it’s coming from the main corridor, loud enough to carry
to every cell.

There is radio in space prison. And it plays Madonna.

Aphasia cries, “Ooh, this my jam!” and jumps down, then busts into a full-blown dance routine that she’s clearly polished over time.

All thoughts of the file are quickly drowned out by the booming beats, as Spencer can’t even hear herself think anymore. “What is this?”

Quinn’s humming along in her bed, nonchalant, as if this were an everyday occurrence.

*Shit, IS this an everyday occurrence?*

“Power hour,” Mack says, rolling her eyes. “The warden has a thing for Madonna. She ‘empowers women’ or some shit.”

Quinn rolls over to face Spencer. “Sylvester made us wear these bracelets with WWMD on them. She said it meant, ‘We Worship Madonna Daily.’”

Before Spencer can correct her, Mack huffs, “More like, ‘When Will Madonna Die?’”

“I haven’t seen one in months,” Quinn says. “I guess people flushed them.”

“No, they right here!” Between dance moves, Aphasia reaches into her jumpsuit and pulls out a handful of twenty or so rubber bracelets. The bunch becomes a colorful prop as she starts doing the Macarena to “Express Yourself” without missing a beat. “Watch While Madonna Dances!”

“The fuck?” Mack says, launching herself off the bed, only to get smacked in the face by a flailing arm. “Gimme one!”

“Why?” Aphasia furrows her brow. “You know I’ll just steal it again.” She bends down and slowly drags fistfuls of bracelets up her body in time with the music, then punches the air in Mack’s direction with her tongue sticking out.

Mack gives up and flops back down with a huff. Spencer watches Aphasia for the rest of the song, at least until her eye catches Charlotte skittering around near the end of her bunk just as “This Used to Be My Playground” starts. She watches for a few seconds, almost mesmerized by the spider’s fluid movements, yet her eyes wander over and settle on Quinn.

Somehow, watching a girl quietly read romance novels interests Spencer more than dancing or drawing (as Mack has now started on her left foot with that charcoal). Quinn’s a bit of a puzzle, though. Spencer’s six hours into her life sentence and she feels she has a pretty good handle on Mack and Aphasia—enough to know she really wishes she didn’t know them at all—but Quinn remains a mystery.

“Hey, check this out!” Still stretched out in bed, Mack kicks her foot up in the air and catches her heel on the edge of Quinn’s bunk. “It’s good, right?”

Spencer can’t see what’s on Mack’s foot, but, judging by the array of smudges covering her arm and Quinn’s own impassive expression, it’s probably not a contemporary masterpiece.

“Right?!” Mack says again while wiggling her foot. “Quinn!”

But Quinn isn’t looking at Mack—she’s looking at Spencer.
For a moment, they share the quiet amusement of ignoring Mack, whose frantic jerks are smearing black dust all over Quinn’s sheet. Not that either Spencer or Quinn even notices. Their eyes lock, and a silent conversation passes between them.

*Can you believe these girls? What even is that on her foot? And what about that dancing?*

A smile starts to curl Spencer’s lips for the first time since she arrived here. It feels good. Almost good enough to let this sudden connection pierce the many walls she’s spent weeks, or even years, constructing.

“I’m fucking talking to you!” Mack shouts.

Quinn doesn’t seem to be in any rush to respond. Without breaking eye contact, she folds the corner of her current page and sets the book aside, then fishes a cigarette and Zippo lighter out of her bra. Spencer arches an eyebrow as she watches. Quinn lights it with a deft snap of her fingers and inhales deeply, then leans over and blows the smoke across Mack’s toes.

“Eat me.” Mack yanks her foot back down with a pout.

Spencer starts to laugh but catches herself and pretends she’s been watching Aphasia instead. Which, *wow.* She’s doing some kind of slow-motion, interpretive dance that is more like yoga-meets-hip-hop, but drunk. At the line, “This used to be the place we ran to,” Aphasia breaks into a half-speed Running Man.

Charlotte, meanwhile, has finally fallen still on the outskirts of her latest creation. Clear as day, Spencer reads the words:

**MY PLAYGROUND**

She cocks her head to one side and studies the web. *How curious for a spider to have a favorite Madonna song.* Spencer wonders just how long Charlotte’s been on board and how many Power Hours this poor creature has suffered through.

*How many will I suffer through? ~60 years remaining lifespan, times 365 days, equals...*

“Material Girl” kicks in and distracts Spencer just enough to decide it’s time to get some answers about this place. She looks up at Quinn. “Hey, why do the guards’ uniforms say P.M.S. on them?”

“Because that’s their Permanent Mental State,” Mack answers before anyone else can.

“Some security force,” Spencer says. “One of them has a *tiny stick.*” If these people are supposed to protect her, shouldn’t they have more than a glorified toothpick?

“Mmm.” Mack loses herself in thought, then says, loud enough for everyone to hear, “I can think of a few places I’d like to stake her.”

“Buffy can’t hear you,” Quinn says, then looks over at Spencer. “She’s hopeful. Buffy has a thing for murderous brunettes.” A shrug. “It happens.”

Mack gets up and leers at Quinn. “And we all know I have a thing for snarky, violent blondes.” She stands on the bottom bunk and starts to pull herself up, but Quinn’s already grabbed her by the jumpsuit, humming in agreement. She flips Mack and climbs on top, kissing her hard and tangling one hand in her hair. Maybe she’s about to try out some moves from *Passion’s Burning Flame,* but
Spencer hopes they’ll literally catch on fire instead.

She turns back to face the wall and tries to lose herself in the music. But it’s hard to forget what’s happening behind her when “Like a Virgin” starts playing. Thankfully, Aphasia doesn’t have a dance to this one. But then the bunk jolts and Spencer hears the rustling of body movements with an accompanying “Hee!” above her as her bunkmate sings along.

*Nevermind.*

A while later, just before it’s time for lights out, Spencer tries to piece together some semblance of a normal routine. There isn’t soap, but she splashes water on her face and tries to scrub away the layer of prison filth she can feel clogging her pores. When she reaches for the lone toothbrush by the sink, she hears a voice behind her.

“You don’t wanna do that.”

Aphasia jumps down from her bed and picks up Spencer’s pillow, reaching deep into the pillowcase. She fishes out a purple toothbrush, then walks over and hands it to Spencer. “This one’s yours.”

Spencer’s confused, but she slowly reaches out and takes it by the handle. The toothbrush is clearly used, probably due for the standard three-month replacing. “Thanks…”

*Did this belong to Jenny?*

Spencer stares at it, rotating it to examine different angles. There’s something morbid about holding a dead girl’s toothbrush. Is she really supposed to use this?

Aphasia puts the pillow back where it came from and hoists herself up with a step on Spencer’s bed. “Keep it hidden or they’ll take it. We all supposed to be sharing, but I ain’t about that life.”

Spencer looks back at the sink and sees the prison-issued toothbrush is absolutely disgusting. The handle was probably once white but now it’s grey with brown stains, just like the flattened bristles. Seeing it up close, she wouldn’t have put this in her mouth, anyway.

Quinn quietly climbs down from her bunk and pulls a pink toothbrush from her bra. She walks over to the other bunks and holds out a hand to Aphasia, who gives her a tube of toothpaste as she passes by. It seems routine, like they do it every day, and Spencer’s quite glad to see dental hygiene is high on the list of priorities here. It might be the first piece of good news she’s gotten all day.

Once Spencer’s brushed and curled up under her flimsy, white sheet, there’s another loud buzzer and most of the lights in the corridor go out, leaving only the emergency lights faintly glowing in the distance. She turns further on her side, facing the wall, and closes her eyes. If she tries hard enough, she can pretend she’s back at home in her own bed, happy and safe and sound. There’s school tomorrow. She has lunch plans with her friends. Her mom needs help carrying in the groceries before dinner. Everything is fine. She’ll be fine.

“G’night, Spanker,” Aphasia says overhead through the darkness. “Welcome to the Big Top.”

“It’s ‘Big House,’” Mack says.

The springs squeak overhead as Aphasia sits up. “You sure?”

Quinn rolls over. “‘Big Top’ is a circus.”

“Pssh.” Aphasia’s body slams back down as she settles in again. “I had it right.”
It takes about a day and a half for the thrill (and terror) of being in space to wear off. Now Spencer’s just bored.

She finished *Passion’s Burning Flame* hours ago—and dear god, what a travesty of literature that was—so the reprieve from thinking is, sadly, short-lived. At least back in Rosewood she could use homework to distract her from how fucked up her life was. Or spy on people. Or masturbate. But no way is she doing that with people around.

She’s fine for now, but eventually she’s going to explode. A girl has needs.

Shower time is out of the question, as last night she learned they take showers as a group. (A dozen women at a time, all just naked in there! Together! At once! Some not even bothering to wash! Or worse, very enthusiastically washing each other!) After which she discovered that space prison has a “towel shortage.” Aphasia has one stashed under her mattress that she shares with Quinn and Mack when they return to the cell. But guess who’s last on the seniority list and doesn’t even get offered the sopping final product, which would still be better than nothing?

Spencer really is just having the best time in here.

Mack’s voice interrupts her train of thought. “Hey, Princess, can you hold it til lunchtime? I’m making wine.” Mack’s behind her in the bathroom area, so that has to be a gross euphemism.

*Except...what if it isn’t?* Against her better judgment, Spencer looks back, praying Mack at least has her damn clothes on. “What?”

Mack’s dressed, but she’s on her knees with an arm shoulder-deep in the silver bowl, which is almost worse. “Hold. Your piss. Til lunch,” she says, irritated, and keeps digging.

Spencer blinks and tries to keep down the dinner she didn’t eat. “You’re making wine? In the toilet?”

“How the fuck else do you expect me to do it?” she snaps, like Spencer is thicker than the walls.

Aphasia calls out, “I want the Chardonnay-nay this time.”

Spencer looks at Quinn, who has quickly established herself as the voice of reason on this ship of fools. “Is she serious?”

Quinn turns another page in a tattered copy of *Pleasure Mountains*. “Unfortunately.”

A minute or so passes as Spencer watches in disgust. It appears she’s cleaning the basin, or at least trying to, considering all Mack has is a sock and some toothpaste. Despite all the elbow grease Mack’s putting in, she’s mostly just tiring herself out.
“You don’t wanna use that toothbrush to do that?”

Mack gives a small laugh and scrubs harder. “Put it in your mouth for ten seconds and I’ll tell you where it’s been.”

Spencer can’t think of any place they could’ve put the toothbrush that would be worse than the inside of a toilet bowl, but now she doesn’t want to know. Another few minutes pass, watching Mack meticulously apply Colgate and scrub like it’s the most important task in the world. “How often do you do this? Drink from the toilet, I mean.”

“Beats that turpentine shit Raven makes in the engine room.” Mack gestures to Aphasia, who tosses her bags of food bits from under her mattress one at a time. There must be at least a dozen under there, like a damn clown car.

Spencer’s eyebrows inch a little higher with every toss. She can’t tell what kinds of food are in there, but she thinks she recognizes tuna casserole in two of them. Nothing about this can be good. “And it hasn’t killed you yet. That’s shocking.”

Quinn folds a page corner down and turns to Mack. “My offer still stands.”

Mack makes a face at her and dumps the contents of the first bag in the toilet with loud, plopping sounds.

“What offer?” Spencer asks. Maybe if she talks enough, it’ll drown out those awful noises.

Quinn grins. “If Mack’s just drinking that because she wants to get sent to the doctor’s office again, I’m happy to knock a few teeth out instead.” She shrugs. “It’d be faster.”

Aphasia looks at Mack. “She won’t want you then.”

“I met her the other day,” Spencer says, trying not to let it show how excited she is to finally know about something in group conversation. “She’s nice.”

Mack dumps another bag in, casting the empty Ziploc aside. “Oh, you got the nice one?”

“Dr. Lewis-something,” Spencer says. “She’s blonde, really pretty.”

“Lewis-Burke-Robbins.” Quinn casts Mack a look that says, Doesn’t hearing her name just get you hot and bothered?

Spencer sees the next bag has a lot of green in it. But not vegetable-green, more like mold-green. “Yeah, her.”

“I never get the nice one,” Mack says.

It never occurred to Spencer that there’d be more than one doctor onboard. “Who’s the other one?”

“Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins,” Quinn repeats. She reaches into her bra and retrieves a half-cigarette she started yesterday.

Spencer looks at her now. “I thought she’s the nice one?”

The Zippo clinks closed, and Quinn takes a long, first drag, exhaling up toward the ceiling. “According to Mack, there’s the nice one and the mean one.” Quinn gives a small shrug and looks back at Spencer. “They’re both okay.”
Spencer’s still confused. “So, wait, who’s the mean one?”

“Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins,” Mack and Quinn say together.

“Then who’s the nice one?”

“Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins.”

“Okay, stop, both of you!” Spencer shouts. “It’s not funny.”

Mack rolls her eyes and tosses aside the final empty Ziplog bag, which still has trails of light-purple gravy in it. “We’re not fucking with you; that’s their name.” She stirs the concoction with a wooden spoon Aphasia pulled out of nowhere, carefully scraping the sides and keeping it even.

Spencer can’t see too well from her angle on the bottom bunk until Mack lifts a spoonful to her mouth to sample a taste. The liquid is brown and chunky and an insult to wine everywhere. And it smells.

“These really are different people,” Spencer clarifies, “who just happen to have the same weird name.”

“Yes.” Quinn exhales a final puff of smoke and flicks the butt skillfully across the room, right into the toilet sludge. Mack just keeps stirring. Looking at Spencer, she says, “Don’t worry about them.”

“Nuh uh,” says Aphasia. “One of them’s cray-cray.”

Quinn laughs softly and opens her book again. “I forgot you’re scared of her.”

“Not the nice one—she alright.” Aphasia’s a bit defensive. Spencer hasn’t heard her nervous like this before. “Just the creepy one.” She clutches her abdomen and shivers.

Quinn looks back at Spencer and explains, “Aphasia went through a key-swallowing phase until one of the doctors got involved. She’s a big fan of Saw.”

Oh god.

“Instead, Mack and I had to dig the key out ourselves,” Quinn continues with more than a hint of disdain. She meets Spencer’s eyes as her voice drops. “Don’t use the toothbrush.”

OH GOD.

“Not our best day,” Mack agrees, spooning another test taste into her mouth. “Shoulda let her rip your guts out.”

Aphasia sits up and turns to face her, offended. “Oh, like I don’t have to see your bare ass every week?”

“Not inside of it!” Mack shakes off the frightful memory and resumes her stirring as the cell falls quiet again. A minute later, she turns to Quinn. “D’you hear what the doctor did the other day?”

“The scary one?”

“Yeah.”

Quinn hums a no. “To who?”
“Sarah Connor,” says Mack.

“Which one?”

“The scary one.”

“STOP IT,” Spencer screams. “EVERYBODY JUST STOP.”

Her cellmates stare at her like she’s lost her fucking mind. Spencer runs her hands through her hair and closes her eyes for a moment. She’s been in prison all of forty-eight hours, and she’s already about to cut a bitch.

Spencer takes a deep breath. “There’s more than one doctor.”

“Yes,” they say in unison.

“Who all happen to be blonde.”

“Yes.”

Spencer’s hands are up, as if trying to cling to her last shred of sanity. “And they’re all named Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins?”

“Yes.”

“...WHY?”

“HASTINGS!” Boomer’s voice startles all of them, but only Spencer jumps. “Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins needs to see you.”

Spencer screams into her hands.

****************

On the plus side, she doesn’t have to wear a paper gown this time.

“Spencer Hastings?” Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins asks as she confidently strides into the room.

Sure enough, it’s a different woman, though Spencer has no idea which one is which. She just nods.

“Your tests all came back clean. Hopefully you’ll be able to stay that way.” The doctor gives a friendly smile, flipping her clipped papers back to the start.

This probably isn’t the scary one. Yay?

“However,” she continues, “it seems my lovely wife failed to ask when your last menstrual cycle was.” She looks up expectantly, pen ready.

Spencer’s eyes widen. Wife?

“Um...last week, I think?” It’s hard to keep track of time considering she spent who knows how long in transit just getting here...wherever here really is.

The doctor jots down something in her file. “Okay. Eventually, you’ll end up on the same cycle as the other inmates, but it’ll probably take a month or two to adjust. They’re due next week, so...” She hesitates for a moment, then adds, “Watch your back.” She sounds concerned, which certainly makes
Spencer concerned as well.

“Watch my back?”

Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins closes the chart and makes her way to the door, opening it as she says, “Shit gets a little real around here during Shark Week.”
Prison is like starting high school all over again, only with less homework and even meaner girls. There’s the ordeal of seating in the lunchroom, judgmental glares in the hall, and even the stress of choosing classes to take. Because, as it turns out, part of this “rebirth” boasted in the motto is academic. Or, at least vocational. Possibly technical? Something. (Spencer has yet to see an actual course catalog.) She asks Mack if there’s anything related to European History, her favorite subject, but just gets laughed at.

Because each class happens once per week and is scheduled against something else, new inmates get to audit the classes they’re interested in before making a commitment. Even still, Spencer is too scared to walk into a prison classroom alone. It’s the first day at a new school, but she could be stabbed if she sits at the wrong desk. So, Mack begrudgingly agrees to let Spencer tag along for their one hour of allotted rec time each day this week. It seems to make the most sense, as Quinn and Aphasia have very light schedules and Mack takes practically everything, like the Honor Roll student who signs up for every AP course to get the maximum GPA. Upon learning this, Spencer immediately feels her competitive streak creep in.

If anyone is going to be the Spencer Hastings of space prison, it’s going to be Spencer Hastings, goddamnit.

It’s Thursday, and they’re using the group bathrooms outside the Mess Hall on their way to whatever will be Spencer’s first rec hour experience. The doors have been removed from most of the bathroom stalls, and the one and only mirror in the long line of sinks is behind an inch of Plexiglass. Spencer notices a piece of paper taped to the wall behind the first sink and steps forward to get a closer look. It’s a list of currently-running classes.

“Oh hey, they updated it,” Mack says. She scans her finger down until she finds two listings crossed out and new ones written in below them. “Sweet!”

-----------------------------------

MONDAY

**Knives 1** in Small Arms Room (Instructor: Faith)
**Lucy’s Play-Doh Funhouse** in Mess Hall (Instructor: Lucy F.) *See Becky to be added to waitlist*

TUESDAY

**Knitting** in Utility Room 2 (Instructor: Santana)
**Zombies** in Gym 2 (Instructor: Alice)

WEDNESDAY
Alcoholics in Library (Instructor: Starbuck)

Group Therapy in Small Arms Room (Instructor: Shaw)

**THURSDAY**

Knives 2 in Large Arms Room (Instructor: Octavia)

Pussy with Jenny Schecter in Library — INDEFINITELY POSTPONED

**DIY Piercings in Utility Room 1 (Instructor: Aphasia)**

**FRIDAY**

Fisting in Gym 4 (Instructor: Graham)

Fires in Utility Room 2 (Instructor: Dark Willow)

**SATURDAY**

Bees in Utility Room 1 (Instructor: Idgie)

Jazzercise in Gym 3 (Instructor: Sue) — CANCELLED DUE TO LACK OF INTEREST

DIY Tattoos in Utility Room 2 (Instructor: Violet)

**SUNDAY**

Candlemaking in Utility Room 2 (Instructor: Lexa)

River Tam’s Book Club in Library Study Room

**Will start next week**

_________________________

Spencer doesn’t want to be on the Honor Roll anymore.

She stares at the list for a moment, taking it all in. *What the hell are these course topics? Why are inmates allowed into the arms lockers? Am I required to do any of this?* Then, her mind fixates on the most unsettling question of all, and Spencer turns to Mack with raised eyebrows. “Lucy’s Play-Doh Funhouse? Really?”

Mack charges at her, slamming her hand loudly against the counter with eyes blazing. She brings a finger to Spencer’s face and grits her teeth. “Don’t you *fucking* talk about Lucy’s Play-Doh Funhouse. I’ve waited a year to get in there. You don’t KNOW!”

She hovers for a minute, daring Spencer to move or respond, or even breathe. Spencer’s quite terrified, but she isn’t sure if it’s because Mack might beat the crap out of her or because Mack is defending children’s modeling clay. It’s an awkward moment. Finally, Mack relents and checks the time. “I got Knives on Thursdays.”

“You don’t go to Aphasia’s class?” It seems odd that she wouldn’t support her friend, regardless of the topic.

“That’s a new one.” Mack points at the asterisk footnote like Spencer’s an idiot.

Without another word, they join the line of women filing out of the bathroom and head up the eastern hallway toward the rooms used for classes. Various inmates break off into the gyms, opting to spend their rec time working out. The rest of them, including Mack and Spencer, keep walking until they reach the Large Arms Room. Why a prison would give inmates access to a weapons locker is
beyond her, much less for a weapons class, but she doesn’t make the rules.

**Here goes nothing.**

In many ways, Knives class is exactly as it sounds—identifying different kinds, discussing their various purposes, how to clean them, even how to throw them at targets. This last part worries her the most until she learns they, thankfully, don’t have any actual knives onboard to use. In fact, the so-called Large Arms Room where the class is held is just an open space with no weapons of any kind. Spencer sees storage compartments big enough to hold assault weapons built into the walls, but all the doors have been removed, rendering them useless.

The Knives instructor, a girl named Octavia near Spencer’s age, describes in detail how she had to hunt and forage in a radioactive forest after living in a floor for most of her life. Spencer wants to ask her neighbor what the hell Octavia’s smoking, but then she remembers she’s surrounded by hardened criminals. The woman beside her, Sarah Connor, seems like a tough lady—not as outwardly scary as some of the other inmates Spencer’s encountered, but definitely not someone with whom she wants to cross paths. It’s the crazy eyes. This woman has seen things. So, Spencer keeps her comments to herself. It reminds Spencer that, while she doesn’t plan on actually signing up for any of these “classes,” this is a learning opportunity, nonetheless. It’s more valuable for her to learn who to avoid in the common areas than to know what a Rampuri is or that a knife exists just to cut linoleum.

Over the next few days, Spencer audits other activities and meets other inmates, each as terrifying as the last. Mack’s Friday class is Fires, thank god. (Spencer really did *not* want to go to Fisting class.) First on her mind is why anyone would want to start fires here in the first place. There are a dozen basic safety concerns, not to mention the oxygen issue, since, you know, *space.* But Spencer keeps her mouth shut because it’s Day Four and she has a silent bet with herself to last at least three weeks before getting her ass kicked.

Considering how *very* lesbian this population seems to be, she’s not at all surprised to hear there is a fire station employee on board, a woman named Leslie Shay who lives in the cell next door to hers. Mack explains that Shay was a paramedic back on Earth and not an actual firefighter, but that she still picked up a lot of know-how in the biz. Despite this, Mack says Shay’s *not* who is teaching the class, she’s just there for moral support and/or ‘cruising for pyros.’

What’s more unsettling, it turns out Fires isn’t about how to extinguish them, it’s about how to start them. The class is led by the scary, veiny girl, Dark Willow that Spencer saw in the cell next to hers. But much to the dismay of an overeager girl named Clarke, Dark Willow doesn’t have any incendiary devices or accelerants of any kind, or even a Zippo—just...*telekinesis?* Spencer refuses to believe it until a giant fireball flies from the Dark Willow’s hands across the galley, slamming into the far wall in a thick cloud of smoke as the onlookers “*Ooooh*” and politely applaud through hacking coughs.

This continues for forty-seven minutes. That’s Fires.

Just like she didn’t want to audit Fisting class, Spencer is equally relieved the next day to hear that Mack isn’t signed up for Bees.

Instead, Saturday is DIY Tattoos, which is a brand-new class just starting today. Spencer only accompanies Mack under the condition that she is not to be tattooed under *any* circumstances. (The dismissive, “*Uh huh,*” is very reassuring.) Spencer barely manages to escape unscathed, as Mack holds up her end of the bargain but her classmates do not. The instructor, Violet, who had tried to show a tattoo to Spencer ten seconds into her prison sentence, spends twenty minutes displaying her inked breast to the class and rubbing it seductively. She’s sharpening up a rusty Bic pen and eyeing her desired subject when the forty-five minutes is up. Spencer calls it a win that she escapes the room.
without Hepatitis. At least, she’s pretty sure.

Sunday is River Tam’s Book Club. Of all the offerings this week, this one is definitely the most promising. As they enter the library, Mack mentions off-hand, “We’re starting a new book this week.”

Spencer turns the corner and freezes in place as her heart stops. There’s the girl who said the freaky thing about A on Day One. “Whoa, wait, that’s River?”

Mack shoots her a glare. “So?”

The girl is leaning over someone’s shoulder to read along, but instead of crouching down, she bends at the waist with her back straight.

“She’s just...creepy.” Spencer can’t stop herself from staring. Too bad there isn’t a class on how to bathe yourself.

“You’re creepy,” Mack says and moves ahead of her to sit down.

They take the last two open seats in the circle, and River welcomes them and initiates a closing conversation about the previous assignment, Howliday Inn. A young woman with very short hair and a big smile jumps in first. She seems genuinely enthusiastic to discuss the various plot points and characters. It might be the closest thing Spencer gets to an academic conversation for a while, so she tries to tune in, despite being unfamiliar with both the text and her classmates.

A minute later, however, Spencer is distracted by the graceful, fucking bizarro creature that is River Tam. She’s sitting in a weird yoga pose and speaking in careful, odd phrases when she chooses to speak at all. The other inmates act like she is reading their damn minds with her brilliant insights. The conversation quickly becomes more Crossing Over than Reading Rainbow.

Just as they begin a survey of how the setting could be considered its own character, the hour’s over and it’s time to get their new books and leave. All things considered, it hasn’t been that bad; Spencer’s even thinking about joining. River’s “A” comment was probably a fluke, or Spencer was just making something out of nothing. It wouldn’t be the first time.

But on their way out, River silently hands her a copy of The Scarlet Letter. Spencer almost throws it back in her face.

****************

Monday morning, they’re sitting at breakfast with a mix of girls and women from other cells. Spencer’s proud she has learned who most of them are in just a few days. She even figured out there are two women with the exact same name. It seemed quite the coincidence, but then, neither “Sarah” nor “Connor” is uncommon by any stretch. Spencer wonders if they’re good friends.

Speaking of friends, Mack certainly seems to have plenty at the moment. Nobody’s ever seen her in such a good mood, so it’s drawn a crowd, like she might do anything in between bites of her crusty waffles. Spencer’s not expecting much; her cellmate is barely remembering to chew and swallow.

Mack stands on the table, hardly able to contain herself, and lifts her milk carton to signal a toast. “I want to say thank you to Jenny fucking Schechter,”—crumbs spray across the table—“for getting your stuck-up, know-it-all,”—a fleck sticks to Spencer’s forehead—“tightwad, pasty ass thrown OUTTA HERE!” The dozen or so women around her all raise their cartons as well and clink the paper boxes together. Mack throws her empty carton against the far wall for dramatic effect and holds her arms above her head with one foot on Aphasia’s tray. “NO MORE WAITLIST FOR ME,
“BITCHES!”

The room erupts in applause, and Spencer awkwardly slow claps but doesn’t really understand why. As the noise settles back to its usual dull roar, Mack gets down and takes another bite of her burnt sausage link.

“I mean, how fucking stupid, right? You got a spot in Lucy’s class, and you fuck it up and get yourself killed?” She laughs and mutters, “Dumbass.”

All heads at the table nod and hum in agreement.

If there’s something Spencer hates, it’s not knowing what literally every other person around her seems to know. She doesn’t want to draw attention or look stupid, but she just can’t take it anymore. “Okay, what’s the deal with this Lucy?”

“What?” Lucy Diamond asks from the end of the table, hearing her name.

Graham, the sly-looking girl who’s been checking Spencer out all morning, waves a hand dismissively and calls down, “Other one!”

Lucy Diamond gives a look that says, Of course, and goes back to her breakfast.

Spencer’s getting quite tired of multiple versions of people in this fucking place. “There’s more than one of her, too?”

“Lucy?” Aphasia asks, then looks at Mack and mumbles, “You wish,” through a full mouth of food.

At that comment, Mack subtly glances across the room before continuing to stuff her now very smug face.

Spencer’s eyes try to follow, but it’s just the same old mass of black uniforms and shitty haircuts. This mystical unicorn of a girl must be in here somewhere, but Spencer doesn’t see anyone who looks particularly special. No rays of sunlight magically shining down on anyone, no rainbows shooting out of anyone’s ass. Just a room full of angry, smelly women shouting their usual threats and slurs. “Where is she?”

Mack doesn’t seem to be listening anymore, lost in her own lustful thoughts, so Graham says, “Eight o’clock, far table.”

Spencer turns to her left and tries to see past the dozens of moving heads in the way. The view is crap, which probably explains why she hasn’t really noticed this section of tables before. But then she sees a splash of color—Is that a pink uniform? There, through the rows of faces, Spencer can see a girl in a pink jumpsuit with long, wavy blonde hair sitting across from two fiercely attractive brunettes. They’re offset from the rest of the group by a few seat spaces. The blonde’s back is to Spencer, but she knows in her gut that’s Lucy.

Mack does have a thing for blondes.

Spencer stands briefly, wanting to see Lucy’s face, but Mack punches her in the thigh and hisses, “Sit down, shitbrain!”

A second later, Graham and Aphasia each grab Spencer by the shoulders and pull her back onto the bench before she can get a good look.

“Hey, let go of me!” She jerks out of their grip and settles into her seat with a huff and some pointed
Everyone is so damn violent here.

Mack is pissed as nails and looks around to see if anyone saw what just happened. “You trying to get us killed?”

“Yes.” Spencer’s tone is bone-dry. “Behold my clever plan to murder you by standing.”

Mack just scoffs and takes another bite of her sausage. “You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Spencer crosses her arms. “You worship this girl, yet you’re terrified of her. That sounds very healthy.” It was hypocritical and she knew it, considering what she and her friends went through with Alison, but they didn’t need to know that. “Why is she wearing pink?”

“Because she’s special, that’s why,” Mack huffs. Clearly frustrated, she looks around the group for assistance. “How do I begin to explain Lucy Fabray?”

Quinn glowers and puts out her cigarette in Aphasia’s syrup. “Don’t ask me.”

“She flawless,” says Aphasia, dunking her stepped-on waffle without a care.

The oldest inmate at the table, a regal looking woman named Regina Mills, leans in. “I hear her hair’s insured for ten thousand dollars.”

Lorna Morello smiles and says, “I hear she did mattress commercials in Ohio. I can picture them in my mind, and it’s really high-level work.” Spencer can’t tell what’s more laughable, the statement or her accent.

A few seats down, River repeatedly stabs her food with a plastic spork and speaks without breaking eye contact. “Her favorite movie is *Ferngully: The Last Rainforest.*”

“One time she met Portia di Rossi on a plane,” Mack says, green with envy.

“And she told Lucy she was pretty,” adds Dark Willow. “Whore.”

Sameen Shaw walks by with her tray, and, overhearing, stops to look at Spencer long enough to deadpan, “One time she punched me in the face.” When Spencer’s eyes widen, Shaw gives a slight shrug and adds, “It was awesome.”

Okay, now Spencer is even more confused than before. “Yeah.” This Lucy girl sounds like a real piece of work. “So...what’s with the Play-Doh?”

Mack stops chewing, mouth open, and just stares for a moment. A second later, she’s on her feet. “You don’t fucking know her! YOU DON’T KNOW HER LIFE!” She flips her breakfast tray at Spencer, then picks up Aphasia’s tray and throws it across the room.

“My waffles!” Aphasia screams and runs after them.

The clash and clang of utensils echo in the noisy Mess Hall, but nobody really turns to see what’s going on. It’s no more a disturbance than when Starbuck decked Kat at dinner last night or when two brunettes started going at it on the table during lunch on Wednesday. (*Come to think of it, was that the same two brunettes sitting with Lucy?)*

But, unlike then, Spencer now has syrup dripping down her jumpsuit and food all over her. She can already hear a few whispers of “Maple Tits” rippling through the room, and she just wants to get up and run away. No one here gives a shit about her. She’s completely on her own.
Aphasia sits back down with her restocked tray, then reaches over and starts gently picking pieces of egg out of Spencer’s hair one at a time.

“Thanks,” Spencer says, closing her eyes. Maybe she’s found a prison friend after all. But then Aphasia starts eating the eggs, and Spencer gives up.

Aphasia mutters between bites, “The waffles are better.”

Chapter End Notes

If you have never seen Mean Girls, shame on you.
Spencer spends her morning shower de-breakfasting herself. Aphasia, it turns out, was thorough in her grooming technique, so Spencer’s thankfully egg-free. But, the ten allotted minutes were only enough to scrub her sticky uniform and nothing else. Now, she’s just wet, not actually clean.

As Boomer’s collecting them to return to their cell, Sue comes charging around the corner in large strides. “Banger!” she yells, not slowing down as she nears them.

“It’s ‘Boomer,’ sir,” the guard replies, like she’s said it a hundred times.

“Until you stop calling me ‘sir,’ you can be Bibbity Bobbity Boo, for all I care. What’s the status on 5?”

“Still code black, but we’re on it, sir—Sue. Ma’am. Sylvester. Sir.”

Sue does not look pleased. She leans down until she’s right in Boomer’s face, awkwardly so, and speaks with an even calmness that gives Spencer a chill. “Move this chum out of my hallway and get your ass down to the galley until you’ve fixed our little problem.” She straightens, glancing quickly down the line of prisoners until she reaches Spencer. Sue casts her a disgusted look, then turns to walk away. “I’ve got the President on the phone, six conjugal visits in the next four days, and enough unfiled paperwork in my office to bury a small child alive.”

Spencer perks up. Not at the sex part (because, ew), but at the potential for office work. She’s overdue for a good, old-fashioned snooping around.

When they return to the cell, Spencer hangs by the door to talk to Boomer. After five minutes of negotiating through the guard’s almost impressive levels of ambivalence and apathy, Spencer manages to convince her to run an idea by Sue—an hour of helping in the office in exchange for a few extra minutes in the shower. It feels like a win-win, not to mention the much-needed change of scenery. An hour later, Boomer comes back with a “whatever” and leads Spencer to a blissful five-minute rinse, saying that Sue will call her in soon. Getting a shower now is a gesture of good faith from the warden, who could smell the breakfast on her from ten feet away.

Three o’clock rolls around, and squeaky-clean Spencer files out for rec time as she’s done for the last four days. She’s finally reaching a point of routine, which is comforting, even though it’s a prison routine. She likes structure and schedules and all that; it helps her stay in control. But today feels different. Today, terror is bubbling violently in her stomach (though, that may be the “orange juice” from earlier), and Spencer has no goddamn clue what is waiting for her up ahead. Somehow, today’s agenda seems even scarier than Knives or Fires or anything else on that list.

Even Bees.

She takes small steps (as if stalling will do her any good), and tries to keep her face as blank as possible. Nobody else seems the least bit worried about their rec time. Regina has a stack of library
books in her arms at least a foot high. Kat’s bragging loudly about her latest bench press load, which nobody’s buying, and Corky’s soliciting opponents for the billiard room—though, for playing pool or “playing” on the pool table, Spencer doesn’t know. For that matter, she has yet to see either a gym or a pool table in this place.

As the prisoners pass through the main hall, a contingent starts to break off to the left. Mack leads the way yet again as Spencer follows timidly (in no small part because Mack grabbed her by the collar and growled, “If you fuck this up for me, I will kill you.”)

A pair of beautiful inmates just behind them—Flaca and Maritza—are chatting incessantly about beauty tips and DIY prison makeup. They’re practically finishing each other’s sentences in rapid fire, bopping from one topic to the next. Spencer wonder if this is the type of vapid conversation that regularly takes place in a Play-Doh Funhouse. She wouldn’t be surprised.

For all Mack’s bluster about this course, it doesn’t seem to be very popular. Spencer counts only a dozen students, including a few familiar faces like Dark Willow and one of the Sarah Connors, making it the smallest class she’s attended this week. They wait outside until a faint signal sounds—a kind of ringing from inside, like a brass bell—and they enter single-file with Spencer close behind Mack at the end of the line.

Yeah. She is absolutely fucking terrified.

Mack isn’t, and she enters with a spring in her step, breathing, “Ohmygodohmygodohmygod,” over and over.

Spencer finally edges into the Mess Hall, takes one quick glance around, and echoes, “Oh...my god.”

The room has been completely redecorated since lunch. It would be unrecognizable if not for the perpetual smell of dirty dishwater hanging over everything. Hot pink drop cloths cover the four center tables with neon green on the benches. Crêpe paper streamers of every color twist overhead. Baskets of craft supplies line the walkway, filled with glitter and paint and beads and brushes and paste. On an easel in the middle of the room rests a purple chart with twelve names, each boasting several gold star stickers in a row under a checklist. (Spencer notices Mack’s name has been added to the bottom on a blank line and Jenny’s row is crossed out.) A string spans the length of the room like a clothesline, displaying maybe fifteen of what must be fingerpaintings on construction paper. But god only knows what they’re paintings of. One of them has eyes? Maybe?

No one with an IQ over sixty made those. And is that “Pop Goes the Weasel” playing in the background? ...On a cassette player?!

Spencer seems to have left prison behind and entered the world of kindergarten.

Kindergarten in Hell.

It’s even worse than she thought.

Two rows of six place settings rest on the tables—replete with small tubs of neon Play-Doh—and Mack pushes through the other inmates to get a seat on the end of the front row.

Spencer lingers in the back and watches out of morbid curiosity. A blonde woman she assumes is Lucy stands with her back turned as she makes final adjustments to the spread of supplies on the front table. She’s dressed not in the standard black uniform but a bright pink one. Definitely the same girl Spencer saw in the cafeteria.

She sighs and resigns herself to an hour of arts and crafts, of all things, and walks up to nudge Mack
over and sit next to her. Spencer figures since she doesn’t have a place setting to herself and she’s not technically a member of the class, she might as well sit with someone she knows. Even someone as embarrassing as Mack; she’s grinning like an idiot and literally bouncing in her seat, as is the happy Maybelline couple on the far end of their bench. Spencer notices the rest of the class behaving similarly, and looks around to see if there’s an espresso machine somewhere she missed.

One very long minute later, the instructor turns around with a flourish and smiles at her rapt audience, giving Spencer her first look at the mystery that is Lucy Fabray. Her breath catches in her chest. Smoldering hazel eyes, perfectly sculpted eyebrows, soft lips she recognizes, though they’re usually wrapped around a cigarette filter...

Spencer does a double-take, then leans over to Mack. “That’s Quinn!”

Mack looks at Spencer like she’s denser than concrete. “No...that’s Lucy.”

Spencer blinks hard and squints, but she’s not imagining things. “It’s Quinn! They’re identical.”

Well, aside from the longer, less-pink hair and the apparent personality transplant.

Mack slaps Spencer’s pointing hand down before Lucy can see it and whisper-yells, “What are you talking about? No, they’re not!”

“Are you blind?” Spencer says it more loudly than she means to, but she’s not making this up. “It’s her fucking twin.”

Mack hisses, ‘Don’t say ‘fucking’! Lucy doesn’t like cussing in here. So I’ve heard.”

Spencer stares at Mack in disbelief. Did she wander into some bizarro alternate universe? Or is this what going crazy feels like?

“Good afternoon, friends!” Lucy announces, sweet as punch, before Spencer can say anything else. “Welcome to Lucy’s Play-Doh Funhouse! It’s a beautiful day to make art, don’t you think?”

“No,” Spencer says lowly. “It’s not even daytime. We’re in SPACE.”

Mack jams an elbow into her ribs. “Pay attention, this is important.”

Lucy puts her hands over her heart. “Today we will use the magic of Play-Doh to recreate a childhood pet. We want to celebrate and remember the love and warmth they brought into our lives.”

Spencer’s eyes nearly roll out of her head.

Lucy Fabray is the Mr. Rogers of space prison.

“For many of us,” Lucy continues, “a pet is the most true and loyal friend a girl can have.”

Apparently, she’s never owned a vibrator.

But hey, at least Spencer is exempt from today’s assignment. After all, she killed her own pet with a death glare when she was five. She doesn’t imagine a dead guppy would meet any of Lucy’s expectations.

A voice rises from the table right behind them. Spencer recognizes it as Dark Willow’s and wonders what the hell this Creature of the Night is doing here. Hunting, perhaps? She’s probably about to flay Lucy’s skin off with a casual flick of her hand. (Spencer remembers that trick and the defenseless fried chicken on Friday.)

“What if I didn’t have a childhood pet?” Dark Willow asks. She then whispers over her table to
Spencer, “I wasn’t allowed to have fish for five years.”

Lucy just smiles. “That’s okay, you can borrow one of mine! I have plenty to share.” She gestures grandly to one of the fingerpaintings, the brown, spiky ball with two glowing red eyes. “Miss Lady Meowsers Scratchington the Third is wonderful inspiration for any artist!”

Spencer thinks it looks like a Tribble on crack, or something out of *Pet Sematary*, only scarier.

One of the Mary Kay wannabes, Flaca, raises a hand, and Lucy calls on her. “Question?”

“Does it have to be, like...*exactly* like how he was? Because I had this little chihuahua named Pepper, and he was always tryin’ to get up on the ass of the little poodle next door, because she liked to come into the yard flaunting it right in front of him even though he was chained to his leash, right?”

Next to her, Maritza asks, “Why she gotta be like that?”

Flaca continues, “And one day she got him chasing her in circles, just running around and around, and his chain got wrapped around his leg and it pulled so tight that it almost ripped it right off.”

Maritza gasps with a hand over her mouth.

“It got messed up *real* bad. Like, there wasn’t enough blood going into it anymore or something and it just hanged there. And then he couldn’t walk right or nothing anymore? It was kinda dragging along behind him. But we couldn’t take him to the vet because we were two weeks late on rent that month and the landlord’s sister was a assistant vet tech at the animal hospital and woulda been like, ‘Hey bitch, why you got money for a stupid dog leg but not for your fuckin’ house?’”

Maritza nods sympathetically, then turns to look at Lucy. “She would totally say that.”

“So, my cousin Marco gave Pepper some tequila—not enough to get him drunk, but just to take the edge off, you know? And then he tied a balloon around right here—” She holds her hands against the top of her thigh at the hip joint. “—and cut off Pepper’s whole leg using this really good knife we got on the Home Shopping Network—”

Martiza cuts in, “I *love* the Home Shopping Network. I get all my best turquoise earrings there.”

Flaca turns to Maritza, confused. “You don’t wear turquoise earrings.”

“It’s not my color, I just like to have them.”

Flaca nods like that makes all the sense in the world. “We could still use the knife after, too. It was kind of messy but Pepper lived through it.”

Putting her hand on Flaca’s arm, Maritza nods and says, “That’s *so good*. I never knew Marco could be so kind to animals.”

“Yeah, me neither.” They close their eyes and share a moment together. “I think we were all better after that, you know?”

Spencer’s watching this tale play out, horrified. She glances over at Lucy and sees she’s listening intently and nodding along, equally heartbroken on poor Pepper’s behalf.

“We grow stronger from the love they show us,” Lucy says, “but we also grow from the love we show them.”
“That’s it exactly,” Flaca says. “So, even though Pepper only had three legs when he died, technically in his heart he had four. So, that’s how I’m gonna make him today.”

Maritza puts her hand over her heart, overcome with emotion. “His true self.”

Lucy smiles at them both. “I think he would like that very much. Thank you for sharing your beautiful story.” Then, looking up over the whole class, she announces, “You may now begin creating your masterpieces!” Right away there’s a flurry of hands grabbing Play-Doh jars and tops popping open, as everyone dives in. Well, everyone except Spencer.

Not one minute later, Lucy walks over to where she and Mack are sitting. Mack about pisses herself. Lucy locks eyes with Spencer and gives a warm, friendly smile. “Hi there! You must be Spencer. I’ve heard a lot about you.”

Spencer is unable to contain her passive-aggressive smarminess. “Likewise.” She can’t imagine what Lucy could’ve heard about her, other than her syrup-flavored breasts, but even that’s not as embarrassing as this class. “Quite the set-up you’ve got here.”

“It’s a very special place,” Lucy agrees. “Well, I hope your first few days here have been going well. Very nice to meet you.”

“You, too!” Spencer’s vapid smile fades the moment Lucy turns away. Being in this environment can’t be good for her health.

For the next twenty minutes, Spencer watches twelve convicted felons make a variety of animal-like creations using colors not found anywhere in nature. At one point, Mack asks her if she wants to try one herself, and Spencer declines with a firm, “No,” and goes back to judging every single thing around her like it’s her job.

Forty minutes in, she’s pretty sure she’s going to die of boredom. And it’s unnerving, watching a girl she’s followed to DIY Tattoos basically devolve into a five-year-old. Spencer wonders why all these supposed hardened criminals are taking such delight in neon modeling clay. Is “funhouse” just code for “nuthouse”? How long have they all been trapped up here? Isn’t there a library full of porn just down the hall? Why the fuck is there Play-Doh in space prison, anyway?

After doing several laps around the cafeteria, Lucy stops in front of their table again. “Great work, Mack!” She claps her hands a few times in polite applause. “Your artistry in creating such a fluffy puppy-dog is outstanding! Just look at those little ears! They’re perfect! I can tell you’re a truly gifted new addition to our wonderful little class.”

Mack beams so brightly she could power the sun, then elbows Spencer in the side just as hard. “Did you hear that?!”

Peering over them to the table behind, Lucy says, “And what a perfect depiction of Lady Meowsers! Whiskers and everything! I couldn’t have done it any better, myself.”

Even the veins on Dark Willow’s forehead are smiling.

Lucy shifts gears, turning to Spencer with a tiny frown. “Is there a reason you haven’t gotten started? Do you need some help?” A pause, then a pointed accusation. “Is Mack sharing?”

Spencer glares, wondering if her fingernail is sharp enough to slit throats. “I’m fine.” She also wonders how in the course of a week she went from a Georgetown acceptance to failing kindergarten.
Mack’s not coming to her rescue. “I asked!” The defensiveness then softens with a smile. “Sharing is caring.”

Lucy smiles back. “I couldn’t agree more.”

Spencer’s going to puke.

The moment Lucy turns her back, Mack grabs Spencer’s arm and bounces in her seat again. But before Spencer can shake her off, a graceful arpeggio sings out from the rainbow-colored chime on the front table, signaling the end of class.

“All right, ladies, it’s time to clean up! Be sure to put the lids tight on your cans! We’d hate for everything to dry out before our next class.”

Spencer hears a murmur as several heads dutifully nod. Play-Doh is serious business.

“If we have class next week,” Lucy continues, “we’ll make chicks and bunnies for Easter!” Most of the room gasps in excitement. “I’ll keep my fingers crossed!”

Spencer leans over to Mack. “Why wouldn’t there be class next week?”

“What’s it to you?” Mack pushes the cap tight on her tub and slams it hard on the table. Without warning, she gets up and heads for the door, clearly trying to distance herself from the class dunce.

Spencer thanks Lucy with the fakest of smiles and chases after Mack. She can’t exit the room fast enough, really. Boomer’s dull, apathetic faces is a sight for sore eyes, and Spencer practically pulls Boomer along at her brisk pace to get back to 10. Who knew she’d be so excited to get into a jail cell?

Quinn’s in her bunk as usual and looks up from her book upon their return. “How was preschool?”

“Ignore her, Spencer,” Mack says, feet perched on the crossbeam of her bunk. “She’s just jealous.”

“Jealous of what?” Spencer asks. “The Crayola Cult? How can you not see how weird that all was?” But she has an even bigger bone to pick with Quinn, who so conveniently left out very fucking important details at breakfast that morning. Nobody keeps Spencer Hastings in the dark. “And you,” she angles up to Quinn, “is Lucy your evil twin or something? Because that was the creepiest part of the whole thing!”

Quinn sighs and doesn’t meet Spencer’s eyes, rolling over to the face the wall without a word.

“You take that back!” Mack shouts. Standing up, Mack gets in Spencer’s face for the eleventh time this week with that same sick, smug look. “You think you’re so damn smart, but you’re the dumbest bitch in this place. You had a chance to work with Lucy Fabray your first week here, and you just sat there like a fucking loser.”

Spencer finally snaps. “WELL, EXCUSE ME IF I’M NOT INTERESTED IN MARY POPPINS’ PLAY-DOH SHITHOUSE.”

For once, Mack doesn’t seem to know what to say. She throws herself onto her bunk with a huff, mumbling obscenities under her breath and mimicking Spencer in a nasty voice. Spencer lies down, too, and hears Quinn quietly laughing up in her bunk.

Thank god there’s someone else who hasn’t been sipping the Kool-Aid, she thinks. Even if her twin is the damn ringleader.
Without warning, Aphasia’s face pops into view from overhead and about scares the shit out of her. “Y’all watched *Mary Poppins*?”
Aphasia wasn’t lying—Quinn spanks Mack on Wednesdays.

Spencer’s curled up in her bunk with The Scarlet Letter. She resents having homework from a crazy person, but she’ll be damned if she doesn’t finish it by next Sunday all the same. She’s still Spencer Hastings, even in prison. Every other word reminds her of Toby’s betrayal, but at least it’s a more interesting read than Quinn’s next recommendation, Sweet Honey Valley. Even better, it’s a welcome distraction from the noise across the cell.

Thank you, River Tam, you deranged lunatic.

Three chapters later, a loud crack interrupts the monotonous drone of smacks and screams. Spencer glances cautiously over her shoulder and sees Quinn standing by her bunk. “Please tell me you’re done.”

Quinn just chuckles as Aphasia hands her something resembling a cricket bat. “Riding crop broke.”

“Ah,” Spencer nods. “And she just lets you do...that...with her stuff?”

Aphasia calls from above, “I don’t mind!”

Quinn gives them both a grin and a wink before resuming her position over Mack. “Wait your turn.”

SMACK!

Spencer sucks in a breath, her eyes widening slightly as she feels a twinge of...something. Not annoyance, like she’d expect, but rather a jolt to her ladyparts which she is just not equipped to deal with right now. She rolls back to face the wall with a groan, hoping it sounds adequately like disgust. Which it is. Really.

Two paragraphs back into the world of Hester Prynne, Spencer notices something moving near her feet. She sets the book aside and sits up for a closer look, hoping it’s her eight-legged friend. Charlotte’s scurrying away on her web, faster than ever, and Spencer can kind of make out the beginning of a “T” before the intercom crackles to life overhead.

Plink-plink.

“What was that?” The riding crop is loud, but Spencer’s pretty sure those tinny notes aren’t the start of any Madonna song. It sounds like the Fisher Price version of the Jaws theme.

Plink-plink.

Quinn curses and the paddle drops to the floor with a clunk. “You’ve got to be kidding me...”
“I’m a LITTLE BUSY here!” Mack yells at the intercom, still on all fours and ass in the air.

But Spencer’s cellmates are too busy huffing and putting their clothes back on. She watches a frustrated Quinn toss the various floggers back to Aphasia, who stores them beneath her mattress. As the plinks come faster and faster, Spencer turns to see Charlotte hovering over the largest web yet, which reads:

**THERE WILL BE BLOOD.**

Okay, now she’s officially freaked out.

“Hey! Guys?” Spencer yells over the incessant plinking. “Is there an emergency or something? Should I be worried here?” But her cellmates aren’t even paying attention, just reading and picking at scabs like nothing’s wrong.


“Uh. That can't be good.” Spencer’s even more concerned than before.

Aphasia leans over the edge of her bed. “Somebody bleeding.”

Sue’s voice continues. “Lockdown procedures are in effect for your own safety.” With a crackle, the intercom shuts off again.

“SAFETY, MY ASS,” Mack screams at thin air.

But Spencer’s still clinging to what Aphasia said. “Like, stabbed?!”

“Naw,” she handwaves, then widens her eyes suggestively. “You know.” And she points down toward her stomach.

Just then, Buffy hurls a rectangular carton between the bars that lands in the middle of the cell with a dull thud. It’s a Tampax jumbo pack.

“Shark Week,” Quinn mutters without looking up from chapter six of *Rum Spring Break.*

The doctor warned Spencer about this, she remembers, but it still doesn’t seem like such a big deal. Is there something dangerous about having your period in space? It’s not like there are any actual sharks nearby. She pauses for a moment to consider that, then wonders if this bunk’s previous tenant went crazy and that’s why she was airlocked. *Seems legit.* “So, what now?!”

Mack kicks the box hard against the back wall of the cell, and it bursts open on impact, setting off a fireworks show of flying peach tampons. “Lockdown.”

“Uh.” Spencer glances around the prison cell. “How can we get any more locked down?”
“Less meals, less showers, NO CLASSES,” Mack shouts toward the empty hallway.

Spencer winces and almost corrects Mack’s grammar with “fewer,” but catches herself at the last second. She’s quickly learning just how many things Aphasia has under her mattress that could kill her, and Mack seems to be in a particularly foul mood over the cancellation of Play-Doh Dumbhouse.

“No breaks, no laundry service,” Quinn adds. “They’re scared to get us all in the same room. Some of the ladies can get a little...”

“Violent?” Spencer offers.

“Homicidal.”

Oh, great.

“Aphasia,” Mack says from the toilet, jumpsuit to her ankles. “Gimme a green one. I hate this orange light-day bullshit. Like, fuck you, Buffy. I’m hardcore.”

With a sigh, Aphasia pulls a small green package from her stash, tossing it to Mack. She then holds a second one over the edge for Spencer.

“I’m good, thanks.”

With a shrug, Aphasia tosses it to Quinn instead, who catches it one-handed without even looking and stashes it in her pillowcase.

Mack tends to her lady business right there in the open, and Spencer wonders how this has become her life. The state-of-the-art bathroom back home feels like a good dream she once had—locking the door, shutting out the world, and washing her troubles away with a long, hot shower. She’d been taking her privacy for granted before now, where the concept no longer exists.

She zones out in Mack’s direction and only snaps back to reality when she hears, “You wanna help or something?”

Chapter End Notes

"Rum Spring Break" is a play on an actual novel called "Rum Spring" by author Yolanda Wallace. It's an Amish lesbian romance, and it's on Amazon. You're welcome.
Sometimes, when she sleeps, Spencer feels like she’s floating. Like she’s fallen into a black hole, weightless and suspended in space. This seems to be one of those nights. She blames the insanity that is Shark Week, even though it’s only been a day and she isn’t even bleeding. But then her head smacks against the metal underside of Aphasia’s bunk and Spencer jolts awake to find that she is actually floating.

“Whoa!” she screams. Reaching out for the bed, Spencer realizes her pillow and mattress are floating as well. She grabs fistfuls of the white sheet and hangs in the air, feet rising up behind her to hit the frame again. The blood is rushing to her head, and it all feels too real to be another dream. She can’t get a good look at her cellmates from this angle, and they’re not making any noise. Kicking against the wall, she pushes herself out from under the frame and grabs on to the edge of the top bunk.

“The fuck are you doing?”

Spencer turns herself around to see a very angry, very not-floating Mack. Well, her feet are a few inches off the bed, but most of her is still flat on the mattress. Her arms are wrapped around her pillow, so it’s not going far. The mattress itself is rising a bit on the ends but seems pinned down in the middle. Maybe by Mack’s bruised, lumpy ass. But Quinn and Aphasia seem to be in the same situation.

“What is happening?!” Spencer cries, clinging to the frame for dear life.

Quinn grumbles and starts to roll over in her bunk, and Spencer now sees a belt strapped firmly across her stomach and chest holds her mostly in place. “Gravity’s out,” she mumbles, covering her eyes with an arm that just floats in mid-air.

“Obviously! Why didn’t I get strapped down?” She looks like a damn flying squirrel.

Mack groans into her pillow. “Go to SLEEP.”

“How. How am I supposed to do that?!”

But Mack just resumes snoring.

Making her way to the far end, Spencer manages to inch down the vertical rail and along the edge of her bed. There has to be a strap here somewhere that she’d missed all this time. Have the other girls been locking themselves in every night and she didn’t notice? It’s just a thin mattress with a single fitted sheet on a flimsy frame, so there isn’t much to investigate. Sure enough, no strap.

Of course.

Maybe Aphasia stole it. Maybe Mack took it so Quinn could use it for spanky times. And then maybe Jenny Schecter floated right off the bed, through the bars, and out the airlock without even waking up.
Spencer releases her grip for a moment to drift back up until she’s eye-level with Aphasia. “Where’s my strap?”

Blinking sleepily, Aphasia stretches into a yawn. “What kinda strap-on you need?”

“A STRAP. This belt thing.” She grabs Aphasia’s and pulls hard to jostle the girl awake. “Why don’t I have one?”

“It’s from my ride.”

Spencer now sees the buckle on the side and the second strap meeting it at a forty-five-degree angle. It’s a seat belt. How Aphasia managed to smuggle them into prison, she doesn’t want to know.

“I only got three,” Aphasia adds.

“What kind of car only has three seats?!”

“MINE.”

The options don’t look good. There’s no way Spencer can hold the bed and sleep. Smacking her head repeatedly on the ceiling wouldn’t be much of a picnic, either. She considers going between her bed and the floor, but she doesn’t want to see what kind of nastiness is under there. (No offense, Charlotte.)

Aphasia smacks her across the arm. “I know!” She rummages around under her bed, only slightly hindered by her limited mobility.

Seconds later, Spencer feels pressure on her wrist and hears a ratcheting sound followed by a clink!

Oh no.

She’s handcuffed to Aphasia’s bed. “Really?” Spencer’s glaring daggers as she jangles the cuff against the rail. “This is your solution to the fact that I can’t sleep floating?!”

“You’re welcome.”

Mack laughs against her pillow.

There’s a rustling as Quinn adjusts her position, sliding the nylon with a low zip sound. “C’mon.” Spencer turns and sees Quinn’s raised arm holding up a muchly loosened seat belt. “There’s room.”

Sold.

...provided Aphasia can release her first. “Please tell me you have the key.”

The instant the cuffs come off, Spencer launches herself through the air toward Quinn. She has to carve a bit of a path through floating tampons, of all things; one nearly goes right into her mouth. And her forward momentum sends her right over Quinn and head-first into the wall. “Shit!”

Luckily, Quinn reaches up to catch her as she braces against the cold metal with her hands. They hold on to each other’s arms, Spencer still hanging in the air, laughing awkwardly. She looks down at the gap between the loosened belt and the bed, running a few quick calculus equations. Yeah, no. She arches her eyebrow. “I can’t fit in there.”

Quinn rolls her eyes. “Fine. Hold on to me.” Working together, they clumsily find where Spencer’s hands can go that won’t be in Quinn’s way, eventually settling for her hips. She points a finger,
saying, “Don’t tickle me,” then clutches the rail with one hand and releases the buckle with the other. “Now!”

In one swift move, Spencer pulls herself against the warm body below as Quinn throws the strap over them both and says, “Lock it.”

Spencer shifts onto her side and finds the loose end, buckling them in tight with a click. She exhales deeply and lets her body relax at the sensation of being grounded and still. It’s strange seeing her bunk empty—right there, just a few feet away—for what appears to be no reason at all. (Well, flying tampons, notwithstanding.) And with that, Spencer immediately tenses again. She’s strapped into a bed with someone else, this girl she barely knows. How is she supposed to sleep?

Right on cue, Quinn presses up against her back. An arm drapes over her side, curling lightly around her stomach. She’s used to Toby’s stupidly heavy arms (even more so when dead), but Quinn’s weight feels comfortable, like an extension of her own body. For the first time in weeks—hell, maybe years—Spencer feels safe.

There’s a light squeeze from Quinn’s fingers on her side, maybe deliberate, maybe just a spasm. Spencer softly sets her hand on Quinn’s, holding it in place as she half-turns to say, “I’m not going anywhere.”

Quinn hums, “Mmhmm,” between slow, steady breaths.

Suddenly, Mack’s foot kicks the metal frame right under Spencer’s ass three times. “SHUT UPPP.”

Quinn smiles against the back of Spencer’s neck. “You’re welcome.”
Spencer’s not entirely sure what she dreamed about that night, beyond a sensation of comfort and warmth, but when she wakes up the following morning, her first thought is, *Why am I strapped down?* She feels breath against her neck and shifts as much, or as little, as she can to glance over her shoulder and sees Quinn almost nuzzling her.

*Oh, right.*

Her first instinct is to elbow Quinn square in the stomach and remove herself from the situation; the dumb part of her considers reaching down to curl her fingers gently around the hand Quinn has resting against her stomach. But before she can come to a decision, Quinn shifts and Spencer feels the belt loosen and fall to either side of the bed.

“G’morning,” Quinn mumbles as she rolls away and stretches.

Spencer can feel her heart pitter-patter as Quinn nudges her with an outstretched arm, but she instinctively pretends to still be asleep. It feels like the right thing to do, even if it is the gay thing to do. She’s not in any hurry to get out of this bed.

Mack growls, “Go fuck yourself,” from under them, just before Spencer can drift back off to a pleasant dream.

Spencer feels Quinn laugh against her neck, and it tickles, making her shift and shimmy to loosen Quinn’s grasp on her waist. But then it tickes there, and Spencer has to flip over to make it stop. She senses warmth close to her face, mere inches away. Her eyes flicker open and gaze directly into Quinn’s. “H-hi,” she says, low and raspy.

*Sure, well done, Spencer.*

Quinn just smirks. “Hello to you, too. Sleep well?”

Spencer hums happily and smiles, stretching her arms downward along her body. “What was that all about, anyway? The gravity, I mean.” Not the cuddling part, which is even more confusing for her brain.

“Sue has Raven shut it off the first night of Shark Week. She says it helps with cramps.”

It’s an absurd solution, Spencer thinks. Why not just give pain meds to the girls who need it, rather than keep the entire cell block from being able to sleep? Well, aside from the privileged few who happen to have a work-around. “And you didn't think it was worth giving me a heads-up?”

Suddenly, Aphasia leaps from her bed and starts a dance routine in the middle of the room. After about twenty beats of hip-hop moves, she finishes with a loud exclamation and both arms in the air. “Waffles!”
Spencer flips back over and stares, dumbfounded.

Quinn whispers in her ear, “It’s true love.”

That sends a shiver down Spencer’s spine. Not that she knows why.

“Lucky for her,” Quinn says, “that’s all we get for breakfast during Shark Week, anyway.”

When Buffy comes around to deliver their cold, dry breakfast, Spencer’s certain that she’ll get shoved aside in favor of food, but Quinn doesn’t seem particularly eager to end their cuddlefest, either. The warmth of their closeness is more comfortable—and less awkward—than she anticipated. In fact, Spencer’s perfectly content to hunker down in Quinn’s bunk for the whole day.

But then Buffy’s voice pierces through her otherwise lovely morning. “Hastings! Rise and shine.”

The cell door unlocks and Buffy slides it aside with barely more than a nudge of her finger. She watches Spencer impatiently, as if counting down in her head before she comes in there and drags Spencer off the bed.

Quinn pokes her in the side again. “Guess you’d better go,” she says, lips ghosting against Spencer’s neck.

Spencer groans and shoves off the bunk, landing on the cold, metal floor with a thud. “What?”

Buffy just shrugs. “Warden wants to see you. She looked hungry. Who knew shark bait was a breakfast food?” She sounds delighted by her own joke, but Spencer’s not laughing.

If prison has taught her anything so far, it’s that curbing her desire to correct people is good for her health, so Spencer puts on her shoes without saying a word. Is she really the only person in this place not on her period? And is that going to somehow be a bad thing? Should she pretend?

Buffy cuffs her and leads her down the corridor. Spencer hears a few whistles and catcalls from behind her, back in cells that can’t even see her walking, and she wonders if this place has turned into a damn zoo of crazy, hormonal psychopaths. River literally barks at her as they pass by.

Buffy turns the wheel on the door that seals the cell block like a vault, then leads Spencer down a long, narrow hall. Only the widest part between the infirmary and the processing room is familiar. The hallway curves sharply in this new territory, and there’s a door ten steps down on the left with a single chair outside it. A metal placard with “SUE SYLVESTER” and “WARDEN” is displayed at eye level.

Spencer sits down and doesn’t put up a fight when Buffy chains her handcuffs to the chair. It’s not like there’s anywhere to go even if she breaks free. This whole space gimmick is quite effective.

"Wait here," Buffy says and heads back the way they came.

After several minutes, a girl Spencer hasn’t seen before emerges from the office. She’s young, maybe Spencer’s age but very short. She’s wearing glasses and a navy-blue track suit identical to the one the warden wore on Spencer’s first day. The girl turns on her way out Sue’s door, salutes, and says, “You got it, boss!” A beat later, she notices Spencer and spits, “What are you looking at, Bloody Mary?” before storming off. The abrupt shift in her tone is startling.

Spencer recoils and almost yells back at a complete stranger. But before she can get any words out, she hears the warden’s voice coming through the crack in the unclosed door, and quickly decides she doesn’t want to reveal her position.
“Madam President—”

Spencer blinks. Madam?

“— We are talking about depraved criminals with homicidal tendencies, pent up in a space box like ticking, hormonal time bombs. Will they eventually claw each other’s eyes out? Yes. Fact.”

There’s a long silence from Sue with a faint, distorted mumbling in the background, and Spencer now knows she’s listening to one side of a phone call.

“I disagree,” Sue replies. “Our turnover has been the lowest in this sector for ten straight years, and frankly I don’t understand why we’re even having this conversa—...You think she’s something special? Half our population are enemies of one state or another!”

Sue sounds more defiant now, and Spencer strains to make out any words of the other side of the conversation to no avail.

“...They don't intimidate me...If the Peacekeepers cared about Aeryn Sun so much, why’d they send her away in the first place? Sounds like a steaming hot pile of Not My Problem by lazy, whiny BABIES.” Each word is dripping with disdain.

Spencer's trying to make sense of it, but it’s not adding up to much. She hasn’t met anyone named Aeryn Sun, and she has no idea what Peacekeepers are.

After a moment, Sue continues. “Well, you try telling an angry lesbian prison mob NOT to shiv the woman who spit in their fish tacos....No ma’am, that was not a euphemism. She worked in the kitchen...Most of what’s left of her is in Ziploc bags. I haven’t seen such sloppy work since the Carter administration.”

There’s another pause, then Sue begins again, much angrier. “Then tell them to shove their Coroner’s Transfer Request UP THEIR PEACEKEEPING ASSES.”

Spencer flinches, startled.

“And if you can find time in your busy schedule of staring out windows, crying for no reason, please tell your Department of Justice to keep the Peace Princesses out of my freshly conditioned hair!”

Shit is getting real in there. How is Sue allowed to talk to a President this way, Spencer wonders? Then, her chest tightens at the realization that she might end up bearing the brunt of Sue’s anger when she’s eventually called inside.

“We are following protocol and taking appropriate measures to control the situation. Despite what you seem to believe, I do know how to run a prison.”

Spencer wonders what those supposed “measures and protocols” are, because everything about this prison is absurd.

Sue huffs and says, “Speaking of crazy people. You know, blame me all you like—whatever helps you sleep at night alone and naked on your presidential sheets. I’d just like to point out that we’ve only seen this dramatic increase in violence since YOU transferred that horrifying belch of a woman to my ship...”

Oh god. Sue doesn’t mean Spencer, does she?

But, no—Spencer’s family might be connected, but not anywhere near that level. There’s no way
this president of...wherever...knows who Spencer is.

...Right?

Sue’s flat out mad now. “I told you these mandatory psych evals are pointless, and now there’s a dead body to show for it. The way I see it, that's every bit as much on her as anyone. Maybe she drove Sun to the brink and she snapped.”

Well, Spencer’s own conscience is clear, as she’s never interacted with this Sun woman. But she’s desperate to know who the warden’s talking about now—The doctor? A guard? Some other staff person Spencer hasn’t met yet? And is Sue really insinuating that this person is a suspect?

“She’s all crazy! Cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs!” Based on what Spencer’s seen so far, she can’t disagree.

There’s a long pause, and then Sue’s voice drops. “Madam President, I find your venom and lack of faith absolutely intoxicating.”

Wait, what?

Sue’s sultry whispering continues. “How I do so look forward to our next conjugal angerbang.” The next part is barely audible, and Spencer—regrettably—leans in to hear, “I may serve at the pleasure of the President, but this time tomorrow, you’ll be the one serving and pleasuring me.”

Wait, WHAT?!

Spencer hears the slamming sound of the phone call ending, and then the warden’s voice booms loud and clear, “BECKY!” A few steps, then the door flies open, and Sue looks left and right down the hall. Both Buffy and that girl, Becky, are long gone. Spencer’s envious that they escaped the mental images of what she just overheard. The warden pauses and squints, considering her next move, then seems to give up. “Get in here.”

“Um.” Spencer holds up her cuffed hands, fastened to the chain.

Sue sighs in frustration, then grabs a ring of what must be thirty identical keys off her desk. She finds the right one and unlocks the hardware.

The office is larger than Spencer expected, and the shelves behind Sue aren’t lined with books or pictures or even weapons, but countless large, gold trophies—an entire wall of acclaimed accomplishments. For a moment, Spencer’s not just intimidated but jealous, until she takes a closer look. The figurines on top are unlike any she’s ever seen before—a woman holding a large rifle, a woman holding a large knife, a woman holding a rifle and a knife, a building on fire, a woman scolding a crying child, a person with a dozen arrows through them at different angles, a double female symbol, a woman wrestling an alligator, a man running away from a woman with a chainsaw, and about four with handcuffs on them. There is also a small cheerleading one on the far end. For some reason, that one scares her the most.

Spencer looks around and sees, hanging on the wall beside the trophy case, a single framed picture...of Sue with Olivia Newton-John, signed, “I love getting physical with you!”

Oh god.

“Gonna put that big brain of yours to work,” Sue says. “Banger-and-Mash says you owe me an hour of labor for some extra time in the showers.” She sits down in her large chair and leans back. “Look,
I understand the perverted, primal desires to ogle the goods around here. We do have quite the delicious assortment, and I know you come from a background of severe sexual repression.”

Spencer opens her mouth to protest, but Sue continues.

“And the truth is, I could use a little extra help, administratively speaking. My assistant is a beautiful, gentle, compassionate soul with all the elegance of a stallion in the wind.” She pauses, seeming taken back by the thought of this, and Spencer wonders how in the hell Sue could be talking about the same girl that just yelled at Spencer a minute ago. “Unfortunately, her organizational skills are lacking such strength and grace.” She gestures with her head to several large stacks of messy files and papers on the floor by the smaller of her three trophy cases. Each stack has a post-it on it with the word “NO” scrawled in a different color crayon. Beside them, a small pile of ashes sits on a charred, black mark on the floor where a fourth pile presumably used to be. “You help me, you earn your Peek-a-Boo Shower Time. Five minutes for each hour of work. Can’t let you get too carried away in there.”

Spencer’s mouth falls open again, but Sue doesn’t seem to need a response from her.

“Today, you’re alphabetizing.” She pauses. “I’m assuming mastery of the ABC song was a requirement for your college applications. Do you need to practice first?”
Spencer ends up working overtime because there are surely clues to be found, though she doesn’t realize it’s been two hours until Sue walks back in and says, “Impressive.” Spencer starts to smile, but then Sue continues. “I had no idea you were such the motivated pervert.”

She blinks hard and bites back the desire to argue, remembering how Hanna would say not to poke the bear. Sue can think whatever she wants as long as Spencer gets what she needs. But right now, what she needs is answers, and she’s found exactly zero in all her digging. Even if she felt brave enough to ask Sue for information, where would she start? If she only gets one question, it’ll have to be the right one. She’s barely begun to scratch the surface in here.

Still, Spencer can’t get back to her cell fast enough to relay this information about the disappearances. Mysteries are her anti-drug, and she always was the super-sleuth of the team. The list of questions in her mind is expanding rapidly, and maybe her cellmates will have some answers. They do kind of resemble Hanna, Emily, and Aria, if she squints a lot. Maybe she’ll get to relive some glory days and put an end to her boredom.

God help her, Spencer’s genuinely excited about something. And it beats reading more terrible lesbian smut from Quinn’s stash.

Boomer’s back on duty now, and she doesn’t seem to be leading Spencer back to the cell block. They go down a long hall that contains all the various rooms for rec time classes, ending with the library. There’s another woman in a P.M.S uniform already standing outside the bathroom, someone Spencer hasn’t seen before named K. Greggs. The two guards acknowledge each other with a subtle nod, and Boomer unlocks the cuffs and gives Spencer a push into the locker room.

“Oh, right, shower time. She’d honestly forgotten.

“Ten minutes!” Boomer calls from behind her before she closes the door.

*Just what do these people think she does in here?*

The showers are almost empty, anyway, so she strips down and bathes as best she can. There’s one other girl, someone Spencer hasn’t seen before—a short brunette with bushy curls and a young-looking face—halfway through her shampoo routine. It’s a little weird seeing someone for the first time when they’re naked, but Spencer realizes the girl’s having the same experience, so it’s probably not a big deal.

When Spencer approaches a shower head she hasn’t used before, one far enough away to give her some privacy, the girl turns and says, “The cold’s faulty on that one,” in a British accent.

“Thanks.” Spencer wonders how a new girl could know that, but doesn’t ask. She can’t have been on the ship for too long, since, like Spencer, she’s not under period quarantine either. Spencer wants to ask her name but thinks better of it. They’re alone, which makes her an easy target. This girl looks
kind enough but could be a violent lunatic, for all she knows.

Spencer finishes her business and huffs in frustration as she dresses, because this uniform is the height of discomfort when wet. It's ludicrous that a prison facility that can afford a gravity simulator can't buy even a few towels. And now she's cold and soggy and dripping, and everything is just awesome.

"Time's up!" Boomer's voice echoes off the yellow tile, and Spencer is surprised when the girl turns her water off, too, and follows her out. The girl walks up to Greggs and holds her hands out to be cuffed, then they silently start toward the cell block with Boomer and Spencer right behind.

When the group reaches cell 10, Spencer notices Aphasia bolt upright in her bunk at the sight of them. For a moment, the air thickens with tension, though Spencer has no idea why. It's like Aphasia is seeing a ghost, but she doesn't exactly look scared. It's not until Greggs leads the girl away and out of sight that Aphasia relaxes and settles back in. Boomer unlocks and slides the door open and shoves Spencer back inside.

Home, sweet home.

Quinn's sitting on Mack's bunk, pushing aside the cup waving in her face, muttering about vomit-flavored wine coolers. She focuses on Spencer, whose hair is dripping onto the floor as she sloshes over to her bunk. "Go for a swim?"

Spencer ignores her. She turns to Aphasia and points into the empty hall. "Who was that?" Until now, it seemed all the connections between inmates were very superficial—cellmates, lunchmates, enemies for stupid reasons, acquaintances on a last-name-basis only. This is clearly different.

Aphasia takes a deep breath, still staring through the bars. "Hermione." Before Spencer can ask anything else, she picks up her orange chalk and resumes scribbling on the wall. It looks like some kind of deformed otter.

Something tells Spencer not to press. If Aphasia doesn't have anything to say, it must be some pretty serious shit. No matter—there are much more important things to discuss. She sits next to Quinn on Mack's bunk and says in a low voice, "You guys will never believe what I just heard."

"Move your soggy ass!" Mack kicks her lower back twice, hard, forcing Spencer to squat on the floor in front of them instead.

She can't help but hope the fabric in the crotch holds out just a little longer.

Spencer sorts through all the info clamoring in her head to present the most relevant bits first, and leads with, "Who's Aeryn Sun?"

"Some mean lady," Mack says, trying unsuccessfully to wipe the water stains off her sheets. "She was in my Knives class."

"Do you know that she's dead?"

Mack isn't fazed. "Figures."

"What? Why? What'd she do?"

"What do you care?" Mack stretches out on the bed with a groan.

"If we can be offed at any minute in here, that's kind of relevant to my interests. I don't want to live
on high alert every day trying not to get stabbed.” It sounds weird saying it out loud, like she’s in a movie. How is this a part of her life now? Except, wait. This was absolutely what Spencer’s life was like before.

Mack *pffts.* “Who’d want to stab you? Besides me.”

“Maybe the same person who got to Aeryn Sun.”

Quinn seems to be waiting for Spencer to say something interesting.

“You knew that?” Spencer asks her. “The warden said somebody tore her apart.”

Mack shrugs. “She did just kind of disappear. I figured she got out.”

“Like Stacey,” Quinn adds.

That rings a bell. “Wait, Stacey Merkin?”

Quinn furrows her brow. “You know her?”

“She your ex?” Aphasia asks.

“No, I—” Spencer considers telling the truth, but saying, “*I saw her name in a spider web*” feels like asking a bit too much from these three right now. “—heard someone mention her in the caf.”

“Lots of girls get out,” Mack says. “Vause said Stacey got parole. She had high-up connections, press reporter and all that fancy shit.”

“So, you don’t think she’s dead?”

Mack rolls her eyes and starts doing push-ups on the floor, clearly bored with the conversation. “No skin off my ass.”

“Is this a regular thing, then? Girls going missing?” Spencer’s not giving up on this yet. “What about that Jenny girl?”

Pushing up from the ground, Mack laughs and almost loses her balance. “Oh, she’s dead for sure.”

“You said she was vented outside, right? But why?”

“Hell if I know.” Mack lowers herself again and grimaces. “Everyone fucking hated her.”

“Mmhm,” Aphasia agrees with some attitude. She snips a piece of fingernail off with scissors, then files it down with sandpaper.

Quinn adjusts her position on the bed and shrugs. “I thought she was alright.”

“And the warden’s the one who airlocks people?” Spencer stumbles a bit over the word “airlock” because this all seems way too science fiction right now.

“No, it's Little Bo Peep,” Mack huffs as she pushes through another rep. “You sure ask a lot of stupid questions. You writing a term paper, Brain Trust? Here, you’ll need this for your bibliography—” And she farts.

“It’s important!” Spencer insists over their laughter; even Quinn’s biting back her reaction, trying to play it cool but failing. But Spencer’s not going to just let them sweep this under the rug. She had
enough of her share of girls going missing back in Rosewood. She’ll be damned if she just sits back and lets it happen again. Though, maybe shame on her for thinking things would be different in this next phase of her life. Is she cursed or something? She lies down and stares up at Aphasia’s bed frame like all the answers will become clear. “Asking questions is what keeps me alive.”

Mack laughs again and pushes up from number nineteen. “Sure. Until it gets you dead.”

There’s truth to that, but Spencer's looking at the bigger picture, even if her cellmates aren't. Either way it slices, Sue Sylvester's lying to someone. From what she said on the phone, it sounds like she's just chalking the disappearances up to random acts of prison violence. Spencer didn't hear anything about airlocking prisoners, though that certainly can’t be routine procedure. And if Sue's covering that up, who knows what else she's hiding?

It could be simple enough to kill prisoners herself and then lie about it to the authorities. Blame it on the violent, baseless inmates. Who would question that? Sue gets to throw out whomever she wants, building an environment of fear to keep the girls toeing the line, and there's no slap on the wrist for it. For all Spencer knows, there's some other perk or kickback that comes from knocking off a prisoner here and there, or bringing in someone new. Sounds like a pretty sweet arrangement.

Spencer's not going to take any chances where the warden's concerned. She dealt with enough dirty cops back home, and the feelings of helplessness and frustration still haven't gone away.

How great to discover that Earth doesn't hold a monopoly on corruption.

For now, Spencer's going to keep her head down and her eyes open. If there's one thing she's good at, it's staying alive when everything around her is crumbling.

“Who'd want to kill Aeryn?” Quinn asks Mack and Aphasia, looking from one to the other.

Mack stands and brushes herself off before heading to the toilet. “Take your pick.”

“I never heard anything about it.”

“Christmas?” Aphasia asks.

Mack clarifies for Spencer, “There's always a fight at Christmas.”

Spencer has a brief vision of inmates tearing each other apart over a sparse smattering of crappy, donated gifts under a fake tree in the Mess Hall.

Quinn shakes her head. “I saw her on New Year's. She was going around the Mess with that little bottle, that compatibility liquid or something,” but she sounds as confused as Spencer feels.

“Oh yeah!” Mack remembers. “And Vasquez decked her when she shoved her tongue in her mouth.”

“Okay, so, what, you think Vasquez did it?” Spencer asks.

Quinn doesn’t seem concerned. “It's possible, I guess.”

“She was in Knives class after that,” Aphasia adds. “We talked about the best blades for cutting out hearts for Valentine's Day.”

_How lovely._

“So, Vasquez just hung on to that grudge for two months?” Spencer's assembling a timeline, and
now she knows Aeryn went missing between Valentine's and her arrival in late March. …She’s pretty sure. But there’s no particular reason why they would hold to the same calendar a million miles into space. “It’s March, right?”

Mack laughs, “Jesus, what’s your damage?”

“Would Vasquez really kill someone just for kissing her? And why wait two months?”

Mack unzips and lowers her jumpsuit, looking very bored again. “Why should we care? Lotsa bitches in here got grudges. You can get shivved for looking at someone the wrong way. Here, I'll prove it. Look at me.” She glares at Spencer in a clear attempt to be intimidating, but much of the effect is lost with the whole peeing thing.

“Ew, no.” Spencer shakes it off and refocuses on Quinn, going into full recon mode. Lowering her voice, she breaks the big news. “This morning I overheard a phone call between the warden and the President—”

Quinn raises one eyebrow.

“How the fuck did you do that?” Mack wipes and stands, her jumpsuit dropping clear to her ankles and boobs just hanging out there.

Spencer really didn’t need to see any of that. “I was in the hall outside her door, and it wasn’t closed all the way. I heard her talking, but she was saying ‘Madam President.’ I can name a lot of foreign leaders, including the few I know who are women, but I have no idea who this one might’ve been.”

“Laura Roslin,” Quinn says without hesitation.

Spencer raises her eyebrows. “Never heard of her.” There’s a pause, but they’re not jumping in to fill in the blanks. “She’s the president of...?”

“Um, space, duh,” Mack laughs and looks to Quinn for backup, like Spencer just got shipped in from Stupidtown.

She’s starting to think that maybe she did. The look on her face says, There’s a president of SPACE? but now isn’t the time to ask for more about that. “Okay, well, Miss President of Space was calling because Sylvester’s in trouble. It sounds like a lot of prisoners have been dying or disappearing lately.”

“Like since you arrived,” Mack leers. “How interesting.”

Quinn jumps in before Spencer can take the bait. “Stacey left months ago.”

“And I don’t think Aeryn was here when I arrived. The warden seemed to think someone new has been responsible for the violence, but I don’t know who that could be. Who else has come in?”

“Only you, princess.” Mack’s walking toward Spencer now, getting up in her face. “So, Aeryn got jumped weeks ago and NOBODY—” she points to Quinn, herself, and Aphasia, “—heard about it, that’s what you’re saying? Nobody took credit?”

“For all we know, the warden killed her herself. But supposedly there’s barely enough left of her to fill a Ziploc bag.”

“Bullshit,” Mack says. “If she was dead, they’d-a told us. But if someone just disappears, she’s back on the world. They keep it quiet so we forget it can happen.” She heads back over to the toilet and
pulls out a bottle of brown sludge from behind it.

Spencer prays that’s the wine.

“She’s right,” Quinn says. “Sue’s all about putting the ‘fear’ in ‘atmosphere.’” Her face shifts, as if put off by her own pun.

Aphasia’s voice cuts into the conversation out of nowhere. With a proud smile, she turns and shouts, “Look at my turtle!” The new red sketch vaguely resembles an iguana. With eight arms. And wings.

Spencer’s losing her patience. “So, nobody else is worried that inmates have been disappearing without explanation and might be getting killed?”

Mack’s upper lip is smeared with brown liquid that she seems in no hurry to lick clean. “In case you haven’t noticed, you’re in prison. People die.”

“You don’t want to find out what’s going on?” But Spencer gets nothing but blank, uninterested stares. Looking at each one of them in turn—Mack, then Aphasia, and finally Quinn—the truth hits her, and she says it out loud. “You’re not going to help me with this, are you.” It’s the most painful reminder yet that she’s not in Rosewood and these aren’t her friends. Spencer’s on her own.

Mack’s already moved on from the conversation. “I’ve got Pruno to sell. Try the next sucker.”

“Seriously,” Quinn says, exhaling smoke, “it’s fine. We’re the last people to hear anything, and it’s usually false anyway. This is just how things go around here.” Quinn sees Spencer is not appeased, then smiles. “Last night you were floating mid-air, surrounded by tampons. Weird shit happens. But that doesn’t mean it’s all weird. They’re probably out on parole.”

“Fine.” But Spencer knows that’s a load of crap, because she was there and she heard the phone call. She heard the fear in the warden’s voice—and the arousal, but she’s choosing to forget that part. Something about all this isn’t adding up.

Borrowing a piece of chalk from Aphasia, she sits on her bunk facing the wall and draws a large bubble map with three big circles that say, “STACEY MERKIN,” “JENNY SCHECTER,” and “AERYN SUN” in the middle. Fast and furious, she adds connection lines with names, dates, facts, anything she can think of that might be related.

She’s quickly amassing a suspect list and soon realizes that everyone is on it. Any of the other prisoners certainly seem capable of kidnapping, assault, murder, you name it. She lists all the inmates she knows and makes descriptions of those she doesn’t, but she’s only covered maybe half the prison. The guards are fair game, too, given that they have access to all the prisoners.

Her mind drifts back to Quinn’s comment about weirdness. How does the gravity work, exactly? It has to be some kind of device emitting a force that could be turned on and off. If so, could it be cut to create a diversion? Does anyone besides Raven have access to it?

And then there’s Sue Sylvester, herself. If she’s having issues with violence, why not bring in more guards? Why not strengthen security measures? What does she have to hide? Who’s this new person who she thinks is taking her people out? And who’s to say she isn’t behind the whole thing and just covering it up? If there was some financial or political motive behind it, like if she gets incentives for each new prisoner she admits, she could totally be knocking off inmates to make room for more. Not too many, and not all at once, just enough to keep it from looking suspicious. After all, Mack was right—there are a lot of crazy bitches in here. Anything could happen.

After twenty minutes of furious scribbling, her yellow chalk piece is down to a nub and the wall is
nearly full. It’s quite an impressive masterpiece, if she does say so. She turns to look for Charlotte, the only one in the cell who might appreciate her weaving of words, but both the spider and her web are nowhere to be found.

Boomer slides a plate of five stale peanut butter sandwiches under the bars. With classes canceled, Spencer isn’t going to get any time to work through her various theories free from distractions, and she's stuck with the very people refusing to help her.

This whole Shark Week thing is really starting to bite.
Mistress Berry

Chapter Notes

Here’s the character photo index.

Spencer’s used to the sound of Mack climbing up into Quinn’s bunk by now—and the moans that ensue—but this time, Saturday after dinner, she finds herself more than a little irritated. “Ugh, seriously?” she yells at the two of them. “It’s Shark Week.”

Braced for the worst, Spencer pokes her head out from under her sheet and looks up. Surprisingly, Mack’s still fully clothed, even as she appears to be...well, grinding down with one thigh between Quinn’s legs. Spencer’s no prude; she knows exactly what those two are up to—They’re ignoring her.

At least now she has an explanation now for why all the uniform crotches are so threadbare. She freezes for a moment wondering who may have done that in this uniform before she came around.

Oh god.

But then the noise starts back up again, and Spencer rolls onto her back with a huff. She’s choosing to ignore the side of herself that kind of wishes she were up in that bunk and not Mack. But a Hastings never dry humps (and especially not with women). “Why is this much sex even allowed? It’s prison. You’d think they’d want us to be miserable all the time...” Spencer mutters mostly to herself. Then again, there is a library full of porn just down the way.

Aphasia shifts around in the bed above her, then pokes her head over the side. “Girl, you don’t wanna see them when they frustrated.”

Spencer can’t disagree with that. “Hey,” she asks, “who’s Hermione?”

Aphasia’s expression changes in an instant, and Spencer knows that she’s said the wrong thing. “I don’t talk about that.”

Then, just as quickly, Aphasia’s demeanor shifts back to the happy-go-lucky girl who’s content to make chalk drawings on her wall instead of talking—or thinking—about anything real. If only Spencer could do the same.

****************

Late Sunday evening, Spencer hears the distant, now familiar clunk of the cell block door opening. But there is a sharp, clacking sound that has to be...Stilettos?

Huh, Spencer thinks. This is new. She slowly sits up in her bunk and leans forward, trying to see who’s approaching. Has her mother finally arrived to pull her from this homoerotic hellhole? About fucking time.

“Mom?” she calls out, though she still can’t see anyone yet.

Suddenly, a whip cracks through the air, and Spencer falls off the bed.
The stranger strolls into view, a short brunette dressed in all black, skin-tight leather and a corset. Spencer, face-down on the cold floor, starts at the six-inch heels and slowly follows a chain of bedazzled gold stars up the knee-high boots to the edge of a dangerously short dress that isn’t hiding anything, at least from this angle. And now Spencer is very glad this woman is not, in fact, of any relation to her whatsoever.

“Until we have negotiated the full terms of a contractual agreement, you may not address me in this manner. Your legal representation can apply for a mommy/daughter relationship at the appropriate time.”

“I…” But Spencer doesn’t have any idea what to say to that.

Aphasia wakes up and looks out to see their visitor. “It’s Halloween again?! You trick-or-treatin’? Damn, where’s my candy!” She starts digging under her mattress frantically.

Quinn, up in her bunk, rolls her eyes. “Rachel, let it go. I am not coming back to Glee club.”

The dominatrix’s confidence vanishes instantly, and she looks left and right to see if anyone is watching. Then, she steps in close to the bars and sputters in a whisper, “That’s not why I’m here!”

Quinn lies back down. “Uh huh.”

Rachel seems almost apologetic. “But since you brought it up, I’ll just say that Glee is there for you whenever you’re ready, and always will be.”

“I’M. IN. SPACE. PRISON.”

“Whenever you’re ready,” she repeats, clearly needing the last word in this.

And with that, the authoritative demeanor returns. Rachel steps back again and cracks her whip, even louder this time. Spencer scrambles back onto her bed and wonders what the hell kind of Glee club these people were ever in together.

“Found it!” Aphasia shouts randomly, holding up an orange plastic pumpkin with a black handle. “Girl, I got you. You want Milky Way or Snickers?”

Rachel opens her mouth to make an announcement but stops mid-syllable, seeing the chocolate held out before her. She quickly reaches for a Milky Way and says, “Thank you. Happy Halloween.” She’s going with it.

Tucking the candy bar into one of her boots, Rachel clears her throat and holds her arms out. “May I have your attention, please!” Rachel shouts, addressing the entire block. “My name is Mistress Berry. As many of you surely know by now, I am here to present you with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I can make your wildest dreams come true.”

And yet Spencer gets the feeling this woman isn’t a cruise director.

“I will select one lucky lady to accompany me on a most exciting adventure.” She pauses and looks right at Spencer. “An adventure...of pain.”

Spencer gulps and brings her knees in a bit closer.

Mistress Berry continues, now pacing. “You will be at my service and under my control, to see to my every desire and whim and need.” A glance at Quinn. “And I do mean every.” She continues. “Each day we spend together will reduce your prison sentence accordingly. You can negotiate your
release back here after two years, should you still have the strength to do so.” She stops pacing and turns halfway. “Not that anyone one ever has.”

Spencer is almost considering going along with it, if only to get away from the insanity of this place. She’s not feeling up to solving the mystery of disappearing prisoners alone right now—a crime which she has dubbed the work of the ‘gAy Team,’ as that seems certain to fit no matter who’s the culprit. She considers whether or not this terrifying little woman could be a suspect, but it seems much more likely it’s someone who’s been here all along. If this were a legitimate way out of this deathtrap, would she take it? She could submit to someone, right? How hard could it be?

“You will not want to disappoint me,” the woman says with a hint of warning. “My fathers taught me the joy of rifle hunting at a young age, along with ballet and singing, of course. I always had a knack for eliminating my competition in pageants, one way or another.”

...What.

“Oh, just get on with it,” Quinn says under her breath.

Mistress Berry extends her arm. “Guard, bring me the names.”

Boomer cautiously approaches with a black leather drawstring pouch that perfectly matches its owner’s outfit, then scurries away to safety.

“Each of your names is in this bag, some more times than others.”

Spencer glances up at Quinn, who is staring at the ceiling and mouthing along with every word, like she knows it by heart.

“I confess I do take significant pleasure in breaking a young, hopeful spirit, so the warden is always kind enough to tip the scales toward the newer inmates.” Mistress Berry grins at Spencer with a wink.

Spencer looks away and notices a new web Charlotte must have made during this spectacle.

**BERRY’S BITCH.**

She swears she can hear the spider laughing at her.

Mistress Berry reaches into the pouch with a gloved hand. “My newest companion will be—”

“I VOLUNTEER!”

Startled, Spencer turns toward the new voice behind her. A girl she’s never seen before pushes Mack and Aphasia out of the way and clamors toward the bars. “I VOLUNTEER AS SUBMISSIVE!!!”

*The fuck?! Where did SHE come from?!!!*

Mistress Berry stomps her foot. “But I haven’t even drawn a name yet!”

“I VOLUNTEER! TAKE ME! TAKE ME!” the girl shouts. She’s shaking the bars emphatically with each word.

With a huff, Mistress Berry withdraws her hand from the bag. “Fine, whatever.” Boomer unlocks the cell, and the girl can’t throw herself down fast enough at Rachel’s feet. The dominatrix lifts a boot and rests it on the girl’s shoulder as their eyes meet. “Mistress Berry is never interrupted.” With a swift push, she kicks the girl over and storms out.
Buffy and Boomer tie up the feisty volunteer and haul her away before she can change her mind.

Spencer looks at her cellmates, who don’t seem confused at all. Apparently, this kind of thing happens all the time. Mack’s intently cleaning under her fingernails with her toothbrush, and Quinn’s already back asleep.

Aphasia breaks the silence and laughs to herself. “Man, I forgot Katniss was even in here!” At Spencer’s stunned expression, she adds, “She real good at hidin.””
A Dream Within a Dream

Chapter Notes

Here’s the [character photo index](#).

It's enough to send Spencer into full-blown paranoia. Learning that someone has been living under her bed for two weeks—other than Charlotte, of course—sets her skin crawling. She falls asleep that night with everything she's seen thus far whirling in her head.

Suddenly, she's in the Mess Hall, and there's too much happening at once to make any sense of it. Mistress Berry sits with a tray full of waffles, feeding them to Aphasia, who's strapped down on top of one of the tables as Becky watches, playing her xylophone. A group of women is throwing knives at other inmates, who are reaching up and catching them, then throwing them back. Spencer realizes that all the classes are happening at once. River's sitting in a circle of girls, reading aloud from *Fifty Shades of Grey* as Quinn and Mack act out the scene. Violet's finishing a full-body tattoo on Lorna with her ballpoint pen. Lucy is constructing a gigantic Play-Doh animal, like Clifford the Big Red Dog, only not any recognizable species. Speaking of animals, a raccoon is chasing after Clarke, somehow carrying what must be a hundred lit candles all at once. And there's a woman walking around just completely covered in bees.

Spencer turns to run away, but the hallway goes dark. It's longer than she remembers, and she can't see or hear anything. And then, she runs face first into a giant spider web. She pushes through it, desperately brushing the thread away, but there's just more and more. It's never ending. And then the lights come on, and Spencer can see the entire corridor is covered in webbing. There are giant cocoons here and there, large enough to hold people in them. Screaming, Spencer runs back toward the Mess Hall to get the hell out, but as soon as she turns around, she sees a new web, this one in clear writing.

*I KILLED JENNY SCHECTER.*

Consumed with panic, Spencer screams again, this time loud enough to wake herself up. She scrambles out of the bed and runs to the toilet, standing on it and almost falling in. Her eyes dart around the cell, looking for any sign of Charlotte. She knows it was a dream, but it felt so real, and it doesn't seem like a stretch of the imagination that the spider could write something like that. Still, the notion of a tiny spider killing people in space is ridiculous. Spencer’s pulse isn’t slowing as quickly as she’d like, and she shivers again at how creepy the whole thing was.

Friendly to Animals Time is over now. Having a little pal’s been nice, but Spencer’s not going to take any chances, not after that dream. She should’ve squashed it on Day One.

“...The fuck, Hastings?” she distantly hears Mack growl, accompanied by the rustling of sheets as the others wake.

Spencer whips around to face Mack. “There’s a spider in my bed, and I’d really, really rather there not be.” She’s pointing wildly at her bunk as she speaks, which isn’t helping her look any less crazy, perched up on the chrome throne.

Quinn sits up, rubbing sleep from her eyes. “What?”
Aphasia hangs over the side of her bunk and peers into Spencer’s own. “Where he at?”

“I don’t know,” Spencer says. “Somewhere over there. Maybe underneath. It's been there all week!”

Mack snarls, “Then why the fuck are you screaming about it now?” It's a fair question.

“Because I had a nightmare, okay? There was a giant web that said, ‘I killed Jenny Schecter.’”

“Aww, wittle Spencer had a bad dweam? Jesus, fuck off.”

Boy, Spencer’s so glad she's fully awake.

Mack pulls off her left shoe and chucks it at her with barely enough force to cover the distance. It hits Spencer's stomach and falls right into the toilet. “FUCK!”

Aphasia shakes her head and mutters, “I hate spiders!”

Quinn sighs, like she's the parent who has to go investigate the disturbance downstairs while the kids stay safely in bed. She climbs down and approaches Spencer's bunk, peering under the frame, then kneeling on the floor to check there. “I don't see anything.”

“She's there.”

“A space spider,” Quinn repeats. She's not buying it.

“Maybe Katniss taught it how to hide from your sorry ass,” Aphasia says. “Good luck.”

It’s all Spencer can do to keep herself from tearing her hair out in frustration. She climbs down from the toilet and sits on it, refusing to get any closer to her bunk. “Did Jenny ever say anything to you about a spider?”

Quinn's checking the underside of the frame again, banging it hard to see if anything scurries out. “No. She mostly just talked to herself.”

“About what?”

Another shrug. “Nothing, really. She was a bit...overdramatic. And angry. Really angry.”

But I’ve been talking to Charlotte here, Spencer thinks, so who’s to say Jenny wasn’t simply doing the same?

Quinn lifts the mattress and seems convinced there's nothing out of the ordinary there. “There’s something called night terrors. Where you think you’re seeing something real while you’re still half-asleep? That’s probably all it was.” She pauses for a beat. “There’s a lot of scary shit up here that will kill you, but not spiders.”

Spencer wants nothing more than to go back in time and show them the spider when it first appeared. Why was she so intent on keeping her fucking mouth shut? Now they think she’s crazy, and she has no way to establish any credibility unless the spider comes back. “I know what I saw,” she grumbles, crossing her arms.

“We’ve been here for a year and we’ve never seen no damn spiders,” Mack says. “Your dumb ass couldn’t even find a whole person, and she was right under your bed half the time.”

Oh, yes, thank you for the fucking reminder.
Mack’s having too much fun to stop now. “What would they even eat? WE'RE IN SPACE.”

That group quietly ponders that for a moment, but then Aphasia looks aghast. “Oh shit!” she cries. “WHAT IF IT TOOK MY BUGS?!” She turns around, pulls the wall-side edge of her mattress up, and begins rummaging under it in a frenzy.

Spencer jumps back and out of the way. “You have bugs?! WHY do you have bugs?!”

Aphasia pulls out a jar with holes punched in the lid, one hole much wider than the others. It’s empty. “SHUT THE FUCK DOOR.” She pushes a finger through the largest hole, like she’s never seen it before, then looks through it into the empty jar. “IT ATE MY BUGS!” She turns to Spencer. “You kill that bitch dead.”

Well, at least now one person believes her. That’s a start.

Quinn walks over to Spencer and squeezes her arm. “Hey. You okay?”

It’s the first ounce of sincere concern she’s received thus far. “Not even a little.” Spencer sighs heavily and tries to turn down the sarcasm a bit. “I’m not sleeping over there anymore until someone shows me a dead spider.” It’s not like she has a lot of options, but that doesn’t matter right now.

Quinn laughs softly in leans forward to whisper in Spencer’s ear, “You can always bunk with me again.”

It sends a shiver up Spencer’s spine. That’s happening a lot lately. Far too much. Still, the option is enticing, far more than the alternatives: Mack, Aphasia, the toilet, or the floor. And Quinn is rather warm and comfortable. Not that Spencer enjoys cuddling other women. Obviously.

There’s nothing she can say right now, so she just nods as Quinn takes her hand and says, “Come on.”
Here’s the character photo index.

It’s interesting, the things you get used to after time. Like spongy, crusty tuna casserole, or showering without a towel, or watching people drink brown sludge out of toilets. Or being the baby spoon for a punk lesbian.

Spencer tells herself that it’s for her safety. Quinn is valiantly protecting her from a murderous creature, after all. By keeping an arm draped over Spencer while they sleep, Quinn is more likely to be attacked by Charlotte, for the sheer sake of having that stretch of skin exposed. By sleeping on the wall side, Quinn is giving Spencer the quicker escape, should something happen suddenly in the night. Yes, that all sounds perfectly logical.

As opposed to the very concept that, if her dreams are as prophetic as she likes to believe, there could, in theory, be a killer spider on the loose. This is one of those times when Spencer doesn’t want to be right. But, her record speaks for itself, so they’re not taking any chances. Safety in numbers, even when asleep, right? She ignores the fact that they’re basically sitting (sleeping?) ducks, anyway, as there is no true protection against a killer spider in your living quarters. It’s not like Charlotte wouldn’t be smart enough to find her, a whopping six feet away from her last known location. ...But what if she went for Aphasia instead? At the thought, Spencer half-opens her eyes just to check on her bunkmate, and her pulse quickens a bit to discover Aphasia’s not, in fact, in bed at all. Nor is she on the toilet or by the door. Glancing around through her morning haze, Spencer leans over to check the final place, but, no, Aphasia’s not on Mack’s bed, either.

She’s just gone.

“Hey, where’s Aphasia?” Spencer asks Mack, her hair hanging down toward the floor.

Mack grunts angrily into her pillow with eyes still closed, as she hates rising before 3pm. “Piss off.”

“No, seriously.” Spencer cringes against the metal frame digging into her chest. “I think something happened to her.” It’s still Shark Week, and there’s no reason anyone would be out of their cells. Right?

“She’s fine,” Mack grumbles, still face down.

“She’s GONE. What if it’s the spider!”

Without another word, Mack takes hold of her pillow and swings it blindly, smacking Spencer full force in the face. It stings, and the force almost pushes Spencer off the bed.

Quinn’s hand catches a handful of black uniform just in time, pulling Spencer back. “Whoa.” She helps a shaken Spencer regain her balance, pushing the mussed hair back into place to see her face clearly. “You okay?”

“Where’s Aphasia?” Spencer’s tone is getting stronger. She turns to look at the empty bunk, and her
mind races with the possibilities. None of which make any sense.

“Hey, hey,” Quinn says, reaching out to turn Spencer’s chin back to face her. “Don’t worry about her. Trust me.” There’s a beat of silence as Spencer starts to protest, but Quinn cuts her off by running a hand through Spencer’s hair, those hazel eyes locked on her own, and suddenly Spencer can’t remember why she ever wanted to say anything at all.

She’s lost in a sea of warmth and closeness, just the two of them there, and Spencer can’t get enough. The background noise fades into nothing—the waking conversation in neighboring cells, the bored lines from the guards, the banging on cell bars—it all disappears, and all Spencer can hear is the sound of her heart pounding in her ears and Quinn gently breathing inches from her face. Every nerve in her body is alive as chills run down her spine with each graze of Quinn’s fingernails against her scalp. Her touch is so soft, yet strong—tender, but intentional. Spencer hadn’t realized just how lonely she’s been for the loving touch of another. There’s a distant click of metal that she can’t quite place, but unless the prison is on fire, Spencer’s not looking away from Quinn’s stare for anything. If every day in prison could be like this, it’s a life sentence she’ll gladly serve.

“Guess you’ve already found something to eat, so I’ll just keep this.”

Buffy’s voice cuts in and brings Spencer crashing back to reality. She pulls back from Quinn on instinct, like her mother just walked in on her, and turns to see Buffy standing with two plates of cold breakfast in hand, ready to slide through the slot. Good, Spencer thinks, help us find—

“Fuck them, I’ll take it!” Aphasia says and jumps down from her bunk.

Spencer whips around so fast, she almost falls off the bed again. Her cellmate is right there, clear as day and definitely not eaten by a spider. She gawks, watching the scene unfold as the suddenly materialized Aphasia stuffs waffle blocks into her mouth. Buffy’s gone before Spencer can form actual words. Even then, it’s still mostly sputtering.

“What?” Aphasia chomps on a third beige brick, dropping crumbs all over the floor.

“You’re…here.” Spencer says in disbelief, looking around again to be sure she’s not dreaming this whole thing.

“Of course I am,” Aphasia replies, taking on a more serious tone. She chews and bites again, attempting to appear as nonchalant as possible. “I’ve been here the whole time.” It’s a stated fact, not an argument.

“You were GONE!”

Spencer runs a hand through her hair and turns to Quinn for backup, but Quinn just puts a hand on her arm and says, “It’s fine, I told you. She’s here.”

“I thought you were DEAD.”

Aphasia walks over to the bed, reaches up, and shoves the last waffle square at Spencer’s mouth, which closes just in time to block it, grimacing. “You keep running your mouth,” Aphasia warns, “you gonna be the one dead.” She slams her breakfast three more times against Spencer’s face, missing her target as Spencer fights to turn away. Spencer slaps at Aphasia with her hands, quite annoyed. They look like siblings bickering in the back of a minivan. Finally, Aphasia relents. “Yeah, you keep that mouth shut. That’s what I thought,” she says and goes back to her own bunk.

Spencer brushes the crumbs off her uniform onto the floor. They’re not an hour into it, and it’s already been A Day.
Two mornings later, on Wednesday, Spencer hears a scattered, repeating progression of plink-plink-plink-plink over the intercom before Becky’s voice shouts, **ALL CLEAR!**

“How about this,” says Mack, stretching as she wakes. “Get me out of this stench pit.” She shoots daggers at Spencer as she goes for her morning pee, and Spencer backs a little closer into the warmth of Quinn. Nice as it is, she can’t disagree with Mack. They do smell pretty terrible.

They file into the Mess Hall for the first time in a week, and it’s nice to see different faces for a change, even these scary ones. All the little cliques are claiming their usual places, and Spencer takes inventory. It feels important to keep track of who has power in here. Lucy’s in the far-left corner with her brunettes, who Spencer now knows are named Faith and Santana. (It’s not lost on her that it sounds a bit like Lucy has an angel and a devil with her at all times. But chances are that’s not the case.) She’s careful not to make eye contact.

Spencer knows most of the faces in her immediate vicinity by now. There are the chatty and arrogant young guns—Starbuck, Kat, Octavia Blake, Clarke Griffin, Johanna, Nichols, Leslie Shay, Flaca and Maritza—and the quiet ones—Lexa, River Tam, Lucy Diamond, and Dark Willow—who all sit close to Spencer's table in the middle with the Skanks. (Mack's term, but it fits.) Then, the adults sit on the other end. Some names, she knows for sure—Corky, Violet, Sarah Connor (the less scary one), Regina Mills, Joan Watson, Sophia Burset, Sameen Shaw, Big Boo, and Vasquez. Other names, she’s still working on—the zombies instructor, the bee lady (Bridget? Fidgie? What was it?), a hot blonde named Mor-something, and a few more she can’t see clearly from here. They seem to keep their distance from the younger girls, which is fine by Spencer, since they look much more dangerous.

But then there’s a definite racial shift at the near end by the door. Spencer asked about this once, when she thought their collective glares were aimed at her for some reason. But no, they were staring down Aphasia. Despite their somewhat mixed ranks, the ringleader, Vee, is very much into “Black Power,” as it was described to Spencer, and she’s pissed as hell that Aphasia and Hermione won’t join her crew.

“We’re hot shit,” Aphasia had said, “and we got all kinds of stuff that she wants.”

“But?”

Aphasia looked more serious than ever. “She the devil.” Then she dove back into her tuna casserole, and that was that.

Spencer doesn’t know as many of the women down there with Vee. There’s the other Sarah Connor and that woman afraid of the number four, Jessica Huang. Otherwise, it’s strangers. Taking stock for a moment, Spencer can’t help but notice how tired everyone looks, not just at that end but everywhere. Shark Week seems to have taken a lot out of everyone, literally and figuratively. Spencer’s desperate to talk to someone—anyone—who might have also seen the spider and would believe her. But after her own “friends” (if you could call them that) laughed her off, who knows what these other crazies would do if she brought it up. Spencer might quickly find herself as the new cell block punching bag or knife target. She needs to find someone she can trust. Until then, she has to hope she can get through to Quinn.

Spencer lines up to get her tray of toast and tomato soup, and tries not to think about the unlikeliness that it contains actual tomatoes. She plops down next to Aphasia, who doesn’t seem to notice she’s there. Her eyes are on someone across the room. Spencer looks in that direction, and sure enough, it’s that Hermione girl.
Before she can ask for the story, Kat cuts in, “Hey, where’s Vause?”

“Who?” Spencer looks around for someone to fill her in.

“She’s usually over there.” Quinn turns to her left to check one of the tables by the door. “With Corky and Violet.”

Spencer thinks back to her first day when she saw their cell. Corky was on the bed with a beautiful woman in glasses, but Spencer never learned her name. That woman, she realized now, was nowhere to be seen. “You think something happened to her?” The conspiracy theory is back on track.

“She’s probably just taking a leak,” Mack dismisses.

“I don’t know,” Lucy Diamond says. “They do look pretty sad over there.”

It was true—Corky and Violet weren’t mounting each other on the breakfast table or even groping each other excessively, just poking at their food in silence. They looked like they hadn’t slept in a week.

“If something did happen to her,” Spencer says, “that makes four since...when? Stacey was first, right?”

“January, I think?” Quinn pauses, reflecting. “It was right after the holidays. Jenny said Stacey disappearing was the second best present she could’ve gotten.”

Spencer’s too scared to ask what would’ve been first. Knowing this group, the answer is probably something like “anal beads.”

...And now I’m done with breakfast.

Looking away, she sees Aphasia is focused on Hermione again. The rest of the table keeps chattering about how hot Alex Vause is and the various positions they’ll use on her if she comes back, but Spencer tunes into the silent communication instead.

Looking left, then right, and taking a deep breath, Aphasia nods at Hermione, who rises from her seat and heads toward them. She loops through the rows of tables, trying to look innocent but failing, and, to Spencer’s surprise, passes right behind them without stopping. Aphasia shuffles in her seat and watches Hermione reach the end of the row to an open space. All around Spencer, there’s a murmur of “There she goes again."

Hermione stops, now with quite a distance between herself and Aphasia, and turns to face the room. She has a wooden rod in her hand that wasn’t there before, and Spencer is only starting to guess what it might be when there is a sudden, deafening crack! and Hermione vanishes into fucking thin air.

“WHOA!” Spencer shouts. “What was that!”

Dark Willow rolls her eyes. “Show-off.”

The guards rush in and charge the spot where Hermione once stood, but she’s long gone. The Mess Hall erupts with whooping and hollering, cheering their escaped comrade and laughing at the guards. It’s clear that this has happened before. Hermione isn’t so new after all, and from the look of it, she’s the hero of space prison. Everyone is celebrating except for Aphasia. Well, and Dark Willow, who’s doing a polite golf-clap.
Spencer can’t help but ask over the noise, “Seriously, what was that? She’s really gone? Like, out-of-here gone?”

Aphasia takes a bite of her sandwich and chews, staring down at the table as the party continues around them. After a moment she swallows and says, quietly, “She’ll be back.” Then, without missing another beat, Aphasia turns to the girls behind them and gives celebratory high-fives, laughing and joining in the noise like nothing’s wrong at all.

********************

Aphasia and Mack both take Wednesday classes, so Spencer conveniently finds that she and Quinn have the cell to themselves for an hour. They’re up on Quinn’s bunk together, despite having plenty of room to spread out. Spencer is still avoiding her bunk, and they’re quite comfortable together now. They’ve stayed safe this way so far, why stop now?

Their feet are tangled at the end of the bed, and Spencer drifts off, thinking about how something so simple as this can feel so intimate. She’s looking down at the crisscross of ankles when she notices...an empty space where a pinky toe should be. She instinctively wiggles her toes to see if it’s her foot, but it’s not, thank god. For all she knows, a spider bite could make it turn black and fall off in the night or something.

Spencer wonders what happened to Quinn—Was she born without it? Did she get hurt?—but doesn’t feel brave enough to ask. Besides, “Hey, where’s your toe?” isn’t a polite conversation starter, so she lets it go for now. Instead, she asks, “I’m going to have to find someplace else to be this evening, huh?” Spencer absently strokes the thin, light hairs on Quinn’s forearm with her thumb. They’ve been snuggling quietly for about fifteen minutes; Quinn might be passed out.

“Hmm?”

“It’s Wednesday. I am not substituting as your spank princess.”

Quinn laughs. “Like Mack would even let you.”

Spencer leans back so she can just barely see Quinn out of the corner of her eye. “She’s crazy, you know that, right?” She feels Quinn’s nose on her ear and shivers.

Quinn hums a little against Spencer’s neck and sighs. “I have a weakness for brunettes.” Quinn traces a finger along Spencer’s ear, tucking her hair back. “You haven’t complained.”

Spencer huffs and flips onto her back, so she can look into Quinn’s eyes. “I am nothing like her.” She almost adds, “And who said I want you to have a thing for me, anyway?” but doesn’t. Because that would be crazy talk. She doesn’t give a damn who Quinn has eyes for, really. Just, you know, watch out for weirdos; one friend to another. A gal to her pal.

But please keep doing that thing to my ear, holy Moses.

“No,” Quinn agrees, “Mack’s best talents are day drinking and bad pick-up lines. You, on the other hand, can see invisible spiders and name every country in the former Soviet Union alphabetically.”

“And I bathe.”

Quinn pulls back a bit so she can look Spencer in the eye. “You do take a lot of showers.”

Spencer smiles. “I am a total catch.” For a moment, she loses herself in the sensation of Quinn burying her nose once more against the soft skin under Spencer’s earlobe. Her mind flashes,
remembering this is hardly the first time Quinn’s cozied up to someone like this. “So, who are all these other brunettes? If they’re inmates, I totally want to guess.”

Quinn vetoes the idea with an mm-mm. “No guessing.” But her tone implies that there’s certainly more to that story. She pauses, then her voice softens. “You already know the most important one.”

Spencer’s heart skips a beat at the thought that Quinn might mean her. But no, that would be ludicrous. And also really gay. And inappropriate. And gay. And narcissistic. And really, really gay. She looks at the ceiling so Quinn won’t be able to see the hope in her eyes. (Really gay hope. Ugh! Stop!) “Who?”

Quinn takes a deep breath. “Rachel. I believe you may remember her as Mistress Berry.”

Spencer bolts upright. “Seriously?”

Quinn rolls her eyes. “Let’s just say, back in high school she was kind of scary in a different way. More sweaters and knee socks, less leather and high heels. But still really bossy and ambitious.” She shrugs. “Confidence is hot.”

Spencer’s trying to fit together two puzzle pieces that seem, well, not fitty. “You dated the dominatrix in high school. Wow.” She flops back down and laughs once at the thought. But then she feels something else rumbling in the pit of her stomach. It’s either the beef stew from lunch, or...well. She really hopes it’s the stew.

The mattress shifts, and suddenly Quinn’s smirking face is right in front of hers. “Are you jealous?”

Spencer gives a delicate snort. Like she’d even dignify that with an actual answer. She needs a topic change. Right now. So, she removes her right leg from the tangle and lifts it to tap her big toe on Quinn’s foot. “What’s this story?”

Quinn shifts uncomfortably and pulls her foot away, burying it under the sheet with a sigh. “It’s nothing.” There’s a long, awkward silence, and Spencer can tell she has screwed up and crossed a line. But then Quinn says, “I just trusted the wrong person,” and begins grazing a thumb back and forth across Spencer’s earlobe.

Her breath catches, and it feels like she’s paralyzed.

Quinn gazes at her with a small smile as she curls her fingertips to drag along Spencer’s cheek in a circle. She runs a thumb along Spencer’s lips, eyes watching it slip back and forth, and Spencer’s frozen in time, heart pounding in her ears, because this is happening—she knows it’s happening—and she has no idea what to do or what to think about it. And then, before she can take another breath, Quinn moves her thumb away and brings her lips there instead.

And it’s soft, so soft. Spencer’s suddenly lost in the immediate and overwhelming response from her body. She feels blood rushing to her head, feels her skin tingle all over. Then, Quinn flicks a tongue over Spencer’s bottom lip and gently tugs on it with her teeth before kissing her again, a little firmer this time, and Spencer’s off in orbit somewhere. At some point—hours later? days?—Quinn withdraws, but not far, as their noses are still grazing against each other.

Spencer opens her mouth to speak, but only a weak noise comes out. She closes her eyes to reduce the sensory overload and focus on forming words, but it’s useless. She can still feel Quinn’s skin against hers, and now there are fingers laced together, and Spencer’s the one leaning in this time.

As their mouths connect once more, Spencer pushes into the pillow to fight for a better angle,
because this is far too fucking good to mess up, and if she’s going to be kissing Quinn, she wants to do it right. Quinn seems to take the hint and lifts herself up until she’s propped on her elbow, towering over Spencer and taking back control of the kiss. Spencer shifts underneath naturally, like they’ve done this a hundred times. But even though she’s used to being on this side of a kiss, back against the bed and warmth above her, that’s the only thing familiar, because nothing Toby ever did compares to what Quinn is doing right now.

Spencer’s taken completely by the new sensations, like she’s never kissed someone before in her life. And, shit, if this is what kissing is supposed to be, she thinks, then maybe I haven’t. Her tongue moves delicately against Quinn’s, and it’s so wonderful yet so foreign—no struggle for power, no clumsiness, no brute force. It’s quite the opposite, the way Quinn parts her lips softly to let Spencer in, or how Quinn’s mouth is almost hovering as they slide against each other. Spencer had no idea a hardened criminal could be so gentle. Her body tingles as the softness magnifies each point of contact. It’s almost too much, and Spencer doesn’t know if she wants to cry or keep kissing Quinn, or both.

But then she hears something far away, pulling her back to reality—The heavy boot steps of her other cellmates and the accompanying guard returning from class hour. Quinn groans and pulls away, and Spencer snaps back to harsh, sobering reality, like waking from a good dream to find your house is on fire.

Quinn drops her forehead to Spencer’s shoulder, uttering a soft, “Fuck,” under her breath, then sits upright and pulls away.

Spencer somehow regains control of her limbs and practically flings herself off the bunk mere seconds before Mack and Aphasia appear, chatting with exaggerated hand gestures about how awesome nipple rings are and how Mack can’t wait for Aphasia’s DIY Piercings class to start tomorrow. Spencer’s frankly a little surprised, through the haze of I just made out with Quinn, that Mack’s nipples aren’t already pierced, but that’s neither here nor there. Aphasia’s follow-up comments for Mack—at least the stray words Spencer’s catching, like “cooch”—indicate she has some very ambitious lesson plans prepared. Spencer’s not really listening, but she hopes Mack considers lobotomies a DIY piercing. A crucifixion would make an impressive a final project.

As the door closes behind them, Mack shoots Spencer a glare that could cut glass, but her focus only lingers for a second before it shifts to Quinn, now smirking. “Ready for tonight?”

It’s a performance; Spencer knows it. All the same, the baby hairs on Spencer’s neck stand on end as Quinn hums back, “Always.”

And with that, Spencer’s heart drops into her stomach to join the beef stew and roaring, raging jealousy. She’s on her feet before she even realizes it. “Boomer!” Spencer calls out, waving an arm through the bars and praying the guard hasn’t left the cell block entirely.

After a moment, Boomer pops into view. “What?”

“All chance I can work in the warden’s office tonight? I’ll do a double shift.”

Boomer scoffs but remains emotionless. “Wow, you don’t waste any time, do you?”

“Please, I really really need to get out of here.”

“Tough shit, inmate. You get out when I say you get out. Not tonight.”
“Please, if I could just talk to Sylv—”

“The warden’s busy, and so am I. Keep it in your pants.” As the guard walks back down the hall, Spencer can clearly hear her mutter, “Pervy bitch.”

Fuck.

But even if she was able to duck out tonight for an hour or so, what the hell is she going to do in the future? She’s in here for life. She can’t just avoid these two forever. Without a proper distraction, Spencer might have to face how she actually feels about that kiss. Which is a lot. But she has absolutely no idea what any of it means.

She really wishes Emily were here to talk to right now. Or Aria. Or even Hanna.

Spencer sighs to herself and considers drawing with Aphasia just so she doesn’t have to even look at Quinn and Mack for the rest of the day. She spares them a glance anyway as she walks toward the back but immediately regrets it. Limbs tangled, hair mussed, they’re staring straight at her.

She doesn’t know which is worse, Quinn’s unreadable expression or the smug smile etched plainly across Mack’s face as she says, “Hey, Aphasia, get the paddle.”
Never Say Never

Chapter Notes

Here’s the character photo index.

It turns out Aphasia is a tougher Monopoly opponent than Spencer had anticipated. Her cellmate is sitting on several thousand dollars in cash and owns two entire sides of the board. Not only does Aphasia have a strong propensity toward greed and hoarding, she is also quite the savvy businesswoman. That, or she is just stealing from the bank. It would be on brand.

“You gonna roll or what?” Aphasia asks Spencer, who’s mentally calculating the rate of return on two houses for the light blues.

“Put that shit away,” Mack interjects. Summoning all her strength, she manages to get up from her bed, where she’s been lying face-down all morning.

It seems Quinn went extra hard on her last night, and Spencer hopes she’s trying to turn Mack off to the scheduled weekly spankings entirely. It’d give Quinn a passive way out from the situation; she wouldn’t be abandoning her duties if Mack just quit. Unfortunately, aside from the occasional wince when she sat on the benches at breakfast, Mack’s not showing any real signs of regret. Crankiness, yes, but that’s typical of a day that ends in Y.

“Why?” Aphasia sounds irritated. “I’m schoolin’ this girl right now.”

“You need a fucking court order? Need me to say ‘pretty please do it’ like your Mama did when I was banging her last night?”

Aphasia looks sincerely confused. “Quinn ain’t my Mama.”

Mack doesn’t reply, just walks across the board in her bare feet in an attempt to end the game definitively. But it backfires as she stumbles, plastic hotels stuck in her soles, cursing loudly. Unable to stand, she falls hard on her ass and screams again.

The morning is suddenly looking up.

Spencer doesn’t have the energy to fight for her right to continue a game she’s losing (quite dreadfully, in fact), so she helps tidy up Mack’s mess into the box. As the bank thief slips the game back under the mattress, Spencer wonders what other possible things might be under there that Quinn could assault Mack with. Barbed wire, perhaps? Or a nail gun? Maybe a machete?

Her mind wanders, conflating memories of Toby’s murder with the grumpy girl before her, and she delights in thoughts of how Mack’s skull would crack under her croquet mallet. She can almost hear it, if she tries hard enough. Sweet, sweet music.

“Now I’m bored,” Aphasia says, still sitting cross-legged on the floor.

Mack groans. “I need to get drunk.” She reaches behind the toilet, just the full length of her arm span from her spot on the floor, and retrieves the bottle of Pruno. It’s still over half full.
Spencer really wishes she wouldn’t. “It’s ten in the morning.”

“She had a hard night,” Quinn says, looking up from a library copy of To Taste Her Nectar. Spencer hadn’t even realized Quinn was awake. She’s a bit like a cat in how she spends much of her day quietly lounging around, much too cool for anyone, and in and out of sleep except for meals, baths, and crotch-licking. Setting the book aside, Quinn climbs down to join them on the floor, motioning for Mack to come, too. “Bring it over.”

Mack takes a long swig out of the bottle, grimacing with each swallow, and burps loudly. Spencer can smell it from six feet away. “Still better than Starbucks,” Mack says with a wince.

Spencer turns with a dubious look. Though she always supports The Brew over the major corporate chains, this is too ludicrous a claim to let slide. “Yeah, somehow I doubt that.”

Mack holds out a pointing finger. “That shit’ll make you blind.”

“Coffee makes you blind?”

Mack looks at Spencer like she’s a moron. “Who the fuck has coffee?”

“You just…” but the way Mack’s gawking at her proves this conversation is just a dead end of frustration. “Nevermind.”

The four sit in a disjointed circle, Quinn and Aphasia leaning against opposite bunks, Spencer facing Mack with her back to the bars. There’s a moment of awkward silence where they all just watch Mack continue to force down the muddy chunks, and Spencer wonders just how much she’s going to drink. This could go from gross to impressive and back to gross very quickly. At least she’s near the toilet.

“Never have I ever,” Quinn says, “taken it up the ass.”

Spencer blinks at the incredibly random and private confession, turning around with what must be a bizarre expression. “Umm. Okay?”

Mack throws back another glug. “That’s a fucking lie.”

“I know.” Quinn’s tone implies it’s obvious and intentional, though Spencer can’t figure out why in the world this conversation is taking place. Quinn reaches for the bottle pointedly, snatching it right out of Mack’s mouth, and takes a sip. Her face crumples in disgust as she barely manages to force it down. “Oh my god, that is foul.”

Spencer’s really glad the kissing has already happened, because she surely doesn’t want to know what Quinn’s mouth tastes like right now.

Mack takes the bottle back. “You’re welcome.” She then turns to Spencer, extends the Pruno toward her, and stares. “You ever let ‘em in the back door, Pillow Princess?”

“Me?” Spencer’s eyes are the size of hubcabs. “What? No. No way. I mean, no. I don’t, no.”

Aphasia tries to hold in a laugh and fails. Spencer glares at her, but that only makes Aphasia laugh harder. “Girl, you could make diamonds in there. Get yo-self rich.”

A loud bang on the bars startles Spencer; she didn’t realize just how tightly this situation has her wound. Mack scrambles to grab the bottle and attempts to hide it, but it’s pointless and embarrassingly unsuccessful.
Fortunately, Boomer doesn’t seem to care. “Let’s go.” There’s a large, canvas-covered bin on wheels next to her with the word LAUNDRY stenciled onto the side.

Mack grins and rises to unzip her uniform. “You heard the lady.”

But Spencer’s waiting for the exchange—surely there must be a new uniform coming while her current one’s being washed. Right? That only makes sense. So, of course, there isn’t.

Laundry Day has just upped the ante on their game quite significantly, turning it to Strip…Whatever It’s Called, as the four girls are left in their undies and bras on the cold floor. If Spencer hadn’t been peeing and showering in front of them for the last two weeks, she’d feel even more self-conscious. At the moment, it’s feeling like a summer camp staple gone awry. And Spencer’s trying not to think about how good Quinn looks, because that would be even gayer than kissing her.

Probably.

“Your turn.” Mack’s looking right at Spencer.

Blinking to recover from her daydream, she says, “I don’t understand the rules,” and she means it. So far, all she knows is Rule #1: You will get really embarrassed.

“Say something you’ve never done,” Quinn explains. “Anyone who has done it has to drink.”

Spencer’s mind suddenly goes blank. What is she supposed to say? Does it have to be about sex? Can she make something up? These girls don’t know her, not really. She could fake her way through this. She’s a skilled liar.

“Um,” she begins. The pressure is on. The only things coming to mind are things she has done.

I killed a boy.

I traveled into space.

I went to prison.

I made out with a girl.

“I have never had sex with a girl.” There. Honest, but not far off her mental track. Not far off even a little bit.

Mack rolls her eyes as she drinks from the bottle, then Aphasia passes it over to Quinn. Spencer’s not sure why she’s being judged so harshly when Aphasia hasn’t been drinking anything either. Maybe they think she’s lame for it, or maybe it was too obvious a statement, but at least they believe it. She doesn’t want to ever know what that nasty shit tastes like.

Quinn takes the bottle by the neck and doesn’t hesitate to pay her fine. Mack reaches out for it again and ponders her options for her turn.

“I have never fingered a girl in the church basement during her cousin’s Christening and then made out with her older sister at the house party afterward,” Mack says triumphantly. She laughs and takes another drink. Then three more.

Quinn isn’t impressed. “You need some new material.”

“My turn!” Aphasia rocks back and forth on her crossed legs. “Oh! I know. Never have I ever had sex with a dude, ‘cause that’s just nasty.”
Oh shit. Shit, shit, shit.

Mack laughs again and hands the bottle back to Quinn, who reluctantly drinks while shooting daggers at Mack.

Spencer’s heart is pounding, but she tries to play it cool. Then, Quinn holds the bottle out to her with a look that says, Go on, it’s okay.

“I didn’t...um...” All eyes are on her. So much for not being a shitty liar. “I haven’t…”

“Yes, you have.” Mack burps again. “Just drink it.”

Oh, god. No, no, no, no, no.

“Look, I’m sorry, there is no way I’m—”

“DRINK IT!” Mack shouts. “You think that shit’s easy to make? Do you know how LONG it takes? How much WORK? RESPECT the wine, Maple Tits.” She pauses, squinting at Spencer through her haze. “You don’t want me to feel insulted, do you?” Her voice is downright threatening.

“It’s not that bad,” Quinn lies, and gestures for Spencer to finally take the bottle out of her outstretched hand.

“Drink it before I tell you what’s in it,” Mack says, trying a different tack. At Spencer’s hesitation, Mack looks to Aphasia. “What’d we start with, the old meatloaf?”

“Nuh uh, first was that yogurt that went bad but they gave it to us any—”

Oh god oh god oh god, JUST STOP.

Spencer’s got a mouthful of the putrid, gag-inducing slime before Aphasia can finish her sentence. Explosions of color burst behind her eyelids, and Spencer’s pretty sure she’s going blind. She can feel her teeth rotting in real time. It’s like her mouth has dysentery. Tears stream down her face as she makes herself swallow, jaw quivering, and finally she’s scraping her tongue with her fingers and hearing nothing but her own “Blehhhhhhh!” She’d throw it up, but then she’d just be reliving it.

Mack takes the bottle and finishes it off. “Knew you’d like it.”

“Coulda told you that was a bad idea,” comes a new voice from just outside the cell.

Spencer blinks several times, trying to focus on the unfamiliar face. It’s a girl about her age in a P.M.S. uniform, leaning against the bars with her arms crossed. She doesn’t appear to be armed with anything but a know-it-all smirk.

“When you’re ready for something that doesn’t make you want to die five times,” the girl continues, “tell Boomer the toilet’s backed up and have something useful to trade. Going rate for a can of ninety proof is a digital watch and four Starburst.”

Spencer laughs. “Where am I supposed to get that?”

“Not my problem.”

“Aww, Raven.” Mack pouts at her competition with fake empathy. “Are you not smart enough to know the big hand points to the hour?”

“That’s the minute hand,” Quinn says.
Mack whips around. “Shut up! I was testing her!”

Raven ignores the riffraff and looks at Spencer. “I’ll be around.” And with that, she slinks out of sight.

Spencer has so many questions. “Who was that?”

“She works for Sue,” Quinn replies.

“Sue needs a bartender?”

Quinn takes a long drag off a cigarette. “She’s a mechanic, supposedly. Mostly she just peddles vodka from the engine room. Probably makes a better living that way.”

Mack kicks the wall. “She takes all my customers!”

“Don’t hate the girl for having a successful business strategy,” Aphasia tells her. “Maybe you should play more Monopoly.”

Quinn taps some ashes into the open bottle of Pruno.

“Suck a dick,” Mack says. “I already have plenty of reasons to hate her.”

“Like what?” Spencer asks. If this girl both works for Sue and is running a prison black market, god only knows how dangerous she could be.

“Buffy says Raven’s super smart. Like, got-into-NASA-at-sixteen smart. I think she got a twenty-thousand on her SATs.” Mack cracks her knuckles. “I mean, how did she even end up in this shithole? If she’s so smart, why the fuck is she here? I asked if she has some kind of record, maybe Sue’s got something on her, but Boomer says the girl’s squeaky clean.” Mack points a finger to punctuate her words. “Not a single bad thing has ever happened to her. Never broke a window or a bone or nothing. That’s some charmed life shit.”

“Mmhmm,” Aphasia hums in agreement.

“I say, fuck people like that.” Mack pumps her body forward, like she’s gonna take out Raven with a chest bump. “Thinking they can just waltz in and take over what I worked hard to build? If she keeps showing her face in my territory, something’s gonna break all right.”

“Right before Starbuck breaks both your legs,” Aphasia says.

Mack flips her off with both hands. “I’d like to see her try. Drunk motherfucker.”

Spencer’s trying to follow along. “She’s in on this vodka thing, too?”

Aphasia laughs. “Mmhmm. Raven’s the brain, Starbuck’s the pain.”

“Catchy,” Spencer says flatly.

Mack scowls and mumbles, “Pain in my ass.”

“They’re business partners,” Aphasia tells Spencer, suggestively raising her eyebrows. Then she makes a crude gesture with her hands, poking one finger in and out of her closed fist. “Sex business.”

Quinn laughs but doesn’t refute it. “They’re kind of the celebrity couple of the prison that everyone’s
obsessed with.”

“Well. There’s a prison catch-phrase if she’s ever heard one.

Mack passes out a few minutes later, much to Spencer’s delight, and Aphasia crawls back to her bunk to play Solitaire with a set of coasters. Quinn’s most of the way through her book, and it’s killing Spencer that she isn’t up there with her, kissing or cuddling or just being close. She can’t climb up without shaking the bed, which means risking waking Pruno Mars over there. Of course, Quinn could always come down to her bed, she realizes. Strange that it never occurred to her to ask before. (With no new spider sightings as of late, she’s felt moderately safe lying on it with the lights on for a little bit at a time, just not at night.) But Mack would have an even better view of them when she woke up, so it’s still a no-go.

Lying on her back, she asks the room, “Does anyone have anything I can do?”

She can feel Aphasia’s weight shift as she moves to the end of her bed. Spencer can’t see the corner of the mattress lift above the metal frame, but she hears the sound of digging. After a few seconds, an outstretched arm appears, holding a disorganized Rubik’s cube.

Spencer hasn’t ever tried these, as she never had endless hours to spare back home, but it’s a welcome sight now. Added bonus, it looks like Aphasia could never finish it, so Spencer has the chance to show her up. “Thanks.”

Fifteen minutes later, she’s gotten nowhere, just moving rows around aimlessly. “These are pretty tough, huh.”

“No.”

Spencer blinks. “You don’t think so?”

Aphasia’s arm pops back into view with a reaching hand, gesturing for her to give it back.

“Uh, okay.” Spencer hands it to her, more than a little annoyed. Now what’s she going to do for the next few hours? Listen to Aphasia peel off and rearrange the stickers while Spencer counts the screws in her bed frame for the hundredth time?

Less than two minutes later, the cube is thrust back into view, each side a perfect solid color. Spencer sits up. “You’re shitting me.” She takes it from the girl’s hand and examines each face. It’s done, stickers fully intact.

“Keep it,” Aphasia says.

And just like that, Spencer’s reminded yet again that nothing in this place is as it seems. She turns the cube over in her hand again and again, as if she’ll find a flaw, something new, if she just keeps looking. At the sound of Quinn putting her finished book away, Spencer turns to just watch her for a minute. Mack’s still out cold and won’t see her staring.

Spencer wonders what pieces she needs to turn, what moves to make, to solve the puzzle of Quinn. She wonders if everything is as much of a mess as she thinks, or if she’s only a few steps away and
just can’t see it.

As if right on cue, “Hung Up” starts blaring over the intercom, kicking off Power Hour.

*Every little thing that you say or do, I’m hung up, I’m hung up on you…*

Spencer throws the cube on the floor, louder than she means to, and turns over to face the wall with a grunt. She really needs something new to think about.
It's Friday afternoon, just a quiet hour like any other, when Spencer hears the sound. Layered tones, kind of a whirring, whooshing noise—in and out like breathing, but mechanical. It's getting louder with every pulse.

*Oh fuck, hull breach! We're all going to get sucked into space!*

But there are no alarms, no announcements, no screams—only the screeching sound. Spencer blinks in disbelief. In the corridor right outside her cell, something large and blue is appearing and disappearing, like it’s blending into reality in time with the sound.

“Hello?” Spencer calls out, but she’s alone in the cell. The others are at classes, and there are no guards in sight. The echo of the sound is deafening now. “UM. HELP?! SOMEBODY?”

But she can’t even hear her own voice over the noise. The blur beyond the bars solidifies, and Spencer reads the words “POLICE Public Call BOX” across the top of the wooden spaceship.

*A phone booth? What the hell?*

The noise dies down finally, and the door to the box opens. A red-headed woman in a brown leather jacket steps out with a hand on her hip.

“Oi! Spaceman!” she calls back inside, “What the hell kind of holiday is this?”

A thin man with spiky hair and black-rimmed glasses pokes his head out from behind the door. “Prison, looks like.”

“One of hundreds across the galaxy.” He’s holding some kind of glowing silver and blue contraption in his hand, about the size of a carrot, and is scanning the air and walls, then Spencer’s cell. The high-pitched buzz sets Spencer’s teeth on edge. “Home to the most nefarious criminals in the universe. Nasty types, best not to engage.”

The woman looks right at Spencer. “You! What’d you do?”

But before Spencer can respond, the man puts out a hand, looking around frantically, then at Spencer, then around again, as if they’ve just awoken a giant monster that’s going to eat them. “Shh shh shh shh! Nooo, no no no no. That’s it, back in the TARDIS. Off we go.”

The woman looks as confused as Spencer feels. “But we’ve *only just arrived.*” Oh, she is pissed. “This was your bloody idea! You know, typical day: distress call, we almost get ourselves killed, blah blah blah?”
“Nope, false alarm. Sorry, Donna.” He puts his hands on her shoulders and tries to push her back in.

“Wait a bloody minute!” She bats at him, smacking him several times on the face and shoulder before he relents. “What kind of prison is this, anyway?” she asks, looking from cell to cell. “Bad Bitches of the Bellorian Galaxy?”

*This woman’s sass puts Hanna to shame.*

“She doesn’t look so bad,” the woman says, pointing back at Spencer.

*Thank you. I think.*

He leans in close to the woman’s ear, but Spencer can hear him, just barely. “It’s a lesbian prison.”

“HEY!” Spencer starts, “I’m not—“, then she stops, not wanting to draw more attention.

The woman seems too intrigued and doesn’t bother whispering in her disbelief. Quite the opposite, in fact. She looks back at Spencer like a zoo exhibit. “They have LESBIANS in SPACE?”

“Oh yes,” the man says. “Almost exclusively, in my experience. Now, back inside we go!”

“But!” She’s protesting as he leans his whole weight on her. “SPACE LESBIANS!”

The woman’s grip gives way and the door slams. The shrieking whoosh is somehow even louder this time, if that’s possible, but still no guards or alarms or anything to acknowledge something’s amiss. The wooden box fades in and out until it's gone, and Spencer has no fucking clue what just happened. That’s twice now in a week she’s seen something disappear into thin air right in front of her eyes.

She has to wonder, if it’s so easy to get out of this place, why can’t she do it herself?
The next week crawls by at a snail’s pace. Each day, Spencer finds herself trapped in a mind loop of, “I wonder what’s happening back home,” followed by, “I’ll never see home again, so what’s the point?” Then it’s, “Maybe I’ll take a class after all.” But she reviews the course list in her mind and quickly remembers why she’s abstained thus far. After that it’s, “Maybe I’ll go get some books!” But then she considers the available titles. And really, reading about fictional women getting to do all the things she can’t would just make her ongoing frustration worse.

It’s like cell 10 has a fucked-up custody agreement where Quinn belongs to Mack during the day but then is Spencer’s at night. Only, Mack isn’t clued in on all the details, and the deal is shit anyway. When Spencer does get to climb up next to Quinn, she’s too afraid to start a conversation and piss off the psycho below. Instead, their exchanges are mostly physical—not sexual but still intimate. She’s trying to push the boundaries of touchy-feely with neck rubs and the like when they’re out of direct line of sight, or sneaking a silent kiss when she can. But those moments are few and far between, because Mack is very observant when it comes to Quinn.

Spencer’s beginning to think maybe she did just imagine Charlotte and her webs. Hallucinogenic drugs injected into the food, or something. Her bunk looks more like the safe haven she needs it to be with each passing day, but Spencer’s not quite willing to relinquish the few uninterrupted hours she gets with Quinn. Not yet.

So, it’s easy to pretend she’s still too scared. Prison is scary.

But, it’s frustrating. She now understands why so much sex happens all the time in this prison. It’s nearly driving her mad that she can’t get her own release, but her options are very few at this point. Quinn’s obviously off-limits (if Spencer wants to live out her life-sentence), Mack is a world of no-thank-you, and Aphasia is, well, someone who sleeps atop her pet bugs. Or, slept. Past tense. Not that that makes it any better.

Maybe someone traded her bugs for vodka? That’s a sentence Spencer’s never strung together before.

And, you know, she’s more than a little angry, too, that Quinn had no reservations about resuming her rampant sexual escapades with Mack the moment Shark Week ended. It stings like betrayal, and the last person who did that took a mallet to the head. Not that she’s comparing the two, because “kissed me and then spanked a crazy bitch” is far lower on the scale of importance than “broke my heart and mind and caused me to go to the nuthouse for several weeks.”

But she’s still fucking frustrated.

On top of everything else, Spencer wakes on Wednesday with the familiar feeling of knowing she started in the night. She shifts to check the mattress, but thankfully, the damage is still contained (barely, given the thin fabric down there). Spencer’s never been so grateful that the jumpsuits are black. She makes her way to the toilet and hunts around for any leftover peach wrappers, to no avail.
“Aphasia!” she whispers, crouched over on the silver bowl. Always being the first one awake has its advantages at times, but this is not one of them. She won’t be off this pot for a while without some help, and she can’t bear the thought of Mack laughing at her, or, worse, Quinn seeing her like this. “Aphasia!”

Nothing. Her cellmate’s snoring away with a hand tucked under her mattress. “Fucking hell,” Spencer mutters, and launches the roll of toilet paper at the sleeping girl’s head, striking her shoulder with a soft thud as it falls to the ground.

Instantly, Aphasia wakes and shoots upright, her withdrawn hand bringing a giant knife with it.

“WHOA, whoa!” Spencer hisses with flailing arms. “It’s just me!”

Aphasia blinks sleepily, sighs, and slips the knife back under her bed. “Did I miss waffles?”

“No, not yet. Hey, can I get one of those green tampons?”

Squinting and still half-asleep, Aphasia just stares at her for a moment, as if trying to make sense of her question. “Five dollars.”

Spencer furrows her brow. “Nobody has any money.”

Aphasia rears back, offended. “I got plenty of money!”

“Well, then I guess you don’t need mine!”

“Says who?”

“Will you please just give me a damn tampon?”

Clearly in no hurry, Aphasia reaches back under the mattress, and Spencer lets out a big sigh of relief. But Aphasia has just grabbed her knife again. She points it at Spencer’s face, moving it with each word. “Five. Dollars.”

Gesturing to the sleeping spank twins, Spencer whispers, “You gave them some for free! Why don’t I get one!”

“That was Shark Week. E’rybody need one on Shark Week. This ain’t Shark Week.”

“Well, I’m bleeding now.”

Aphasia tilts her head as her knife hand drops. “What-chu mean? You broke your vajayjay?”

Spencer’s face falls into her hands. Explaining to her mother that she was rejected from UPenn was easier than this. She is never getting off this toilet. And now she has no toilet paper.

Without warning, something smacks her in the leg with a light thwap. Spencer opens her eyes and sees a green wrapper by her right foot. A single tampon has never looked so beautiful.

Quinn rolls over and buries her face in her pillow without a word, irritated by the whole scene.

Spencer gratefully snatches up the gift and sticks her tongue out at Aphasia, who huffs and mumbles, “Tryin’ to steal my shit,” before turning over and going back to sleep.

**************************
By Sunday morning, the carousel of emotional turmoil is even worse than usual. Mack’s taking Quinn for a ride yet again, leaving Spencer forced to seek distraction from Aphasia. They’ve been getting along lately, even bonding over shared interests, such as chalk art drawings and strategies to ignore the furious moans several feet away. That’s proving difficult, though, with Mack being even louder than before and screaming Quinn’s name a lot. More than should be necessary, as far as Spencer’s concerned. She has to be doing it on purpose just to get under Spencer’s skin.

It’s working. After at least a half hour of this, Spencer's so tense that she nearly snaps a piece of pink chalk in two.

Aphasia just pats her shoulder. “Girl, you got it bad,” she whispers while drawing what seems to be a cross between a rhinoceros and a giraffe.

Spencer rolls her eyes. She does not have it bad. She does not have anything, good or bad or otherwise. Or, fine, fuck it, maybe she does. She’s clearly been obsessing about this for days. “Whatever,” she grumbles. “Not like I can do anything about it.”

“I thought that’s why you get shower time,” Aphasia says, like it’s the most obvious thing in the world and Spencer’s a colossal moron.

Mack’s final “QUINN!” echoes all down the cell block, and now a few minutes alone in the shower is starting to sound like a grand idea, if only so Spencer can be somewhere that is else.

“Boomer!” she yells as she jumps down off the bed, putting entirely too much effort into not looking over at them.

It takes a minute, but then Boomer’s apathetic face appears before her. “Let me guess.”

“I’d like some office time today.” Spencer tries to be as firm yet polite as she can. “If that works with the warden’s schedule, of course. Please.”

The office hours go almost as slowly as being locked in the cell, but at least Mack isn’t thrusting between Quinn’s legs on Sue’s desk. Spencer’s so distracted by what a lesbian melodrama her life has become that she can’t even work up the energy to look for more clues, she just does what she’s supposed to do. And she spends so much effort thinking about not thinking about Quinn that she may or may not have stuck S before R when alphabetizing. Whatever, paperwork is hard when you’re handcuffed.

Looks like her lawyer was right; Spencer apparently does have some latent bi-curious feelings. Fantastic. Shaking off that topic for later, she notices a crisp, green Missing Persons report for Aeryn Sun sitting on the desk.

Wait, I thought she died in a prison fight? And Sylvester had what’s left of the body?

Spencer scans the paper quickly, and it reveals a very different story: Missing prisoner, suspected escape, guards on high alert, highly confidential. And specific instructions to keep this internal until resolved.

Well. THAT’S interesting.

She reads through it all again, since she can’t make a copy and doesn’t want to risk stealing it. How can someone go missing for weeks at a time on a spaceship? A space prison, no less? Spencer frantically searches the area for a second report, making more of a mess than she should, but then the door opens without warning.
It’s Boomer. Time to go.

Shit.

Spencer pretends she was tidying a pile of papers, puts a final tap on the corners, and heads out of the office. She knows now that there’s more to this than she thought. There is a conspiracy. There is a mystery to be solved. And somewhere in that office are more clues. She just has to find them.

Should she tell the others about this? No, she decides. Fuck them. They’ve made it clear she’s on her own, at least until she has some proof in her hands. Her adrenaline is pumping with each step down the hall. Just like at home, the rush of good detective work is turning her on.

She’s so very, very glad it’s finally shower time.

Spencer’s still a little self-conscious as she stands under the showerhead with lukewarm water raining down on her. Running fingers through her hair, she double checks to be sure no one is around before she lets herself slide a hand down over her breasts, then abdomen. And, god, her fingers are ghosting through curls and over incredibly sensitive skin, and it’s been far, far too long.

Spencer presses two fingers hard where she needs it most, and a shudder rips through her as her body responds immediately. She’s fought for days to think of anything but Quinn, but now, fuck it. She works her hand back and forth, letting her mind wander to all those forbidden places. Quinn’s breath against her neck, Quinn’s tongue grazing across her ear, Quinn’s teeth tugging her bottom lip, Quinn’s hands...

God, those fucking hands. Spencer wants them everywhere. And a Hastings gets what she wants.

She plunges two fingers in without further preamble, hooking her thumb firmly to her clit, and the whimper that she’s fighting back echoes off the metal walls anyway.

And that fucking voice. She can almost hear Quinn, mocking her, teasing her.

“Look how badly you want me, Spencer.” A little laugh. “You’re shaking.”

And she is. She slaps her other hand against the wall and leans against it for support, because her knees are about to give way at any moment and she’d really rather not have bruises from a fall.

She’s close. She’s so close. After days of building tension and hearing first-hand what kind of sounds Quinn makes during sex, it’s not going to take much more to put her over that edge.

“Beg me to touch you, Spencer. Say you want it. Say you want me.”

“I...” Spencer bites down on her shoulder to keep from screaming out. She’s breathing hard and her arm is killing her, but she works her thumb back and forth faster and faster. She can’t stop now. Not when she’s imagining Quinn hovering above her, slowly reaching a hand low into her jumpsuit with a devilish grin on that beautiful face.

And then the door swings open.

FUCK.

NO! GODDAMNIT.

Spencer wants to die as she wrenches out her hand and tries desperately to look like she hasn’t just been furiously masturbating. If only the water were actually hot, she’d have an easy excuse for her
flushed skin.

In walks Boomer, leading a small group of ladies—of which she recognizes Lucy Diamond and Graham and Kat—and Spencer’s sure they all fucking know exactly what she was just doing. A few cough awkwardly and giggle, but Graham’s eyes size her up with a flirtatious smirk. The light swirls of blood at Spencer's feet only add to the picture she’s painted for them.

Spencer has never been more embarrassed in her life.

“Keep up the good work,” Graham says as she walks past. She misses grazing Spencer’s ass by an inch at most.

Spencer chokes down all that frustration—even worse now that she’d started and couldn’t finish—and snatches up her uniform to quickly dress and scurry to the door.

“Okay,” she mutters to Boomer, extending her hands to be cuffed again.

“Already?” Boomer has a look of, But they just got here? She shakes her head. “Whatever.”

Spencer steps back into the cell and throws herself down on her bed without a word. Killer spider or no killer spider, she just can’t take all these feelings anymore. Her nights with Quinn are over. They’ll go back to how things were before they started all that cuddle bullshit that only made it worse. No more touching. No kissing. No breaths against her ear. No warmth, no safety.

But hey—maybe now Mack will stop looking about five seconds, tops, from strangling Spencer with that seat belt.
“¡Buenos días!”
Spencer jerks awake to find Aphasia dangling half off the top bunk with the biggest, brightest grin. The first night back in her own bed had been uneventful until now; she’d even slept through most of it. She was overdue for something weird.

“¿Qué coño?” she growls as she instinctively switches her already overloaded brain to foreign language mode.

“Mexican Monday,” Quinn says from across the cell.
A tray slides across the floor into view, holding small bowls of suspicious rice and what must be beans. Spencer looks up to see Quinn smirk.

“Yeah, it’s not so bueno.”

Spencer stumbles over to examine the food close-up. If you can even call it food. It smells a lot like the toilet wine. Maybe the Pruno would pair nicely with this breakfast. “Why is this happening?”

Mack shrugs from her bunk. “Sylvester’s, like, 1/64th Mexican or something so we celebrate her ‘heritage’ once a year.”

Aphasia pulls castanets out from under her mattress and clacks away. “¡Arroz y frijoles!”

In about half a second, Mack flies off her bunk, heading right for Spencer, grabs a bowl of rice, and launches it at Aphasia. The bowl just barely misses her head and hits the wall, splattering rice all over her bunk and the floor. “You know I fucking hate those pincher things!”

“She’s afraid of lobsters,” Quinn explains.

Aphasia doesn’t even flinch, just starts plucking up rice clumps with her castanets and dropping them into her mouth. “¡Desayuno en la cama!” she sing-songs.

Spencer surveys the scene and decides to skip breakfast today. “So, Quinn,” she says with a little too much enthusiasm. “What are we reading today?”

Quinn looks up from her current choice of romance novel and displays the cover. *Panqueques Amarillas Asesinos y Escobas* doesn’t sound like much of a panty-ruiner to Spencer, but what does she know. “I need to hit the library later,” Quinn says sheepishly.

It’s a quiet morning in the cell, aside from the dull, sporadic staccato of Aphasia still eating rice up above. But then that guard Spencer saw once before—K. Greggs—marches a prisoner past, and Spencer recognizes her this time.
It’s Hermione.

Aphasia was right. She’s back.

Hermione doesn’t look into the cell as she passes, and no one speaks to her. In fact, the whole cell block is quiet, which is unusual for delivery of newcomers. But then, this girl isn’t new. Spencer knows that now.

*I guess her escape plan isn’t as sound as she thought.*

Once they’ve gone past, Spencer asks, “Hey, you okay?” Silence hangs over the room.

Aphasia is still picking rice off the bed and doesn’t meet Spencer’s eyes. She says quietly, “Hoy es un día feliz,” but she sure doesn’t seem to mean it.

Slinking back down to her mattress, Spencer realizes that if she wants to make it out of here alive herself, she has a lot of work to do. She’s miles behind Hermione.

She turns back to face her scribbled notes on the wall, and sighs. Yeah, Sue’s tangled up in lies about prisoner deaths, but how the hell is Spencer going to crack this case when she can’t roam freely to investigate? She still has no prime suspects, a theory built only on circumstantial reasoning, and a pathetic evidence list: one side of a phone conversation and the mental snapshot of a Missing Persons report.

There are no killer monsters in outer space. *Hell, maybe there is no spider in the first place.*

It’s been weeks since any sign of Charlotte, so maybe it was Spencer’s imagination after all. Space prison is fucked up, and she needed a coping mechanism. So, her subconscious created a manifestation of a familiar childhood character, building logic into a place that was inherently illogical and giving her a false sense of security. After befriending Quinn and establishing an actual interpersonal bond, her hallucinations ceased. Basically, her brain made it up to give herself an excuse to crawl into Quinn’s bed. A lust-driven fabrication of which Spencer should be deeply ashamed. And she is.

This realization is the first thing to make sense in a long time. And if she figured that out, then, dammit, she still has it. She can solve a murder mystery, even all by herself.

It’s what Spencer Hastings does.

Granting the premise that a warden has no reason to kill her own prisoners (*which, that should be easy, right?*), Spencer tries to think beyond Sue’s role in whatever’s happening. There has to be more she’s not seeing. If, somehow, Sue’s innocent, it means someone else is guilty. Or, even if Sue’s the one calling the shots, it’s unlikely she’s killing girls with her own two hands. Looking back over the list of names on the left-hand side, all the ones she knows, Spencer thinks about the various levels of violence and psychosis, and one name still stands out.

Lucy Fabray.

There is just something off about that girl. She’s downright creepy with her whole goody-two-shoes act and pink jumpsuit. Why the fuck is *she* in space prison anyway? And the goddamn Queen Bee, no less? It isn’t adding up. If she is killing people, playing the sweet-as-pie kindergarten teacher would be a perfect cover. She’d be the last one accused. Making her Spencer’s new prime suspect.

Time for some recon. And maybe some vodka.
“Hey, you have Play-Doh today, right?” she asks Mack in the friendliest, most nonchalant voice she can muster, considering how much she fucking hates this girl.

But Mack isn’t buying anything Spencer’s selling. “What do you care?”

Spencer chooses her words carefully. “I may have rushed to judgment before about Lucy.”

Quinn stops reading and raises an eyebrow.

“She seems like a nice person.” Spencer’s trying to stay as sincere as possible. The truth is, Lucy is fucking terrifying.

Quinn puts her nose back into her book. “She’s phony, and I hate her.”

Spencer takes a breath. “I was thinking I should give her another chance. Be more open-minded to people who might have a different way of doing things than I do. I like learning.” Mack’s staring straight through her. “Sooo...do you think I could tag along again? To class?” It’s really the only way Spencer can think of to get more information, short of accosting her in the Mess Hall. But she’s seen the scary brunettes Lucy runs with, and no thank you.

“Why would she even let you back in after you were a total dickbag?” It’s a very fair point.

“I messed up, I know, and that’s why I want to go back. I want the chance to apologize. Sue said it’s okay. I asked her last week.” That’s an outright lie, but hopefully it doesn’t show.

Mack sighs heavily and lies back down on her bunk. “Whatever.”

There, one obstacle overcome. Now she has momentum and a plan. She has something to do, thank you, Jesus. Her mind goes back to the Mess Hall last week and Hermione Houdini, which still doesn’t make any sense. Where did she go? How does that even work? ...and can Hermione take other people with her?

Obviously, there are some kinks to work out, seeing as how Hermione's right back in here, but it’s the closest thing to an escape plan Spencer has at the moment.

Aphasia’s made it clear she doesn’t want to talk about Hermione, but Spencer is running out of options, and for all she knows, running out of time as well. She’s been relying pretty heavily on her cellmates to make progress on this case, and even then it’s slow-going. It’s too bad they don’t share the same interest in solving it. They might actually get somewhere.

“Hey,” Spencer says, pulling herself up so that her chin rests on Aphasia’s mattress. “Can I talk to you for a minute?” She notices HERMIONE is spelled out in white rice just inches from her face. Aphasia stares at it and remains silent. “I’ll take that as a yes.” Spencer climbs up to sit at the end of the bed. She’s careful not to mess up Aphasia’s masterpiece as she settles in. They sit quietly there together for a moment as Spencer decides how to proceed, but one thing is very clear. “Does she love you, too?”

It’s soft enough that it feels like a private moment, and thankfully their cellmates aren’t butting in. Mack’s on sit-up number fifty-eight and counting, and Quinn’s meditating on her bed. While smoking.

Aphasia sniffs once and keeps staring at the rice. “I don’t know.” It’s the softest, saddest whisper Spencer’s ever heard.

“It’s too bad you can’t be in a cell together.” She doesn’t want to think about how she’d feel if she
and Quinn were separated, and that’s only just started. (Spencer’s promise to stop having gay feelings was short-lived.) This thing with Hermione sounds like a lot more.

“We already got five people in here,” Aphasia says, then corrects herself. “Four. But I ain’t asking for a move. We don’t want Sue knowing she and I got a thing. She already got enough attention on her as it is.”

*For instance, Spencer thinks, an entire cafeteria applauding.* “What was that? She just disappeared.” It still baffles her.

Aphasia takes a deep breath and straightens a few tilted rice grains in the *N.* “She’s a witch. She knows spells and shit.”

“Like Dark Willow?” That hadn’t even occurred to her before, but it makes sense now. *Does this mean Dark Willow can disappear, too?*

Aphasia makes a belittling *pssh* sound and looks up. “She way better than that. With that wand, she can do anything.”

*A wand. THAT’S what that was.*

Spencer starts piecing the puzzle together, how Hermione passed right by Aphasia before she disappeared. “You gave it to her.”

Aphasia nods. “They always take it when she gets caught. She can do some things without it, she can escape, but not much else.” There is a quiet pause. “She needs it.”

Spencer tilts her head back in realization and says, “So, you get it for her. You steal it back.” That explains why Aphasia was gone from the cell the morning Hermione left. It doesn’t explain how the hell she did it, but Spencer’s not going to press her luck and lead the conversation off course.

Aphasia’s eyes are shining. “She needs it,” she repeats. “She’s fighting out there. There’s a war going on.”

Spencer raises her eyebrows, trying to picture this girl stationed in Afghanistan or something. With her little stick.

“You wouldn’t know about that,” Aphasia continues. “It ain’t on the news or whatever. It’s too scary. Too dangerous. People can’t understand.” A tear runs down Aphasia’s cheek and she blinks it away, only causing two more to fall. “She kills people, bad people. But she has to. They some fucked up bitches. It’s the government. They the ones who keep sending her back here. Because she’s too good. She's too strong. She doesn’t give up.” Aphasia smiles for a moment. “And she keeps getting right back out there.” She thinks about her words for a moment and adds, “She’s the bravest girl I ever met.”

Spencer exhales heavily, taken aback by the depth of this whole love subplot. “How long has this been going on?”

She sniffs again. “A year? Something like that. She been in and out of here so much, I lost count. They bring her in, I get the wand, she gets out, they bring her back. It’s just what we do.” Aphasia shrugs, but she’s clearly a mess inside.

“They can’t stop her from escaping? They obviously know she can get out of here. Don’t they have Solitary or something?”
“They don’t even bother with that. She can get out of anywhere; that’s the magic. Except her school or something, but I don’t know much about that. She said there’s another prison that she wouldn’t be able to break out of either, but it’s full, so they send her here because it’s so far away. When she disappears, she can only go so far, so she goes to other ships she knows about, and that’s why they keep catching her. Sometimes she can’t get all the way back home. Sometimes she does, and she’s gone for a long time.” Aphasia’s voice is quiet now.

“What if you went with her?” Spencer asks. “Maybe you could help her keep from getting caught.” It’s the closest way she can ask if Hermione would consider running her own Underground Space Railroad.

Aphasia’s lip is trembling as she mumbles, “She’ll never take me with her. Not til it’s safe. Not til she knows she won’t be coming back in here. Who’d get her wand back?” She lets Spencer consider that before continuing. “They still don’t know it’s me.” Aphasia smiles proudly at this, then gets serious again. “They can never know. Never.” When she seems certain Spencer understands, she says, “She needs me here. So, I stay.”

Spencer is quiet for a moment, processing everything she’s heard. This whole situation is crazy. If Aphasia were ever caught, she’d be killed on the spot or at least transferred to a higher-security facility, Spencer’s sure of that. She can’t imagine where they must lock up this wand that Aphasia keeps stealing back, or how she manages it in the first place. But even overlooking these questions, how’s this all going to help Spencer? She doesn’t know if throwing herself into a supposed wizard war is worth the trouble of trying to get out of here. If a first escape didn’t work, she might never get another chance. It’s a dead end.

“Does she know how you feel about her?” she asks, putting her selfish plans to rest.

Aphasia looks Spencer in the eye. “She has to.” Staring at the letters one last time, Aphasia crumples the rice into a pile, throws the stale grains onto the floor, and curls up in a ball under her sheet.

Spencer climbs back down with a heavy heart. All this time, she’d thought Aria and Ezra’s story was pretty tragic, but this is on a whole new level. Further proof that she’s a small-town girl who knows nothing about the real world. Nothing at all.

She tries to refocus on her plan to infiltrate Lucy Fabray’s world later that afternoon, steeling herself for the coming freak show. It seems everyone has a story here, and she’s intent on learning as many as she can.

***************

“Mexican Monday” doesn’t seem to be much of a celebration, Spencer thinks. The Mess Hall looks the same as it always does when lunchtime rolls around—gray and grimey with a sticky floor and more tables than a group this size warrants. Aphasia, however, must be over their conversation from earlier, because she’s beside herself with joy now. She excitedly places her order in Spanish as she pushes her tray through the line, despite the fact that there is only one item: fish tacos.

Or, well, wait. Upon further inspection, it’s a single Gorton’s Fisherman fish stick wrapped in a corn tortilla.

“¡LUNES MEXICANO!” Aphasia turns to shout with both arms up, randomly in the middle of the line.

The rest of the inmates don’t share her sentiments, except maybe Flaca and Maritza, and Spencer feels glad to be in the majority for once. Aphasia gets excited about the weirdest fucking things. But
it’s almost kind of precious, Spencer thinks.

She carries her tray past the end tables to the center section, where Quinn is waiting for her. Spencer hovers for just a moment before sitting, scoping out Lucy and her girls. They’re leaning in slightly, like they don’t want anyone to hear what they’re discussing. Spencer squints and tries to read Santana’s lips, but she’s too damn far away and—

“Hey,” Quinn says from across the table, snapping Spencer out of her daze. “Freak show.”

“Sorry.” She sits in a hurry, still looking in Lucy’s direction, then shakes it off and focuses on Quinn. “Thought I saw something.”

Quinn removes the fish stick from her tortilla, eating half of it in one bite and tossing the tortilla casually onto Aphasia’s tray without looking. “Your killer spider?”

“Ha, ha.” She won’t admit it to Quinn, but a vanishing, literate spider sounds a lot less fucking scary than a saccharine, arts-and-craftsy WASP who rules over Angry Lesbian Space Prison. Holding up the fish stick, Spencer bangs it on the tray a few times just to confirm it’s in fact as rock-hard and inedible as she thinks. And it is. “Who makes this stuff, anyway? This can’t be the handiwork of an actual human.”

Immediately, everyone around Spencer starts hushing her, as if she’d just said “Beetlejuice” twice. Even Quinn looks scared.

“Jeez, sorry!” Spencer backpedals. “What fine international cuisine.”

Aphasia chomps another bite off her taco. “Martha gonna cut you up.”

Spencer hasn’t heard that name yet in her time here. “Who’s Martha?”

“She runs the kitchen,” Quinn says. “Just stay out of her way.”

Spencer hasn’t seen anyone back there, but that doesn’t mean much. The food has to come from somewhere. She’s a little relieved to know it’s not just spit out of some space machine. But now she’s picturing someone out of a cartoon—a giant, angry-looking woman with an apron and a hairnet and a permanent scowl. It seems fitting for a place like this. “So, what does M—”

Without warning, a loud crack! brings the conversation to an abrupt halt, and the Mess Hall erupts into cheers yet again. Spencer hadn’t even seen that Hermione was there in the first place, but it’s irrelevant—she’s long gone now. Aphasia joins in the celebrating this time, but Spencer can see through the charade. She knows all about lying. Blending in is Aphasia’s best way to keep both herself and her true love safe.

Wait a minute...Spencer has been with Aphasia all day, other than shower time. How did she manage to sneak away and get the wand back so soon?

Once again, Aphasia’s a lot smarter than Spencer gave her credit for. She wonders, nervously, if she’ll discover the same thing about Lucy Fabray.

She really hopes not.
Lucy Fabray is shaking a pair of maracas with a sombrero perched on her head, and Spencer just does not know what to do with this image. She lingers near the doorway for a second before cautiously stepping inside to retake her spot next to Mack. A banner near the head of the Mess Hall reads “¡La Fiesta Play-Doh de Lucy!” in garish pinks and oranges, with cacti clip-art adorning either end.

Spencer’s suddenly a little envious of Aeryn Sun; what happened to her must be preferable to this circle of Hell. She’s tempted to walk right out and never look back, to pretend Lucy Fabray really is just sweet as pie and could never be involved in killing anyone ever. Spencer shakes her head—and ignores the eye-roll that Mack shoots her way. A Hastings never gives up the chase, even if it leads into a dayglow hellscape.

“¡Hola, clase!” Lucy calls out over the mariachi music coming from her tape deck.

The class replies in unison, “¡Hola, maestra!”

Mack is especially enthusiastic, though in Spencer’s humble opinion, her pronunciation is terrible. You know, because she’s such an expert on these things.

Lucy continues shimmying around in time with the tinny music. “Are you excited for today’s aventura internacional in the magical world of Play-Doh?”

“¡Si!”

Even Spencer joins in for that one, as much she wants to shrivel up and die just for being back here. She figures she has to blend in to avoid looking suspicious. Not that Lucy’s paying any attention to her right now.

“Or, wait...Shit, here she comes, with that perfect smile.

“You’re back!”

Spencer gapes and stammers. “Yeah, I...uh...”

Lucy taps her maracas together. “Fantastic! I brought an extra set of Play-Doh just in case!” She leans in close and whispers, “I’ll make an exception because of the holiday, but I’ll have to insist on a closed class after today. Be sure to tell Becky you want on the waiting list. Fair’s fair!” She winks once before backing away.

That’s a mixed blessing. On the one hand, Spencer’s deeply relieved to hear she’ll never again be allowed to set foot in Satan’s playground, and her cover wasn’t blown with Mack about the whole prior-permission-from-Sue thing. But it does mean she only has forty-five minutes to construct a profile of her prime suspect. And she’ll be expected to participate this time, but Spencer’s nothing if not excellent at multi-tasking and deceit.

“Today, we’ll be exploring our deepest connections in life—friends!” Lucy sets aside her maracas to pick up something that vaguely resembles a person’s face sculpted out of neon green clay.

Spencer chokes down the half-digested fish stick that had started to work its way back up. Placing this class after lunch really is poor planning on someone’s part.

“Everyone has someone special to them. Someone meaningful who helps us define who we are as individuals. This might be a person you haven’t seen in a while, or it could be someone you see every day. But, their place in our lives is undeniably important.” Lucy smiles at each person in her class. “Love, after all, is what makes us human.”
Everyone nods with rapt attention. Spencer sincerely hopes Lucy isn’t about to make the green face talk back.

Lucy plucks up a chunk of Play-Doh and starts twirling it between her hands. “We’ll start with your base, rolled into a ball like so...”

Spencer can’t help but fixate on the deft movement of Lucy’s fingers and how similar they are to Quinn’s. And how similar everything else is to Quinn, save the hair. And what it might feel like to cuddle up against Lucy instead of Quinn, with those fingers wrapped around her own or raking gently through Spencer’s hair or reaching down into—

She blinks hard to clear out that mental image before it can really take root. Fluffiness aside, Lucy doesn’t seem like much of a cuddler anyway. And those well-manicured fingers might have killed someone.

No sleeping with the enemy, Spencer.

She spends the next half hour immersed in the creation of a face that kind of resembles Toby, but with purple eyes and spiky green hair. Spencer picks him for her inspiration, as it were, because she doesn’t really want to associate any of her actual friends with this insanity. It’s bad enough that she’s even participating. If Hanna could see her now, she’d never hear the end of it.

Thirty-four minutes have passed, and Spencer still hasn’t learned anything new about Lucy Fabray. She spends the entire class walking the floor, instructing Dark Willow on how to correctly carve sad eyes and helping one of those scary brunettes from lunch with crafting the perfect ponytail.

At one point, Spencer overhears Lucy murmur to that same girl, “Santana, I know you’re having a rough time with this, but remember how agile your fingers are.” And Spencer swears she can see a glint in Lucy’s eye that pierces her usual tranquility. Spencer files that away for future examination.

Time continues to drag on, and Spencer’s getting nowhere. Mack’s putting the finishing touches on her own contribution, which looks kind of like Mrs. Potato Head gone abstract. Spencer’s reduced to jabbing a finger into clay-Toby’s face out of sheer frustration, when Lucy claps her hands to get everyone’s attention.

“Okay, clase, you’ve all done a wonderful job!” she says. “The detail each of you has put into your sculpture is phenomenal!” She motions to the chart to her right, where she keeps track of her students’ progress week to week. Assuming each person gets one sticker per session, some of these girls have been enrolled for a long-ass time. Flaca and Maritza must have at least a hundred each.

Lucy rummages behind her, then turns around with her arms wrapped around a cardboard box. “And now, for our gran final...” She tips the box forward to reveal...tiny wooden mallets.

The flashback of pummeling the life out of Toby’s face catches Spencer by surprise. She glances down at the Play-Doh visage she made and furrows her brow.

“We’ve created with love,” Lucy says, “and now we will express the anger each of us feels, because with love there is always pain. Some on the surface...” She gives Mack a smile. “And some, deep down.” Lucy balances the box on her hip and pulls out one of the mallets. “And we will do this like so...”

The hammer makes a sickening and kind of wet sound as Lucy practically pulverizes her own model with what must be her full strength, over and over and over again.

Oh. Well, then.
Mack shakes her head, stunned, and whispers, “Genius...”

Spencer briefly wonders why this wasn’t a Shark Week activity, but then figures putting even a toy weapon into the hands of crazy, emotional people is a recipe for disaster.

“Oh, clase!” Lucy says, flicking a lock of blonde hair away from her eyes. “It’s your turn now!”

It all comes back the instant Spencer’s hand closes around the mallet’s tiny handle. The betrayal, the attempt at puppy-dog eyes, the pleading...the blood, everywhere. She takes great delight in pummeling clay-Toby, so much that Mack stares at her like she’s grown at least two more heads.

Spencer shrugs modestly. “I’ve done this before.”

She continues on, and at some point, the anger gives way to sexual frustration. If she can’t bang Quinn or even herself, at least she can bang this mallet. It’s a little fulfilling, and Spencer finds herself growing to almost respect Lucy Fabray and her teaching abilities.

Almost.

Meanwhile, over the racket of a dozen hammers pounding against Play-Doh and tables, she hears crying behind her, as Dark Willow destroys the face of her own long-lost love. There’s a lot of emotion in the room.

Cathartic as the activity is, it’s still not enough for Spencer to sign up for Play-Doh fucking Funhouse officially. She’s not about to sacrifice what’s left of her dignity and sanity. While the forty-five minutes aren’t particularly fruitful, they’re not a total waste, either. Lucy’s still Suspect Numero Uno. There’s clearly more to her than puppy dogs and sunshine. Whether that’s good or bad, Spencer just doesn’t know.
The rest of Loco Lunes, as Spencer is calling it, proceeds mostly without incident, other than a strange argument between Quinn and Aphasia over a blanket, of all things. Spencer didn’t even know Aphasia had one, much less that Quinn had access to it. They bicker back and forth for half of Power Hour because Quinn supposedly borrowed it during class time without Aphasia’s permission, even though she put it back before Aphasia even returned. Now, it’s nowhere to be seen. This must be some special fucking blanket the way Aphasia’s carrying on and ripping Quinn a new one.

_Boo fucking hoo and shut the hell up! This should not be a thirty-minute conversation!_

If she wasn’t so bitter about missing out on cuddle time with Quinn, she might be glad for the distraction during the endless loop of “La Isla Bonita.” The goddamn bongo drums are going to haunt her sleep tonight. (Really, if she never hears another Madonna song ever again, it’ll be too soon.)

The Mess Hall serves _fajitas_ for dinner, which, tragically, seems to be the only Spanish word Aphasia has mispronounced all day. Spencer cringes every time she hears, “¡Me encanta fa-jitas!” with a hard J. But then, Aphasia is pretty fucking gay, so maybe it’s not a mistake after all.

The following afternoon, that blasted bongo song is still in her head, and Spencer needs a reprieve. She’s considering an hour of office work to try to dig up more information on the hammer-happy Lucy, but then she realizes it’s Tuesday—the one day a week when she gets the cell to herself for fifty-five glorious minutes. This is new, as Mack just joined Aphasia in Zombies class to round out her schedule, maybe to avoid being alone with Spencer. Which, that’s fine—Spencer didn’t want to be stuck in here with her any more than she did. They seem to have this unspoken agreement to just avoid each other as much as possible for, well, the rest of their lives. Which it literally will be.

_God,_ Spencer is going to waste away in this stupid, little room with a hoarding thief, a nymphomaniac lunatic who hates her, and the current object of her sexual frustration, who seems to be all but done with her before it ever really began.

And that may be the most aggravating part of all. Quinn’s so close by, and Spencer’s so fucking close just thinking about Quinn, and yet, still, no release. After three weeks.

..._Holy shit, I have the cell to myself._

Nothing about prison is ever going to be prime circumstances, but Spencer’s learning to be flexible. Boomer passes the cell every fifteen minutes, there’s a murderer on the loose, and maybe even a killer spider in her bed. But by god, Spencer Hastings is going to finally have an orgasm. A perfect way to celebrate the end of her cycle.

Tucked under the sheet, she casually pretends to read something from Quinn’s stash while waiting for the guard to pass, thus ensuring a maximum interval of uninterrupted time. As soon as Boomer’s out of sight, Spencer pulls down the long zipper and shoves a hand into her underwear. Turning her
head toward the wall, she takes the hemmed edge of the sheet between her teeth to keep quiet as she works two fingers in circles. Her head is swimming with the flood of chemicals in her brain, and she starts naming them off just because she can, but then refocuses because, hi, why think about dopamine when you can think about Quinn’s tongue between your legs.

*Oh god, Quinn...*

And like that, Quinn is all over Spencer and everywhere. Pulling her hair, palming her breasts, kissing her neck, whispering dirty commands in her ear, grinding against her, sucking her clit—doing **everything** Spencer has wanted all at once, and it’s too much. Her arm pumps harder, body humming, sweat dripping down her thighs, and her back arches as she bites hard into the thin sheet.

Spencer feels herself building, rising, climbing, climbing higher, and then finally peaking. Her entire body clenches and shudders, closing in on itself reflexively. She moans hard with eyes shut tight as the sensations course through her, like some primal force within her that’s finally being released.

The payoff is even better than she anticipated. Chalk it up to differences in atmospheric pressure in space, or the lapsed time, or the fact that she wants Quinn—a girl—more than she ever wanted Toby or any other stupid boy. Or, hell, maybe Martha did put drugs in the food. Spencer doesn’t know, and she sure doesn’t care, because she’s fucking floating and not coming down from this high any time soon. (Though, she does open her eyes for a half-second to be sure she’s not literally floating.)

After sixty long, blissful seconds, the tingling in her toes and gentle hum across her skin send Spencer into a contented sleep.

**************

The slam of the cell door pulls her back to reality as she wakes behind closed eyelids. Her right hand is warm, still tucked snugly into her soaked underwear.

“*Jesus, Maple Tits. Didn’t realize you were that bored.*”

It's Mack. *Fuck.*

Spencer rips her hand out and tries to zip her uniform back up, which is impossible to do discreetly under the sheet. She jumps off the bed like it was on fire, only making it more obvious that she has something to hide. “I wasn't—” she begins, but then she sees what her three cellmates are all staring at.

The back of the cell is covered with a haphazard jungle of yellow thread. It's a web.

“A web with writing in it. And it’s **terrifying.**”

“I gotta pee,” Aphasia announces. There's no way to reach the toilet through the maze.

“Seriously, what the hell,” Mack says, but Spencer barely registers a word.

“I didn't do this.” She’s shaking and her mind is racing, praying that she's still dreaming.

The others may not yet realize what Spencer does—the web says, **I KILD JENE SHEKTR.**

Quinn surveys the scene with raised eyebrows. “Okay...”

*Well, at least they see it this time. Yay?*

Spencer walks over to the web and reaches out to touch one of the lines of thread, just to be sure it's
really there. With a tug, it pops off the wall, and Spencer jumps back. The work of the web itself is a strange combination of sloppy and precise. The letters aren't written across radial lines, like they usually are in Charlotte's webs on her bunk. Instead, it's mostly a net stretching in diagonals from one side of the cell to the other. It makes the letters much harder to read, but there's no doubt they're there. “The spider did this. It had to be.”

“Yeah, okay,” Mack laughs.

“I was asleep!”

Quinn raises an eyebrow and glances down at Spencer’s crotch.

Spencer closes her eyes, frustrated. “I fell asleep. Either way—not Crazy String Girl.” She looks back at it and adds, “Also? I can spell. Give me a little credit.”

Aphasia tilts her head at the web. “Is this some kind of dream journal thing? My mom made me do that when I was little. It was stupid.”

“This is stupid,” Mack says, lying down on her bed.

“Hey.” A new voice comes from the corridor, and all heads turn. It’s Raven. “What the hell is that?”

Aphasia crosses past Spencer to handle it. “Pssh, horny girls do crazy shit, you know how it goes.” Reaching into her jumpsuit, she pulls out something small and gray, slipping it through the bars. With her other hand, she takes a sealed tin can from Raven. It’s a quick exchange, one they’ve clearly made before.

“Yeah.” Raven takes a moment to examine her new item, flipping it open, and Spencer immediately recognizes it as an old-style cell phone.

_Aphasis had a phone in here?

Raven closes it, looking satisfied, and puts it in her pocket. “Let me know when she’s able to track down that belt.”

“She knows,” Aphasia says. “I got you.”

Spencer has no idea what’s happening. It’s somehow even more confusing than the giant yellow web still hanging behind them.

Raven nods back at the mess before walking away. “And clean that up.”

“You clean it up,” Mack snaps back after she’s gone.

Spencer sighs and crosses her arms, staring at the string message and trying to make sense of it. It feels like someone’s punking her. Well, hopefully they’re having a good laugh right now, because Spencer sure isn’t.

Quinn doesn’t look very amused by it, either. “You really don’t have to do stuff like this to try to get us to believe you, you know. It’s...not helping.” She looks back at the message. “And it’s kind of creepy.”

Aphasia climbs up to her bunk. “They just had knotting class. Go be crazy there.”

“It’s knitting,” Quinn says.
“I don’t know…” Aphasia’s eyebrows are high. “Santana into all kinds of freaky shit.”

Quinn ignores that and says to Spencer, “It’s not too late to sign up. You clearly have…an interest.”

Spencer’s mouth falls open. They still don’t believe her. “I DIDN’T DO THIS!” she shouts, sounding as desperate as she feels now. And then something snaps in her, and she flies into a fit of rage, tearing down all the thread and ripping apart what she can into pieces. It’s tough to break, and it hurts her fingers the tighter she pulls. With one final cry, Spencer eventually gives up and collapses to the floor, tears streaming. Because that will make her appear sane and attractive again.

Her cellmates don’t seem to know what to do or say. Then, Aphasia jumps down and bypasses Spencer entirely, going right to the toilet. Once her business is underway, Aphasia rolls her eyes at Spencer, muttering, “Mommy issues.”

Spencer shoots a look right back, but Quinn’s voice cuts in before she can say anything. “Come on.” She gestures for Spencer to come up on the bunk.

No. Fuck you.

Spencer drags herself back to her bed instead and quietly cries into her pillow. She’s terrified and exhausted and alone, and now Charlotte’s back and fucking with her on a whole new level. Why, Spencer doesn’t know, and she’s too angry to think about it rationally right now, anyway. Maybe it was stupid of her to believe a spider could genuinely care about her. Maybe this is what Charlotte wanted all along—for Spencer to lose her mind. Maybe crazy people make easier targets. There certainly doesn’t seem to be any lack of crazy in here, Spencer just didn’t think she’d be at the top of the list.

But it seems the more she fights, the worse it’s getting. She’s so powerless here that even a spider has control over her world. Spencer has no credibility, no allies. She even got what she wanted—a clear, solid confession to murder—and it only took her another step backward. And now she has no sanity left, either. She’s become The Girl Who Cried Spider.

It’s the middle of the day but Spencer manages to cry herself to sleep again, if only to bring an end to this nightmare. Maybe Charlotte will end her suffering peacefully in her slumber. At this point, Spencer would rather not wake up at all than live another day in this dumpster.

Falling further into darkness, the last thing Spencer hears is Aphasia muttering, “Bitch stole my towel.”

****************

Spencer wakes when Power Hour comes blasting over the speakers. Not that that helps her know what time it is; she’s learned that Sue turns on the music any time she damn well pleases. But her body tells her it’s been a few hours’ nap, and the memory of the afternoon’s events come flooding back in a depressing wave. She’s more relaxed, though, if just groggy from sleeping too long. She rolls over, praying there’s not another message waiting for her.

Squinting against the light from the corridor, her eyes adjust to take in the scene. Aphasia’s dancing to “Holiday” in the middle of the room while Mack does make-shift pulls-ups on the bed frame and Quinn reads. The small pile of yellow thread is right where Spencer left it, a few feet away in the back-right corner. She turns away, still massively skeevved out by its very presence. No, Spencer’s not going to let her guard down ag—

Her face pales and her blood runs cold when she sees it.
Another spider web. This one, regular silk thread, and attached to the bed frame just over her feet.

**THE SUN WENT DOWN**

In a flash, Spencer tears the web apart with her hands, much more easily this time. Her scream is mostly drowned out by Madonna's backbeat, but she can still feel her cellmates' eyes on her. Spencer's not going to waste her time with them anymore. She's had more than enough of this bullshit.

“GUARD! BOOMER! SOMEBODY!” she shouts, running off the bed to bang on the cell bars. “HEY! I NEED HELP HERE.”

“Hey. Spencer,” Quinn tries, but Spencer ignores her. Quinn had her chance.

Boomer’s not running, but she’s meandering at a somewhat faster pace than normal. She keeps a safe distance and takes a quick look around the cell to see that the screaming lunatic is, in fact, not at all threatened by anything. “What.”

“There is a KILLER SPIDER in here.” Spencer knows how crazy it sounds, but there’s no room for doubt or weakness now. She just has to go with it. “Let me out RIGHT NOW, or I swear to god, I will be eaten alive and it will be on YOU.”

Boomer looks thoroughly bored and just walks away.

“Hey! HEY! WHAT THE FUCK? Where are you going?!”

The guard is halfway down the corridor by now and isn’t slowing down.

“She killed Aeryn Sun! I SAW IT. I am NOT CRAZY.”

With a pause in her step, Boomer pivots and sighs. She paces back slower than anyone rightfully should and stops ten feet from the cell. “You have information about Aeryn Sun?”

“Yes,” Spencer pants, ignoring the fact that the only information she has was all obtained without permission. “Take me to Sylvester! I want to talk to the warden! NOW!”

Boomer stares and considers her options. “Calm the fuck down for an hour, and I’ll think about it.”

“IN AN HOUR, I COULD BE DEAD.”

Boomer’s already walking away. “Don’t we wish.”

Spencer turns and slides down the bars to sit on the floor. No way is she going back to her bunk now. She watches Aphasia dance, letting her mind get lost in the hypnotic movements. “Holiday” is immediately followed by “Live to Tell,” and Spencer knows the prison is mocking her now. She drowns in the simple keyboard notes and fades out, gripping the words like a lifeline.

*Will I live to tell the secret I have learned?*

Other songs come and go, but Spencer doesn't hear them.

By the time Power Hour ends, Quinn's decided to try again, climbing down to sit next to Spencer, shoulder to shoulder. “Talk to me?” Quinn asks, her expression almost approaching concerned.

Spencer keeps staring forward, even though there's nothing to look at anymore. The only thing she can say is, “Charlotte.”
Mack snarls, “Who the fuck is Charlotte? Is she hot?”
Spencer barely sleeps at all that night, too paranoid of every little itch and sensation that could be spider legs against her skin. She knows now that she’s not crazy. She didn’t make this up—any of it—and Spencer's not going to let that eight-legged bitch get away with murder anymore. Not on her watch.

She’s half-conscious when the jarring sound of banging on the cell bars yanks her awake. Spencer jolts upright, hitting the frame yet again. On the bright side, there isn’t a new web. Maybe the killer is on the run.

Boomer’s voice cuts through the fresh headache. “Hastings! Let’s move.”

Thank you, yes please, get me out of here.

As they walk, Spencer can tell it’s first thing in the morning, judging from the dim lights and few early risers in various cells they pass. She tries not to get her hopes up, but she can’t help but feel optimistic. Maybe Boomer told Sylvester about Charlotte first thing when she came into work today and they decided it was an emergency. Maybe she’ll hire an exterminator. Maybe she’ll grant Spencer a reward, like a reduced sentence or even a transfer back to Earth. She’d miss Quinn, but at least she wouldn’t have to put up with Mack anymore. And hey, with this newfound attraction to ladies, she could go back to Rosewood and have Emily introduce her to some of the five thousand lesbians wandering the general vicinity. If she hurries, she might make it back before A kills them all.

Sue is sitting at her desk, hands folded, awaiting Spencer’s arrival. “Morning. I hear you’re having some issues of the eight-legged variety. ‘I assume this is some weird Millennial euphemism for cramps?’ At the confused look on Spencer’s face, Sue dismisses the idea and continues. “Well. Gotta say I’m surprised. I’ve been up here for a whole decade—since I was a nubile eighteen years old, just like yourself—and I’ve yet to see or hear of a spider in space. Congratulations.”

Spencer squares her shoulders and prepares to lay out all her evidence, or at least what she dares to reveal. It’s all hearsay, some quite literally. Her confidence is going to have to sell this thing. “Miss Sylvester, I have reason to believe that the culprit behind the disappearances of Stacey Merkin, Aeryn Sun, Jenny Schecter, and maybe Alex Vause,” she takes a deep breath, “is a dangerous, space-dwelling arachnid.”

Okay, it does sound ridiculous when said so matter-of-factly, but it’s fucking true. Spencer knows it’s true, even as she watches Sue struggle to not laugh in her face.

“Really?” Sue fixes Spencer in place with an arched eyebrow. “Who says they’ve disappeared?”

“Um.” Spencer’s mind races. She can’t just say, I overheard you on the phone telling the President they were getting stabbed. Time is ticking. “The other girls said they were here and now they’re not.”
“Well, I'll be damned.” Sue throws up her arms. “You're right—they must be dead!”

Spencer is feeling stupider by the moment. “Were they released?”

“Frankly, that’s none of your business, Nosy Nancy. But if there were a killer spider on my ship, wouldn’t I know about it?” Sue stands up and begins pacing the room. “Do you think I’m that terrible at my job that I’d let some creepy-crawly stalk my inmates right under my nose?”

Spencer stammers. “I-I didn’t mean—”

“No, of course you didn’t. That wouldn’t be lady-like now, would it?” Sue looks longingly at her trophies as she continues pacing. “I know your type, Wastings. Whip-smart and convinced you can solve any puzzle with grit and a little deductive reasoning. But you know what your problem is? You’re lazy. You jump right to conclusions without bothering to gather any real facts. Yes, four inmates were here and now aren’t anymore. Not that you knew them or have any reason to give two rats' rears about their livelihoods.

"You’re new to the prison system, so let me explain something to you: Inmates get transferred. Inmates get released. Inmates get paroled. Inmates get sent to Solitary. Inmates get stabbed to death by other inmates. Sometimes, inmates get sucked out the airlock simply because I can’t stand the sight of their pasty, simpering, mouse faces anymore.”

Spencer’s heart stops for a moment. Is she talking about Jenny?

Sue points at her now. “But what inmates don’t do is get detailed reports on the daily whereabouts of others. You forgot you stopped being a person with rights the moment you were convicted. You lost all control of your life, and now you’re trying to regain some control here. I get it.”

Spencer really doesn’t want all of this to be so logical because then she can’t disagree with it as easily. She wants the murdering warden to be wrong.

“You found yourself something to do. Something to spin the old hamster wheel inside your noggin. Most girls would barter for a Sudoku book. But instead, you decided to invent a killer spider in outer space—one that can dispose of several entire human bodies, no less. It’d be impressive if it wasn’t so juvenile, and frankly, more than a little bit sad. That’s quite an imagination you’ve got there, and I say that as the person who inspired Lady Gaga’s meat dress over a rousing chat on AOL instant messenger in 2004. Before you ask—” Sue holds up a compact disc with an America Online graphic “—yes, I have the World Wide Web. Forty whole hours of it!” She puts the CD back in her disk drive and folds her hands, as if to say, Your move.

“Um—” Spencer starts, but Sue cuts her off again.

“I had high hopes for you, Spinster. I thought, ‘Here’s a girl who’s going to rise to the top of every class, a girl who’s going to get involved! Someone who’ll read every book in our library and not let her brain just rot away in her thick, oddly shaped skull.’ But I guess I was wrong about you. I don’t like being wrong. In case you hadn’t noticed, I’m a winner.” Sue references her overflowing trophy case. “And you are very quickly going the way of LOSER. You need to get your head out of your ass and start tuning into your new reality.” She cups her hands around her mouth to magnify the sound. “NEWS FLASH: YOU ARE IN PRISON. This spider malarkey ends here and now.”

“Miss Sylvester, I swear—,”

“Don’t swear in my office. It’s tacky.” She pauses and looks Spencer up and down, crinkling her face a bit. “I'm starting to think maybe this flight of fancy was the result of raging hormones. I can
spinning. You’re just a little bit too interested in terminal cases of acute arachnophobia.

“Spencer, get your ass out of my office and back to your cell. I have work to do.” 

Boomer shoves Spencer into the hall and heads to his office, leaving the handcuffs hanging on the door. 

Spencer turns back to the examination room, her heart racing. She can’t believe they’re going to treat her like this. She steps carefully over the tiny chains left on the floor and climbs back onto the examination table. 

Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins is in the room, looking down at her clipboard. She’s wearing a white coat and has the name embroidered on the pocket. 

“Spencer,” she says, her voice calm and collected. “I think it’s time for our first session.”

Spencer’s eyes widen. She’s never had a therapist before. This is all too much. She wonders if she can make it out of this alive.
“Who are you?”

“Hi, Spencer.” The doctor extends her hand toward Spencer’s cuffed ones. “I’m Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins. I’ll be doing your ex—”

Spencer pulls away from the handshake. “No, you’re not.”

A pause. “I’m not?”

Spencer’s on the verge of a nervous breakdown. “Every single person I meet in this room tells me she’s Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins! Nobody’s showing me any ID or credentials, so what am I supposed to believe? What the hell are you people doing to my body? Who are you? What kind of tests are you running? What are you writing in—”

“Hey, hey, Spencer.” The doctor holds up a hand and deescalates the situation with her soothing tone. “I know this must be confusing for you. You’re not crazy—there are three of us. But don’t worry, just three.” A small smile. “My wives and I rotate days so we don’t get exhausted. Tired doctors make mistakes.”

...Wives?

“...Wives?”

“Two of them and me makes three,” the doctor smiles. “We hyphenated our names when we got married; it’s not exactly rocket science.” With a smirk, Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins goes back to looking over Spencer’s file. “I haven’t seen anything from your previous tests or exam notes that raises a red flag, but it won’t hurt to run them one more time, just to be sure. That’s a nice perk of the arrangement—we can always get second and third opinions. Hold out your arm.”

Spencer’s built up enough trust with the previous doctors to let her mind wander during the routine of pokes and lights and scopes. She’s never met two married women before, much less three. Was that even legal in the United States? Maybe that’s why they came to space in the first place. Spencer wonders what other arrangements people have out here, beyond the iron fist of Earth laws.

And then, just for a moment, she considers what it would be like having her own wife, or two. Quinn and...maybe someone who looks just like Quinn. Oh lord, what fucking insanity that would be. Her heart starts beating rapidly at the thought, and the muscles between her legs clench.

God, think of the wedding night, what with the—

“You okay?”

The doctor’s voice brings Spencer back, and she pulls away from the cold of the stethoscope that’s only just now registering.

“Yeah,” she shakes her head, “just...thinking about something scary again. Someone’s killing the prisoners up here. You know that, right?”

“Well, I certainly hope not. Makes it much harder to do my job when the patients are dead.” Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins listens to Spencer’s chest for another moment, then sighs and consults the file again. “Spencer, I don’t see any physical explanation for the hallucinations you’ve been experiencing. I’m sorry, I’m afraid this is beyond my realm of expertise. Hopefully Dr. Umbridge will be able to help you more than I can.”

“You married to her, too?” It’s drier than it should be, considering Spencer kind of likes this doctor,
maybe even more than the other two.

“My dance card’s full,” the doctor says. “Go ahead and get changed; I’ll see if she’s available.” She takes a step and then pauses to add, “For counseling, not marriage.”

Spencer purses her lips and nods. “Thanks.” As soon as the doctor’s out the door, she hops up and starts rummaging through the three drawers under the counter within her limited reach. They’re stocked with typical first-aid materials—gauze, band-aids, alcohol wipes—but then Spencer finds what she’s looking for.

She shoves a handful of tampons into her underwear, the only place she can hold anything, before changing back into her jumpsuit. Better to be prepared next time, she thinks, since Aphasia’s not willing to assist. While she’s still alone, Spencer practices moving slowly to minimize the crinkling noise, but there’s no way around it. She’ll have to talk over it somehow. Chances are, Dr. Umbridge will notice the bulge and think Spencer’s just really happy to meet her.
Boomer opens the door after a minute, not even knocking first to see if Spencer’s done changing. She looks as disinterested in life as ever. Prison work must be so very fulfilling.

They continue down the hall as it curves to the left, further than Spencer’s been in this direction. Then, on the right, she sees a wooden door. It’s quite noticeable, as it’s the only fixture not made of metal on the entire ship. The golden placard is much shinier than Sue’s, and it reads, “DR. DOLORES UMBRIDGE, SPACE PSYCHIATRIST.”

Spencer isn’t sure if she’s supposed to just go in or knock or what, but fortunately Boomer takes the initiative and opens the door without hesitation. She pushes Spencer into a room that might as well be an alternate dimension. It’s like a Hallmark card, a florist, and a pet store all mated and vomited their various charms on every inch of the place. The walls are covered in pink and white floral wallpaper, plastered over by what must be a hundred pictures of kittens. Kittens on plates, kittens in frames, kittens on parade, you name it.

To Spencer’s left is a fireplace with an actual burning fire and white lace doilies draped across the mantel. A rocking chair with a very-old-but-hopefully-still-living cat is to her right. And in front of her, a giant wooden desk—mahogany, to match the door—with a bizarre-looking older woman in the tall, purple plush chair behind it. She’s dressed in a fuzzy, buttoned sweater like someone’s great-grandmother on her way to the retirement home knitting party. In 1953.

Just when Spencer thought this place couldn’t get any weirder.

Oh, wait—There’s a framed photograph in the same place on the wall as in Sue’s office. It’s Umbridge with what looks like some high ranking, older gentleman in a robe. Spencer can barely make out the gold cursive from her seat, and is frightened to see that it also says, I love getting physical with you! signed, The Minister.

Oh my god, she’s banging a priest.

“Miss Hastings,” Dr. Umbridge says in a soft British accent. “Please do have a seat.” She gestures to a pink velvet chair that blends in frighteningly well with the wallpaper.

“Hi,” is the only thing Spencer can manage to say, so she coughs as she sits to hide the sound of crinkling wrappers against her skin. This place made Lucy’s Play-Doh Hellhole look like Alcatraz. What is a room like this doing in a prison? In space?!

“My name is Dr. Umbridge, and I’m the ship’s psychiatrist. My job is to help our residents come to terms with the things that are troubling them and seek out the truth. I have helped countless women just like yourself overcome the burdens of the soul and the tortuous afflictions of the mind.” She pauses as if waiting for Spencer to say something, or possibly throw herself at the doctor’s feet to thank her for coming to her rescue.
Spencer just stares at her.


The chance that this walking, talking tea cozy would believe what Spencer knows to be the truth is pretty fucking slim, but hey, stranger things have happened here. (Theoretically. She just can't think of any right now.)

“I think someone is kidnapping and killing the inmates,” Spencer says. Her voice is low and matter-of-fact, as she has no time for bullshit.

The doctor, to her credit, sounds genuinely intrigued in her Golden Girl kind of way. “Really? And who might be doing such a thing?”

Here goes nothing. “A spider.”

Dr. Umbridge blinks. “A what?”

“A spider. It’s written messages in its web on my bunk with clues. Things like ‘Fuck Stacey Merkin’ and ‘The Sun Went Down,’ which has to be about Aeryn Sun.”

Dr. Umbridge flinches at the profanity but quickly recovers. “Does it, now? And who else has seen these webs? The guards, surely? Miss Sylvester? How is the investigation going?”

“There is no investigation, because nobody believes me. My cellmates even saw the yellow string web in my cell, but they think I did it—and I didn’t.” She finds that holding up her arms for emphasis is far less effective when she’s handcuffed. “So, I end up looking crazy when I’m the only person who really knows what’s going on.”

“I see...” Dr. Umbridge makes a few notes on a pink legal pad with kitten pawprints in the corner. “And how do you presume this spider is going about these kidnappings and murders? It seems like quite the arduous task for one little bug,” She gives a look as if to say, I bet you hadn’t thought of THAT, hmmm?

Maybe this woman isn’t going to be on her side after all.

“It’s not a bug. It’s an arachnid.” After weeks around Mack’s incompetence, Spencer's been itching to correct someone. She just can’t help herself. Shaking it off, she takes another breath before continuing. “And I honestly don’t know how she’s doing it. I just know that she is.”

 “…She?”

 “...Yeah. I call her Charlotte.”

 “Ah.” More notes on the legal pad.

Great.

 “Look, can you just tell me if those four people were transferred out or something? Jenny Schecter, Alex Vause, Aeryn Sun, and Stacey Merkin. Do you know if they’re even alive?”

“I’m afraid I’m not at liberty to discuss confidential prisoner information, Spencer.” But she doesn’t look even the least bit sorry. “Have you spoken to the warden about this? Has she shared any details with you?”
“Oh yeah, we had a big girl-talk and dished over mimosas and a pedicure. That’s why I’m here with you.” Spencer takes a deep breath to recenter and adjusts her approach. “I’m not crazy. Something IS happening here. If someone would just help me, we could stop it.”

“Ah, yes, you do enjoy working in teams, don’t you? I’ve read that in your file. You had such a lovely little A-group back home.” Dr. Umbridge looks very pleased with herself.

“I wasn’t on the A Team!” Spencer shouts, louder than she means to. “I was the only person willing to step up and stop them from continuing to ruin our lives!”

She doesn’t want to be talking about Toby. She doesn’t want to be thinking about Toby. This isn’t fucking even about Toby at all. Why does no one care about the people who are still alive here?

“Now, now,” the doctor tuts. “We can’t always just go snuffing out our problems with croquet mallets, can we?” There’s that condescending look again.

And here comes the complementary snark. “I don’t know—I feel it might do a wonder on this fucking spider that’s KILLING PEOPLE.”

Dr. Umbridge gives a little hem, hem cough. “You will not use that language in this office. It is inappropriate.”

This lady and Mistress Berry would get along fantastically.

Scrubbing that mental image from her mind, Spencer’s on her feet in a second. “Are you going to help me or not?” She already knows the answer, and she hates rejection so much. “That’s your job, right? To help me? Then DO IT.”

But this doctor isn’t the least bit intimidated by Spencer, it seems. She merely folds her hands and changes the subject. “Tell me about your daily life here. How would you categorize your relationships with your cellmates?”

“How is that supposed to help?”

“I hear things, you know,” Dr. Umbridge says with a knowing grin. “The Wednesday happenings of cell 10 are legend in these halls.”

Spencer’s eyebrows shoot up. “What, the spanking?”

“Quinn and Mack seem to have developed a mutually beneficial relationship during their time here, wouldn’t you agree?”

There must be a sharp implement nearby with which Spencer can impale this frog-woman. She’s romanticizing an ass-bruising, of all things? Spencer doesn’t want to think about Mack right now any more than she wants to think about Toby. If Mack likes getting hit in the ass so much, maybe Spencer could pummel her with a croquet mallet. That could be quite satisfying. You know, if she had a croquet mallet.

And since when are Quinn and Mack a respected item around here? Apparently, they’re so together that even the prison staff knows about it. This? Is bullshit.

“I think if you were to participate in these kinds of events,” Dr. Umbridge continues, “you might feel more included with your peer group. Maybe then you wouldn’t feel the need to make up these hare-brained stories of killer spiders just to get attention.”
“I don’t want Quinn to spank me!” But wait, that wasn’t the main point. She shakes her head to restart. “It’s not a fucking story! It’s a SPIDER.”

Another cough. Hem, hem.

Whatever.

“You really shouldn’t tell lies, Spencer. It’s quite distasteful.”

“IT’S NOT. A. LIE.”

“We both know you desperately want Quinn to spank you.”

...Wait, what?!

“From all reports, she has made herself very available to you, and you pull away, time and time again. If you’re going to continue to reject her advances, I think it might be time for a new approach.” The doctor waits before pressing on, but Spencer’s not about to interrupt. She’s curious to see what crazy-train station this little speech is pulling into. “Perhaps what you need in order to build your confidence and overcome these depression-based hallucinations is a change of environment.”

That gets her attention. “You’re moving me?”

“I see now that you’ve been placed with girls you find incompatible. Tsk, tsk. This happens on occasion. I’m only too glad I can help sort it out! You, Spencer, need to be with girls who will push you to become a stronger, more active participant here, to feel more included.”

No, no, no, this is all wrong!

“But I want to stay with Quinn!” Spencer pleads. She isn’t about to lose her only shred of sanity, the only person in this shithouse that makes her feel human and important. Hell, the only person in here who makes her feel anything at all besides rage. “She’s my friend. I’ve been included! We cuddle, for crying out loud! Just because I don’t let her beat the crap out of me doesn’t mean...” But Spencer doesn’t know how to even end that sentence.

“I’m afraid I just don’t see it, dear,” Dr. Umbridge sighs. “No, surely there must be a better fit. Girls you can relate to, talk to, play with, get involved with.”

Spencer’s just shy of either breaking into tears or shouting, “But I just masturbated six hours ago thinking about Quinn FUCKING ME SENSELESS. I’M INVOLVED, OKAY.” Instead, she clenches her jaw in a moment of clarity and says, as calmly as she can, “You don’t want to help me at all, do you?”

Dr. Umbridge pauses and looks almost offended through her smile. “Nonsense, dear! I live to serve. This is for the best, you’ll see.”

She searches for a prisoner transfer form in her desk, quickly fills it out, and stamps it with a pink flower print, APPROVED.

Spencer runs a few calculations in her head to determine whether or not her whole body could fit inside the small fireplace. It can’t. She’ll just wait for the tuna casserole to finish her off on Friday.
Spencer's body feels numb. The twists and turns back to the cell block are one gray blur.

What just happened in there?

She replays the conversation, everything starting with Sue and the third doctor, trying to figure out where it all went wrong. But nothing adds up, it never does in this fucking place, and suddenly she’s being shoved back into cell 10 with a “Make it fast” from the guard. The slam of the door behind her is startling.

Oh, right—She asked Umbridge if she could at least drop by the cell one last time.

Quinn’s reading lesbian erotica in her bunk. Mack’s stirring in the toilet again, and Aphasia’s pumping a Thighmaster while singing something Spencer vaguely recognizes as Backstreet Boys, but with the wrong lyrics. It’s just another typical evening in space prison.

A sort of wistfulness comes over Spencer. She thought she was going to wither away for years in this stupid room with these terrible, wonderful people. She and Quinn are just getting started in...well, whatever it is.

Was.

Spencer’s stomach tightens as she looks up to meet those bright, beautiful eyes.

“I was almost starting to worry,” Quinn says playfully. “That much time with Sue can’t be good for anyone’s health.” She doesn’t know anything is wrong. Why should she?

Standing in the doorway as awkwardly as on her very first day, Spencer doesn’t know quite what to say or do. She’s stalling for time, she supposes. It’s not like she has things to pack up, just her contraband toothbrush and the tampons still shoved down her front. Her cellmates have no idea she’s there to say goodbye. Spencer wonders if they’ll even care. They’re not even noticing that she’s still wearing handcuffs.

Aphasia peers down at Spencer through her spread thighs. “Who that?”

At the same time, Mack looks up from where she’s kneeling in front of the chrome throne. “Nice boner. Hope you don’t have to go.”

But Spencer does have to leave, and it’s killing her more than she thought it would. It’s the craziest thing, this prison bond she’s made in four weeks, but it’s there all the same. There’s a name for that, she knows—when people in dire situations form strong connections after suffering through things together—she just can’t remember it, because the only name on her mind right now is Quinn.

Well, and Charlotte. But mostly Quinn. God, she’s going to miss her. And good old Aphasia with her crazy, loveable ways, and, christ, maybe even Mack, who doesn’t want her to go! Spencer
purses her lips at the kind sentiment—from the raging psycho, of all people—before Mack adds, “Occupado.”

Oh. She just meant Spencer can’t use the toilet, as it’s brimming with a new batch of Pruno.

“Sorry, Sphincter!” But Mack doesn’t sound sorry at all.

Aphasia, still spread-eagle on the bed, turns to Quinn, then back to Spencer, clearly confused as ever. “Wait, this the same girl?”

Yep, Spencer is going to miss her. It’s not like they’ll never see each other. There’s the Mess Hall and classes and, god, the showers. It’s prison, for crying out loud, which is the entire problem in the first place. Spencer won’t really be able to escape these three any more than she can escape the other lunatics and the perpetual fear and the killer spider and the fucking Play-Doh.

But this transfer is a severance, nevertheless. It’s an end in a place that is an end in itself, and this isn’t the new beginning she wants, not by a long shot. Things keep getting worse the more she tries to make them better.

And she’s tired, so very fucking tired, and wants nothing more than to curl up with Quinn in her bunk and forget how horrible everything is. But with a glance at her own bed, Spencer sees the giant yellow map on the wall and remembers why she’s standing here. There isn’t time for pleasurtries or goodbyes, not to these people who didn’t stand by her when there was murder going on.

Spencer’s on her own now. It’s time to get down to business. She holds out a hand to Aphasia, never taking her eyes off the smeared chalk. “Give me paper and a pencil.”

With a loud huff, Aphasia sits up and glares, clearly affronted. “What the hell would I have that for? We in prison. This ain’t Wal-Mart.”

“You have everything. Maracas and seat belts and Halloween decorations and THIGHMASTERS—”

“SHHHH!!” Mack hisses at Spencer, motioning toward Boomer with her head overdramatically. As if all of this is really a fucking secret, or Boomer gives two shits.

“Well, I don’t have paper and pencil,” Aphasia snaps back. “Who needs that?”

“I need it!” Spencer sits down on the edge of her bed, resting her forehead against her fist. “Just for once, I need your help with something that’s actually important. But I guess that’s too much to ask.”

Aphasia examines her fingernails as her legs keep pumping. “You need your big gay jaw wired shut, is what you need.”

Aphasia examines her fingernails as her legs keep pumping. “You need your big gay jaw wired shut, is what you need.”

Spencer looks up and snaps, “You really put the ‘whore’ in ‘hoarder’.”

“She puts the ‘der’ in ‘hoarder,’” Mack mumbles from the toilet.

“Fuck you, Macaroni!” Aphasia slams her Thighmaster down on the bed for emphasis. “Your hair is stupid, your nipples are ugly, and your wine tastes like that grey shit they made me drink when I had that upper GI Joe test at the doctor with the x-rays, and they said it was a milkshake but it wasn’t because later they told me it had metal in it, so it was a metalshake, and I TOLD them it was nasty but Mama said it was just really bad vanilla but it was a LIE and my poop was heavy for a week and NOW I HAVE TRUST ISSUES!”
Her body slams against the bed as she blindly throws the Thighmaster across the room at full strength, missing Quinn’s head by mere inches. It hits the wall and falls to the floor, and Aphasia turns, embarrassed, to see her mistake. Quinn’s staring her down, unimpressed and threatening, as Spencer stands in the middle between them. No one moves or speaks. Spencer doesn’t even breathe.

Suddenly, a faint, high-pitched wheeze — something like a balloon deflating — cuts through the silence. All three girls turn their heads to glare at Mack, who shifts uncomfortably.

“Oh, fuck off,” she grumbles.

Quinn stifles a laugh as she turns back to Aphasia. Her expression is softer now. “Give her the blue highlighter.”

Spencer looks up to see Aphasia wafting one hand in front of her face, reaching the other hand under the mattress. She finds what she needs and yanks her hand out, jabbing Spencer hard in the hair with the pen.

“Sorry,” Aphasia says but clearly doesn’t mean it.

Quinn picks up the book closest to her and tears off the back cover, which is plain white on the inside. “Here.” It’s small, but it’ll do as a writing surface.

“Thanks.” Spencer’s voice is soft. Their fingers briefly connect in the exchange, but it’s not enough. All she wants right now is for Quinn to touch her. How cruelly ironic that she’s being moved because she didn’t let Quinn touch her enough. She’s such a screw-up, she’s even doing prison wrong.

Boomer bangs a fist three times on the cell door. “Hurry up!”

“Keep your pants on,” Quinn snaps back at her.

That gives Spencer an idea. Maybe an impromptu spank session could earn her a few more days here? Spencer’s desperate enough, she’s considering unzipping and leaning over right here and now. She could power through it. She’d even take the inevitable broken nose from Mack afterward. Whatever will get Spencer’s body pressed back against the warmth of Quinn’s again, with those lips breathing softly across her ear.

Boomer yells and bangs again, and Spencer snaps out of her daydream and shakes it off. There’s nothing to be done at this point except what she came here for. Within a minute she’s created a four-by-seven-inch bright blue map of clues and names. And with that, Spencer’s holding everything she owns. A hurried sketch of truth, an unwashed jumpsuit, and the seven heavy-days still shoved into her briefs. Time’s up. With one more quick mental inventory of her bunk, she reaches into her pillowcase and grabs her toothbrush, shoving it up her sleeve.

This catches Quinn’s attention. “What’s going on?”

About time.

“Umbridge. She told Sylvester to transfer me. I don’t know where.”

Quinn jumps down off the bunk and stands in front of Spencer, spitting mad and maybe ten seconds away from punching someone. “Let me talk to Sue!”
Boomer has her key in the lock but doesn’t turn it. “Get back up there, Quinn. Now.”

Pushing past Spencer, Quinn rushes the door and gets in Boomer’s face. “You can’t just take her away! This is bullshit!”

“It’s done,” Spencer says dismissively. She’s taking her frustration out on Quinn, which is the last thing she wants, but she can’t stop herself.

“Back the fuck up, inmate” Boomer looks more intimidating now than ever before, eyes wide and staring Quinn down hard.

The guards may have the weapons, but Spencer will bet on Quinn in a fight any day of the week. She seems to have that killer instinct and that look in her eye that says, I already know where I’m going to hide your body.

Without another moment’s hesitation, Boomer grabs a small, black instrument from her hip-holster, points it through the bars at Quinn’s crotch, and pulls the trigger. A small wire shoots out and the claw at the end clamps to the skin beyond the thin threads. Quinn screams, falling to the floor as waves of electric current attack her again and again.

“QUINN!” Spencer cries out. She feels helpless, not knowing if she can rip the wires off without getting electrocuted herself. She’d risk it if she wasn’t wearing these goddamn handcuffs. Instead, she turns to Boomer and yells, desperately, “STOP IT!”

But the guard just stares at the convulsing girl on the floor, not moving or reacting, and certainly not stopping it. She doesn’t look human, the way she’s so emotionally disconnected. She’s frozen in time with no regard to consequence, like a robot, or a machine.

Spencer’s crying now, crouched over, pleading, “STOP! PLEASE!”

She feels the toothbrush bristles scratching against her arm and wants nothing more than to take it and shove the handle in Boomer’s eye. If Spencer thought she could strike without missing, she would. But the goddamn bars are in the way, and her tears are blurring her vision. Finally, the buzzing noise fades and a few seconds later, Quinn’s body stills.

Spencer has seen a lot of messed up things in space prison, but this is the scariest so far—Quinn in a puddle on the floor, hair frizzled, body curled. Her face is still contorted in pain, and her fingers are twitching with reflexive aftershocks.

She was just sticking up for me.

“Quinn?” Spencer sniffs hard and wipes her eyes with her sleeve, trying to hold it together.

Quinn doesn’t respond.

Boomer unlocks the door casually, unhooking the taser and reholstering it. “Let’s go.” But Spencer’s glued to the spot, terrified out of her mind. Boomer rolls her eyes. “She’s not dead.”

“How could you do this?” Spencer cries.

“LET’S GO. Or you’re next.” She reaches for her taser again, but Spencer now knows not to test her patience any longer.

With another sniffle, she carefully sidesteps Quinn’s mussed hair as she picks up the marker and map that she must have dropped on the floor. She holds for a moment, debating if she could reach over
and check Quinn’s pulse or stroke her cheek. Something to tell her it’s going to be okay. But Spencer just stands and keeps going, never taking her eyes off the crumpled girl.

The door closes behind her, signaling the end to the gruesome scene. Immediately, Mack rushes to Quinn and checks her vitals, brushing her hair out of her face and doing all the things Spencer wishes she could do. Here in the corridor, she can only look on, already a world away but wholly responsible for the damage done. Mack and Aphasia have no words for Spencer—their eyes say plenty. Spencer has brought nothing but trouble upon them, and they’re glad to see her go.

“You’re a monster,” Spencer says to Boomer as she finally turns away. The tears aren’t holding themselves back anymore, and Spencer doesn’t care. “She didn’t do anything to you!”

“She disobeyed a direct order, inmate.” There isn’t a hint of regret in her voice.

Mack shouts, “Fucking asshole piece of FUCKING SHIT,” adding more volume and more loathing with each word.

Spencer thinks she can hear Quinn whisper her name as she starts to walk away, but it’s probably just the fans. The air in this place, like everything else, isn’t real anyway.
The Walk of Shame is over before it even begins, as Boomer takes Spencer all of twelve feet next door.

“That’s it?”

The door to cell 11 slides open, and three faces stare back at her—one very interested, one very much not, and one looking at Spencer like she’s the dinner they’re waiting for.

Boomer pushes Spencer inside hard, quickly shuts the door, and walks away. No wishes of luck this time.

Spencer examines her new cellmates, two of whom she already knows all too well—River Tam and Dark Willow. They’re easily the weirdest people in this prison, save the fluffy mystery that is Lucy Fabray. Spencer’s going to need all the luck she can get.

The third girl, who’s already undressing Spencer with her eyes, is a brand new face. She has slick, long brown hair and beautiful features, no bulging veins or permanent creepy expression, plus bonus points for above-prison-average hygiene. She vaguely resembles that girl from the movie about women who dance on bars, Coyote Something-or-Other, not that Spencer was paying any attention when Hanna got drunk and put it on. Because that would’ve been very gay.

If cell 10 is a funhouse mirror of Spencer’s friends back home, cell 11 is Two Crazies and a Goth Queen. It looks like she’ll need to get used to a new bunk, too, since Dark Willow’s got the bottom-right one. Spencer doubts her new top-right bunk has the same veritable wealth of items beneath it that Aphasia’s does. Only one way to find out.

This isn’t her first rodeo, so Spencer decides to take a new, aggressive approach this time. “River. Dark Willow.” She nods to each girl in turn.

That’s right, look like you own the place.

She then turns to the horndog on the bottom left bunk, under River’s, and crosses her arms. Spencer’s never seen her before, and she’s delighted to finally have seniority over someone. “Who are you?”

The girl has one leg wrapped around the vertical beam, bent at the knee, and she’s smoking a cigarette with an air of arrogance, as if saying, “Hi, here's my crotch. Please get in it. Isn’t lung cancer sexy?” She looks like a hooker sloth. The annoying part is, it’s almost as charming as she thinks it is.

“Paulie.” She lifts her eyebrows once. “Oster.” Paulie rests her cigarette between her lips to extend a free hand to Spencer.

Yeah, there’s no way she’s touching that.
Spencer waits her out, staring her down and asserting her authority. After an awkward moment, Paulie tries to save face by continuing the conversation. “I was just telling River she should pick a Shakespeare for the next Book Club assignment. Whataya say, New Girl?”

*Hey, you don’t get to call me that! I was here first!*

Spencer steadies herself, careful not to show any emotion. Step One to being the boss: Make them like you even if you don’t like them. “Macbeth.”

Paulie flies off the bed with a squeal of delight, taking Spencer’s hands and twirling her around 720 degrees in a spontaneous dance. “Macbeth is the BEST!” she says when they come to a stop, then glares at River. “This is what I’ve been saying.” She looks at Spencer with hearts in her eyes. “Finally, someone with good taste! I like you, New Girl.”

The feeling isn’t mutual. “It’s ‘Spencer,’ and I’m not new. I’ve been living next door for weeks.”

“What brings you here, then? You stab somebody, New Girl?” Paulie’s clearly a great listener. “Kidnap your cousin? Run over an old guy with his newborn grandbaby in his arms?”

*What?*

From the bunk above, River says, “She crossed the A,” and traces the letter in the air with a boney finger, eyes curiously following the path as she moves.

Spencer looks back at Paulie and widens her eyes in concern, like their cellmate must have shimmied out of her straight-jacket earlier that day. And then eaten it. With a deep sigh, Spencer addresses the original question. If they’re playing Get To Know You, she’s going to rewind to the murder part and leave the "Please don’t spank me" cell transfer out of it entirely. She’s scarier that way.

“I killed my boyfriend.”

“Boyfriend?” Paulie and Dark Willow say together, as if Spencer has uttered something terrible and shocking. Then, Dark Willow adds, “For real?”

“That’s the part that bothers you?”

“Sweetie,” Dark Willow says, “Who in here hasn’t killed somebody? Show of hands?” Nobody moves. “Yeah, that’s the scary part.” She looks like she needs a drink just from having to think about men for two seconds.

“He deserved it,” Spencer adds with a shrug.

Dark Willow’s tone darkens significantly as her voice drops. “They all deserve it.”

“Rage more,” Paulie grins, as if initiating Spencer into their Cool Killers Club. Something about Paulie makes her look like she’s always up to no good. Like she has a secret she’s dying to tell you that you should be dying to know, but god only knows what you need to do to get it out of her.

*Probably reach in with your tongue, Spencer thinks, judging by the way she’s looking at me. Which, no, thank you.*

Paulie then says, “Weapon of choice?” It sounds so casual, like she’s asking what flavor of Kool-Aid Spencer prefers or what knitting stitch she favors.

“They turn you like a screw,” River interjects, “so you smash them with a hammer. The blood upon

Saying no more, River climbs down from her bunk with the grace of a Capuchin in the rainforest. She promptly propels herself into a handstand in the center of the room, lowering her legs into a split, parallel to the ground. Her hands move her in a circle, spinning her around like a helicopter. It’s a miracle she doesn’t hit her feet on the vertical beams of the bunk. Spencer steps back to a safe distance with a “What the fuck?” expression.

Dark Willow hand-waves, “She just does that. Please, go on.”

Spencer climbs up to her new bed, and they talk about murder weapons and techniques for at least an hour before moving on to blood stain removal tricks, how long to let victims live before killing them, and their favorite types of pizza crust. (After about twenty minutes, River stops spinning and walks on her hands over to the toilet. Pulling herself up, she remains perched in a handstand as she pukes down into it. She’s much better at holding conversation after that.) Morbid as the topics are, it’s a fun and welcoming energy, and certainly a friendlier environment to Spencer.

A part of her hates that she’s already happier here, at least when she considers the whole versus the sum of its parts. Because all of these parts are batshit crazy, and none of them are Quinn. But she’ll take what she can get right now.
It should be peaceful, Spencer thinks, now that she’s out of range of Aphasia’s snoring. It’s not like the bed feels any different from her last one, and Charlotte hasn’t followed her—at least that she knows of. But the hours tick by, long after lights-out, and Spencer continues to stare at the ceiling, wide awake. Her thoughts won’t slow down long enough to settle. Usually, she spends her restless nights revisiting the specifics of a case, turning them over in her mind to find new angles or connect pieces together.

But not tonight. Instead, images of Quinn screaming and crumpling to the ground replay in her head, endlessly on loop. And there in the footage stands Spencer, worthless and paralyzed, not doing a goddamn thing to stop it.

_Fuck Boomer._

She restarts the scene again and again, sometimes playing the hero, other times not. But what’s done is done, and Quinn will never forgive her. Spencer didn’t even have the chance to apologize, though she’s not exactly sure what for. She has all night to figure it out now. A guilty conscience doesn’t sleep.

The next morning, when Buffy comes to collect them for breakfast, Spencer knows she has bags under her eyes. Jumping down, she runs to splash water on her face and get to the door as quickly as possible. She needs to talk to Quinn, baggage and all.

She files out into the corridor second, right behind Paulie. Just ten feet ahead she sees pink-blonde hair, and her pulse quickens. Spencer leans forward and hisses, “Quinn!” Not loud enough. Spencer pokes her head out to the side and tries again, though this time Paulie swats a hand at her face like she’s a gnat in her ear.

Again, Quinn doesn’t turn around, but Mack shoots Spencer a nasty side-eye. Then an unfamiliar voice behind her yells, “Shut the fuck up!”

Spencer whips her head around, but it’s a group of women she doesn’t know yet; it could’ve been any of them. She takes a deep breath for a third and final attempt, but then Buffy knocks her back into line with a sharp elbow to the side. Spencer clutches her ribs with a grimace. _Okay_, maybe she’ll try again in the Mess Hall.

Breakfast is just as noisy as always, and Spencer’s halfway through formulating a plan of attack when she catches Quinn bailing out of line to go sit at their usual table, without food. Spencer considers her options. She can eat like she’s supposed to, or she can join Quinn and hopefully get a moment alone to apologize. Maybe Quinn will want to meet during rec time so they can talk m—

“Line’s moving.” Sophia Burset cuts through her daydream. She’s the tallest woman on the _Uterius_ and looks even more imposing when right behind Spencer.
Food first, Quinn later, Spencer decides. That is, if Mack doesn’t stab her in the throat with her spork. By now, Spencer’s used to the constant danger of being shanked by an angry brunette.

Directly ahead of her, the brains of the cosmetic industry are discussing the menu.

“Do you think the eggs are, like, real eggs?” Maritza asks Flaca.

“What else would it be?”

“I’m just saying, I don’t think they have chickens in space.”

Flaca looks like a hard truth has just been dropped on her. “Then what the hell kind of eggs are they feeding us here? Alien eggs or some shit? Is that why my skin’s been more oily lately?” She looks sincerely concerned.

Maritza examines her cheeks carefully. “I don’t think so. It’s probably all that hooch you been drinking.”

“Oh yeah,” Flaca agrees.

Spencer decides to help those less fortunate than her. “The eggs are from a powder,” she says, leaning in.

“Powder?” Flaca turns her head with a look of disgust. There’s a dramatic shift in her tone now that she’s addressing someone other than her soulmate. “How the hell you gonna make eggs from a powder? That’s how you make pancakes.” She refocuses on Maritza and softens with a smile. “Actually, I kind of like the idea of alien eggs. It’s exotic.”

“Right?” Maritza says. “Like, imagine what they’d pay for that in LA.”

“Probably like five thousand dollars.”

“Mmhmm.”

“We’re lucky, if you really think about it.”

Maritza agrees. “So lucky.”

They reach the pickup counter before Spencer is subjected to further invigorating discussion. She collects her breakfast—skipping the eggs—and marches over to Quinn with all the steely determination she can muster. She practiced the conversation a thousand times last night and has it all planned out. The distance closes, then Spencer plants herself behind Aphasia, facing Quinn and Mack, and takes a deep breath for strength.

Before she can utter a word or even put her tray down, something solid pelts her in the face. Spencer flinches upon impact, more from disbelief than anything else.

“My waffles!” Aphasia cries.

Mack growls, “Table’s full,” and fires a second starchy assault, then a third.

Spencer holds a hand up to block any more incoming bricks. And of course, now she’s got maple syrup on her uniform. Again. “Quinn—” She can take an entire firing squad of waffles to the face if it means Quinn at least looks at her.

Which, she doesn’t. Quinn doesn’t even so much as glance up from the table. Mack eventually runs
out of waffles to throw, but it doesn’t matter. They’ve made it clear there’s no place for her here. In the middle of this raucous cafeteria, Quinn’s silence is deafening.

The noises around her begin to spin and swirl together as her head starts to pound. Spencer can feel the burn behind her eyes, and her throat’s closing up, and it’s outside Toby’s apartment all over again. She can’t do this, not again, not here. Not with Mack practically gloating.

 Fuck Mack.

 Fuck Boomer, and fuck Mack.

Spencer chokes it all back and stalks off to join her new cellmates on the other side of the room.

She’s never been to this table before or seen the cafeteria from this angle. Familiar backs of heads now have fronts, and everyone she knows well is out of sight and a world away.

It’s weird.

But still, Spencer relaxes a bit as she takes her seat. Dark Willow and River probably won’t throw food at her, and Paulie isn’t going to just ignore her. Right now, the change of venue provides an escape. She almost wants to become someone else, take on a whole new persona and erase the last four weeks.

Almost.

No, Spencer’s not giving up. Mack can’t form an impenetrable barrier around Quinn all the time, like when she’s in Play-Doh Funhouse. Plus, Quinn could now be signed up for classes that Mack’s not in. Spencer will join anything to see her. Even motherfucking Bees, if that’s what it takes. She can do this. She’s gone up against worse enemies than some half-ass, malcontent prison bitch.

After breakfast, she looks at the class schedule posted outside the library on her way back to cell 11. The Wednesday choices are Alcoholics and Group Therapy, which Spencer finds a bit redundant. Quinn wasn’t taking a Wednesday class before, but maybe she just wanted more bunk time with Spencer. And maybe Quinn has joined something now in the hopes that Spencer will be there. They could both be working the same motive; it’s plausible. And it’s the best plan Spencer’s got.

Quinn has never mentioned a problem with addiction, so Spencer takes the safer choice, Group Therapy. And, honestly, with everything going on right now, some girl talk doesn’t sound like the worst thing in the world. Spencer might get a new lead on the murders. At the very least, she’ll be able to air out some frustration over the transfer. She can’t be the only one here who’s been screwed over by Umbridge.

As an added bonus, it’s likely that Mack goes to Alcoholics. Though, it wouldn’t surprise Spencer if they just sit around and drink for fifty-five minutes. With the week she’s had, Spencer’s considering going there instead just on the hunch.

That afternoon, Spencer discovers she’s the only one from her cell taking a Wednesday class, so she files into the line alone. Mack and Aphasia step out ahead of her, as predicted, but Spencer’s heart drops when Quinn doesn’t follow. The doors slam close; it’s too late to change her mind now. Spencer walks past cell 10, keeping pace with the others, and Quinn’s up on her bunk, face buried in a book like nothing’s happening, nothing’s changed. Like Spencer’s nothing to her.

“Quinn.” Spencer hates how weak she sounds. She hates everything about this. “Quinn.”

The book drops closed on her stomach. “What?” Her tone is impatient, hostile. Like she’s fighting back something.
“MOVE IT!” Boomer shouts from the back of the line.

Spencer can’t stall forever. “Can we just talk? Please?”

“You’re late for class.” Quinn fingers through the pages and finds her spot.

“I was trying to see you!”

Quinn’s expression hardens. “I’ve been right here. You’re the one who left.”

It hits Spencer like a punch in the gut, and then she really does feel a shove as the line pushes forward. Spencer’s swept forward against her will, wanting to go back and fix it, to explain that it wasn’t her fault, that she tried. But now they’re nearing the end of the hall, about to turn the corner. She glances into the other cells as they pass, but they all look the same—mostly empty inside, like her.

The lone exception is the last one—Lucy Fabray’s cell. The three girls are simply lying on their beds, silent but awake, and Spencer can only imagine what they’ll be up to when the traffic’s gone. A rousing session of macaroni art, perhaps, or that thing where you use your hand to make a turkey. It could get wild in there!

Buffy leads them down the corridor and around to the parallel hall where most classes take place. Mack and the other girls going to Alcoholics break off into the library with Boomer. The Small Arms room, Spencer and Aphasia’s destination, is down at the very far end past most of the other spaces. Eight or nine girls walk in ahead of her, most of whom Spencer doesn’t really recognize. There’s a circle of metal chairs in the middle of the room and more door-less lockers lining the walls, just like in the Large Arms Room. Buffy’s gone, but Greggs is back, leaning against the door frame and looking bored with her assignment. It seems she’s there to keep them from escaping or throwing chairs at each other. Though, that could be very therapeutic.

As the last inmates settle into their seats, the awkward silence begins, and Spencer wonders just what the instructor, Sameen Shaw, is waiting for. Shaw’s got her arms crossed, slumped over in her chair. She looks more pissed than anyone to be there and just stares angrily at the wall behind Spencer’s head, motionless.

“Hello, everyone,” says a voice to Spencer’s left. The woman’s hair is done in little knots on her head, and Spencer can’t help but think she resembles a Bumble Ball. “I guess I’ll get us started today. I’m Suzanne.” The woman pauses, as if expecting a reply, but Spencer doesn’t know the protocol here, so she doesn’t say anything. Suzanne continues to speak slowly but very animatedly with her hands, each word emphasized by her expressive face and very big eyes. “I was hoping to share a poem I—”

“No,” Shaw says, still staring straight ahead at nothing.

“I wrote it when—”

“No.”

“I just have all these feelings, you know?”

“No.”

“I think you’d really like i—”

“No.” Shaw’s expression hasn’t changed at all.
“But this is group therapy, right?” Suzanne laughs a little at her own question. “Where else am I gonna share what’s inside me?”

“Figure it out.” Shaw’s tone makes it clear that point is not up for debate.

Spencer has no idea why this woman volunteered to run this class, or how the assignments even work around here, come to think of it. But it’s obviously a bad match, unless there’s some great plan in store, like a psych exercise in progress that Spencer just doesn’t know about. After five more minutes of uncomfortable silence, it seems doubtful.

She figures she might as well try to get something out of her fifty-five minutes here. It looks like she’s stuck, either way. “Um, hi, everyone.” All eyes lock on her. “I was hoping to ask the group something, if that’s okay.”

Aphasia looks particularly concerned.

Not surprisingly, Shaw says, “No.”

“You don’t even know what it is,” Spencer says.

Shaw turns to stare her down and raises an eyebrow, reminding her far too much of Quinn. “I don’t care.”

“How the hell is this supposed to be therapy if we can’t talk about anything?”

“Yeah!” Suzanne points at Spencer in a gesture of solidarity. “Let Cauliflower talk!”

Spencer does a double take and scowls but lets it go. ‘Cauliflower’ is better than ‘Maple Tits.’

“No,” Shaw says yet again, eyes still locked on Spencer. She looks downright sociopathic. Gorgeous, but sociopathic.

Spencer throws caution to the wind and just goes for it. “Look, there’s this spider, and—”

“Are you deaf or just stupid?” Shaw leans forward with a hardened glare.

“We don’t talk about s-p-i-d-ers,” Suzanne says with wide eyes. “Some people have phobias.” She gestures toward Aphasia.

It’s the least subtle hint Spencer’s ever seen, but she takes it. Fine. Whatever. “This is pointless.” Spencer turns to the guard. “Can I leave?”

But Greggs only shakes her head. “Sorry, kid.” Her tone has that, We’re both stuck here together quality. “Not til time’s up.”

“What if I have to pee?” She’s just getting cute now.

“But you don’t have to pee,” Greggs retorts, throwing a little attitude back.

Spencer slumps in her chair, defeated. The room is silent for several minutes other than the soft shuffling of jumpsuits when someone has an itch. Spencer is regretting this whole stupid plan that’s been a complete waste of time. She knows Quinn doesn’t like to take classes. Getting her hopes up for nothing has only made her feel shittier.

Out of nowhere, Vasquez offers up, “I like to shoot people,” from two seats to Spencer’s right. It breaks the tension, however awkward it is, and Spencer’s more than a little nervous at the
confession. She didn’t want a reminder that she’s among violent criminals.

Rather than shut down the speaker, however, Shaw’s face softens slightly with a grin. “Tell me more about that.”

When the forty-five minutes of lively conversation is up, Spencer wonders why this particular class isn’t just called Murder. Unfortunately, it doesn’t produce any new leads or suspects, but Spencer decides to join the class on the off-chance it does in a later session.

As the inmates head out into the hallway, Spencer crosses to get behind Aphasia, cutting the line as politely as she can. “Hey,” she whispers. “Can I ask you something?”

“I’m not giving you any heavy-flow tampons!” Aphasia says, much too loudly. Several women up ahead turn and laugh.

“That’s not—Look, will you please just tell Quinn I’m sorry? The last thing I wanted was to get moved away. It was all Umbridge.”

That certainly gets Aphasia’s attention. She stops walking and turns to look Spencer dead in the eye. “What did she say?”

Spencer stumbles, a bit thrown by the inquiry. Aphasia looks scared. “Uh.” She knows she shouldn’t lie, but she doesn’t want to say this out loud. “That I want Quinn to spank me?”

Aphasia frowns and turns to keep walking. “You wastin’ my time.”

“I swear I’m telling the truth!” Spencer pleads, trying to control her volume. “She kept asking me questions about all kinds of—”

“Did she say my name?”

What?

“No? Why? D’you steal her favorite kitten plate or something?”

“HEY!” Greggs shouts from close behind. “Quiet down. This ain’t The View. Keep moving.”

“Nevermind.” Aphasia quickly resumes her pace. “Just...don’t trust her. Don’t tell her anything. Anything.”

“Wasn’t planning on it.” But Spencer didn’t exactly keep her mouth shut in there, throwing her spider theories all over the place. Maybe she’s already said too much.

Three hours later, after dinner, Paulie’s showing River how to blow smoke rings. She boasts she can even do it with her ass (“Watch!”) before Dark Willow and Spencer both shout “NO.”

And then Spencer hears an all-too-familiar sound in the corridor. Her chest tightens with every slap and accompanying scream coming from next door.

Of course. It’s still Wednesday. And, apparently, being tasered in the fucking genitals isn’t enough to stop Quinn from getting her spank on.

Spencer feels stupid for thinking Quinn wouldn’t go back to Mack. Just because she stood up to Boomer on Spencer’s behalf, it doesn’t necessarily mean Quinn has real feelings for her. Or does it? Quinn’s been here long enough; she had to know about the taser. Maybe she felt it was worth it. But then, if she did, she wouldn’t be treating Spencer like this.
Spencer refuses to believe she’s the villain of this story. She didn’t ask for any of this. Quinn can’t blame her for everything, can she? Not forever? But maybe Quinn doesn’t want to think about her at all right now. Maybe she’s just returning to what she knows, Spencer realizes. It’s what we do when we’ve been knocked down and reduced to nothing. We go home. Maybe it’s safer that way.

Maybe Quinn is better off without Spencer after all.

Turning over in her bunk, she listens for Quinn’s voice between Mack’s pained gasps but hears only the sharp smack of the paddle against tender, bruised skin.

Meanwhile, River is up on the far end of her bunk, reaching all the way over to the bars and putting her head through somehow. Her body is angled around so she has a view into the cell next door. Spencer can’t be bothered to chastise her to give Quinn some privacy. She doesn’t want to have an opinion on anything to do with Quinn right now.

There’s a particularly loud noise from Mack, followed by a series of moans that Spencer recognizes as her orgasm sounds. Quinn’s probably got at least one finger inside her right this very moment.

“Aren’t you glad to be out of that madhouse,” Paulie says and bites at the thick ring of smoke drifting from her face.

“Yeah.” She gives a little laugh and turns over to face the wall. But really, Spencer doesn’t know. She has no fucking idea.

****************

The next Wednesday isn’t any better. Spencer’s imagination now paints the scene with much more extravaganza than she ever witnessed firsthand—Quinn’s face glowing with arousal at each slap she administers, head thrown back and mouth open with joy. Aphasia, handing her item after item, endlessly, and Mack, ass high and wanting, leaning in to take the full impact of Quinn’s force. All the while, there’s an undertone that they’re laughing at her. Spencer obsesses over this outrageous mental picture more and more with each passing minute.

Because, clearly, she fucking hates herself.

The next morning, as she’s poking at her burnt hash browns, Spencer overhears Paulie talking at length about the new Tax class she’s teaching in the kitchen. She brags that Sue was so excited by her area of expertise, she dropped the redundant Knives class to make room for it on the schedule. Supposedly, this started last week, though it’s the first Spencer’s heard of it.

What’s blowing her mind is that Paulie has a background in accounting(!) Maybe that’s why Paulie’s here—she used her bookkeeping knowledge for nefarious purposes like tax evasion, embezzlement, or a host of other things. Even if that’s what the class ends up being about, Spencer’s still excited to do some math. She really misses math. Balancing books, legally or otherwise, sounds delicious right now. Maybe that’s why it’s in the kitchen, she muses to herself.

But before Spencer can ask if she prefers cash method or accrual method, Paulie starts raving about how well the first class went last week. Turns out, she already has a prize pupil.

“I think Quinn’s gonna finish her skunk next week,” Paulie says proudly. “The look in his eyes...it’s like he’s been hunting you day and night for weeks, and you accidentally caught him in a moment of weakness, like he was taking a shit or something when you crept up behind him, and he can’t believe he did something so stupid as to get busted by such a pathetic creature as you.”

It takes a moment for Spencer to put two and two together—the only math she’ll be doing today, it
seems. Paulie’s beloved “tax” class is just short for Taxidermy.

*Of course it is.*

Sadly, this makes a lot more sense, as does the location. (Spencer’s trying not to overthink it.) What isn’t making sense, however, is this star student.

“Quinn’s in that class?” Spencer asks as innocently as possible.

“Girl’s got a gift. She sees the beauty in death and captures it like a fucking artist.” Paulie looks a bit sad when she says, “She’s way better than me.”

Spencer can’t think of anything creepier than making art out of dead animals, but this is a sure way in. Provided Mack isn’t there of course. “Is the class full? It sounds really interesting.” Just to be safe, she adds, “Could I make a lobster?”

Chapter End Notes

During the initial drafting process, we had chapter titles based on plot points, then later I adjusted many of them to puns. We were too emotionally attached to this one to change it.
Mount Me, Stuff Me, Shoot Me

Chapter Notes

Here’s the character photo index.

Later that afternoon, it isn’t hard to spot Quinn among the handful of Taxidermy students, with her pink hair and the rather immaculate skunk that inspired reams of poetry from Paulie. Spencer has waited over a week to have a real conversation with Quinn, and now it’s time to put up or shut up, as they say. She ducks in the doorway behind Lucy Diamond and weaves through the kitchen to take the seat next to Quinn. Paulie has already set up a work station for Spencer, complete with a plastic knife, an Elmer’s glue stick, a pillow (ripped open, for the stuffing), and a dead rat.

“Sorry, New Girl,” Paulie tells her. “Martha was out of lobsters, but she had this.”

Spencer purses her lips and nods, staring at the rigor mortis rodent. “No problem.” She’s not here for the project, anyway. At last, this is time with Quinn, free from Mack and Aphasia and periods, with no killer spiders in sight. She can do this. And Paulie wasn’t wrong—the skunk is damn impressive.

But before Spencer can get the conversation going, Quinn breaks the ice for her, looking over with a raised eyebrow. “Didn’t know you liked this kind of thing.”

Spencer gives a small smile as her brain gears shift into overdrive, trying to come up with an appropriately innuendo-laden response. She’s clever and loquacious. This should be easy.

“The only thing I like in here is you.” That’s cheesy.

“I heard you were good with your hands and wanted to see for myself?” ...That’s even worse. God, where’s Hanna when you need her.

Time’s running out.

Quinn’s drinking from a plastic cup and not even facing Spencer anymore—she’s watching Shay staple antlers to a parakeet’s head. But that doesn’t stop Spencer from finally blurtling out, “I’m not interested in stuffing animals.”

OH MY GOD WHAT WHY WHAT.

Spencer hears a strangled choke as Quinn coughs hard around a garbled, “Excuse me?” trying to clear the water from her windpipe.

Well, fuck.

She realizes now the correct response was, “I could say the same about you,” but that moment has passed. Spencer’s started down this road. No turning back now. “You heard me,” she shrugs.

Seductive yet playful. A+ recovery.

After a few beats—during which Paulie passes by and waxes nostalgic about how much that skunk reminds her of boarding school or whatever—Quinn leans closer to Spencer. “Okay. Really, why are
you here?"

Spencer shrugs again as she picks up a plastic knife and twirls it between her fingers, a little more self-conscious of her foreplay attempts now that Quinn isn’t reciprocating. “I want to apologize,” she says without meeting Quinn’s eye. “For...” But she realizes she doesn’t know what to say next. Anyone could be listening, and she doesn’t want to embarrass Quinn further with, “getting your genitals electrocuted.” She settles on just “…Boomer.”

Quinn’s shoulders tense as she straightens and back away from Spencer. “It’s fine.”

“I just...didn’t want you to hate me for what happened, and it seemed like you might?” Spencer lets the plastic knife fall to the workstation. “You were ignoring me, and Mack was throwing food, and —”

Quinn cuts her off. “I said it’s fine. Don’t worry about it.” She starts running a brush through the skunk’s fur.

“But I—”

“Spencer!” Quinn barks, finally looking back up. The class pauses and looks over but soon resumes their activities when they don’t get a show. Quinn closes her eyes for a moment and takes a deep breath. “They were taking you away. It wasn’t your fault.” She shrugs. “It’s not a big deal.”

Spencer shakes her head. “It is to me.”

Quinn meets her eyes for the first time today, but then looks back down and whispers, “I know.” She reaches out and gives Spencer’s leg a gentle squeeze, safely hidden under the table.

The little hairs along Spencer’s arms stand on end, even after Quinn lets go. She really needs to get control of herself before she throws Quinn down on this table here and now. Suddenly, Spencer’s hand shoots up. “Excuse me! Bathroom emergency!”

Paulie looks amused by the outburst. “You can’t hold it, New Girl?”

“I...have a spastic colon.” She winces visibly as the words leave her lips.

A chorus of “Girl, no,” and “Nasty!” reverberates through the kitchen.

Paulie waves a shooing hand at Spencer with a, “Whattaya still standing here for?” as the murmur of laughs die down.

Of course, this is all for naught if Quinn doesn’t follow her. Spencer reaches out and tugs discreetly on Quinn’s jumpsuit to get her attention, then heads for the door without looking back. She can feel the collective stares of the class on her with every step.

Spencer just made herself Shit Girl of space prison. So far beyond the halcyon days of Maple Tits. Very, very far.

*Please, Quinn, make this worth it.*

****************

Spencer’s been idling by one of the sinks in the communal bathroom for at least five minutes, berating herself for such a stark lack of game, when the door swings open. She’s so relieved, her body slumps forward as she sighs, “Oh, thank god.”
“Spastic colon?” Quinn wanders casually toward Spencer, looking her up and down. “Is that what they call it now?”

Spencer holds on to the edge of the counter with both hands and tries to keep her wits about her as the distance between them slowly but steadily erodes. She has no idea how to play cool in this situation, or any other where Quinn is concerned. “Call what?” is all she can manage in response, and now the sway of Quinn’s hips is hypnotizing her, and, Dear god, what is air?

Two more steps, dangerously close, and Quinn’s gorgeous face stops. Quinn places her hands on top of Spencer’s, still gripping for dear life, and looks back and forth from pleading eyes to parted lips. Leaning in, close enough that Spencer can feel the breath against her face, Quinn says, “When you want so badly to get fucked in a bathroom that you’ll do just about anything to get it.”

Yeah, Spencer can’t breathe anymore.

Her eyes fall closed, head heavy with the intensity of the moment—the warm words brushing her lips, hazel eyes staring right through her, the strong fingers clamped on hers, and all of her sensing just how near that perfect body is. “I…” she starts, somehow, with the last bit of air in her lungs, but it’s futile.

Quinn’s kissing her, pulled closer by the hand now tangled deep in Spencer’s hair. There’s a thigh firmly planted between her own, matching the gentle force of Quinn’s tongue against hers and pressing with purpose. And the sound Quinn’s making as she moves is unlike any Spencer’s ever heard.

She is so gone.

Everything is a rush and a blur, lost in the feeling of Quinn everywhere. She’s fantasized about this, but her imagination is crap. Because now Quinn’s thumb is dragging across the nipples behind thin black fabric, and the weaker Spencer’s knees become, the firmer Quinn’s leg braces against her. Her quivering elbows are saved only by the strong arm around her lower back. And Spencer doesn’t even know how she’s still standing—or if she’s standing at all, anymore.

In one smooth motion, Quinn lifts her onto the low counter, and Spencer wraps her arms and legs around Quinn’s beautiful body to kiss her harder. Roaming hands slide down to Spencer’s ass and try to draw their bodies even closer together. Spencer wonders if Quinn’s glorious abs can feel her wet heat through the thin cloth. She rolls her hips once, needing to know, and Quinn’s hands tighten their grip in response, pulling Spencer forward, pleading for more.

A soft whimper escapes Spencer’s mouth as Quinn’s teeth drag along her bottom lip. The noise only makes Quinn recapture those lips and kiss her deeper. But then suddenly all the pressure against Spencer’s body is released at once and her jumpsuit zipper is zooming downward fast. The rush of cool air on her chest makes her gasp against the kiss, and Spencer holds that breath in, imagining what it will feel like to have Quinn’s hands on her skin after all this time.

But instead of pushing the jumpsuit aside to explore underneath it, Quinn takes a fistful of the loose fabric and pulls on it, hard, holding Spencer in place as the kiss breaks. It’s startling, and Spencer opens her eyes, honestly afraid of what might happen next. The intense look on Quinn’s face, inches away, doesn’t relax her one bit. Neither does the long silence.

“I can take you,” Quinn finally says, staring Spencer down hard with that locked grip. “Right here.” It’s not a challenge, it’s a statement of fact. And something in Quinn’s voice tells Spencer that she either damn well wants to or is certainly about to. Maybe both. “I can take...everything you have,” Quinn doesn’t even blink. “Anything at all.” Her eyes drift down slowly and linger there. She makes
sure Spencer sees it. “Because you want me to. Tell me I’m wrong.”

Every muscle in Spencer’s body is outside her control. Not that she would protest even if she could. Quinn isn’t wrong at all.

She sits there, paralyzed, mesmerized, not sure if she’s more lost in Quinn’s eyes or her words. Spencer feels herself shaking with adrenaline and want, watching helplessly as Quinn’s eyes search each line of her face, as if looking for a crack. Looking for a way in. But Spencer’s wide open.

She wonders if Quinn can hear every inch of her body begging to be touched.

In an instant, Quinn’s face shifts from its dominant stance to hesitant and almost fearful, lips parting slightly as her eyes flash with realization. Her delicate tone mirrors her expression. “I can take everything you are, Spencer.” Quinn’s brow furrows as she considers her point, shaken by the implications of her conclusion but knowing she’s right.

Spencer knows it, too.

But then Quinn releases the fistfuls of black and takes a slight step back, just enough to let Spencer breathe without fully releasing her charge.

It’s an unwelcome change. She immediately misses the warmth and closeness and, hell, the rush of fear and desperation. Quinn’s going to walk away and leave her here wanting just to show Spencer she can.

Only, she doesn’t. Instead, Quinn’s eyes soften and her mouth quivers, just once, as she whispers shakily, “…or you can give it to me.”

There’s the slightest hitch in Spencer's breath, an involuntary reaction. Quinn's eyes are locked on hers again, scared and begging, and Spencer can't move, can't think. The words replay in her head like a beautiful dream, and if she can remember how to move, Quinn might make that dream come true.

Everything else falls away; the faint echo of slurs down the corridor, broken toilets behind broken doors, the reality of her new life a world away from everyone who ever loved her. Quinn's eyes are glistening with vulnerability and need, and nothing else matters.

Spencer’s arms are heavy, but she somehow finds a way to move. Ever so faintly, over the pounding in her ears, she can hear the soft rustle of her jumpsuit sliding off her shoulders and falling against the counter.

For a few long seconds, the silence envelopes them as they consider the implications of Spencer’s choice and what they’re about to do—how their lives are about to change—but then Quinn’s mouth is on hers again and the hammering pulse in Spencer’s veins suddenly shifts to a much lower location.

She leans hard into the kiss, back arching as her hands find Quinn’s neck and hair to take control of their encounter for the first time. She feels electric, like her body is buzzing with the frequency of Quinn’s moans, and she’s eagerly seeking out pressure against Quinn’s stomach again, because if she doesn’t get release soon, she’s probably going to die.

Spencer pushes Quinn’s mouth down against her neck and holds it there, tilting her head back to give wider access, and she can’t help the “Oh god” from escaping once (or twelve times) at the sensation of hard bites on sensitive skin. The legs wrapped around Quinn’s back squeeze tighter as their bodies move together in a seamless dance of give and take.
Placing one hand firmly on Spencer’s back, Quinn moves the other to her breast, pushing past the cotton cup without hesitation to tease the hardened nipple. She twists and pinches in time with long strokes of her tongue along Spencer’s neck, then palms the soft weight with gentle pressure, seeming to relish how perfectly it fits in her hand.

Even with just this simple action, there’s a stark difference Spencer can’t help but notice. Toby—or any boyfriend she’d had, for that matter—felt so foreign, so large and clumsy and imposing and just...wrong. Everything about Quinn’s body seems to be made to match Spencer’s. The contrast of soft skin with determined strength, the way their curves complement and fit into each other, the incredible things Quinn just knows to do to her…

Releasing a handful of pinkish-blond hair, Spencer takes Quinn’s hand and stills it with a gentle squeeze. She focuses all her energy into a careful, tender kiss before pulling back and opening her eyes.

There’s an unreadable expression on Quinn’s face, like she doesn’t know if she’s made a mistake but can’t bring herself to ask. She isn’t moving, waiting for answers and reprieve.

“Quinn,” Spencer whispers, heart pounding again as she gathers the strength to speak. The fingers on her chest feel so small and fragile now.

Slowly, she moves Quinn’s hand through the narrow, empty space between their bodies, eyes following all the way down, and stops when they reach the V of the zipper just below her navel. They hover there together for a moment, Quinn so near to where Spencer needs her to be and aching with want to close the distance. Spencer steadies herself and finds Quinn’s eyes. “Take me.”

Stillness hangs around them, inside them, frozen, before everything happens at once. Quinn’s mouth crashes into Spencer’s as her hand drives downward, taking firm hold around the wanting curve of her body. Spencer cries out as they kiss, while Quinn’s fingers slide easily across her soft, wet skin. Two finger pads find her throbbing clit and push hard, grinding in circles, inscribing the letter ‘Q’ over and over and branding Spencer forever.

Spencer flings her arms around Quinn’s neck and holds on for dear life, glad she’d decided to take off her underwear before Quinn arrived in the bathroom, but mostly wondering how in the world someone’s hand can move like that. Quinn breaks their kiss and leans against Spencer’s forehead, breathing heavily across her cheek. The immediate increase between Spencer’s legs indicates a renewed focus, and it’s more than she can handle. She buries her face into Quinn’s neck to muffle her moans, but Quinn is working faster the louder Spencer gets.

Then Quinn stops, just for a moment, and moves her hands to Spencer’s hips, pulling her off the counter and, thank god, holding her upright, as Spencer’s feet are hardly load-bearing anymore. With a swift motion, she drags the rest of the jumpsuit down Spencer’s legs and off, then lifts her back up, kissing her again and pulling Spencer’s ass forward one more time.

Quinn’s hands seem to be everywhere—on Spencer’s sides and breasts and back and neck, then finally between her legs again, resuming their patterns but now without obstruction. The closer Quinn pulls her, the wider her legs spread against Quinn’s body, and Spencer realizes there is nothing she wouldn’t give Quinn, no part of Quinn she doesn’t want to take in. Their tongues move together as Spencer traces a hand down the strong forearm to place her fingers on Quinn’s, applying even more pressure.

When Quinn uses the added force to drive two fingers deep inside her, Spencer screams.

Quinn grabs a fistful of hair and holds Spencer’s mouth against her neck again, pumping her arm as
fast as she can. Her thumb drags back and forth across Spencer’s clit as she moves, and Spencer is hungrily pushing Quinn’s hand deeper, faster, harder. She’s never felt anything like this before. Her body is on fire, sweat running down her back, breaths short and fast, eyes shut tight, muscles clenched as she pants into Quinn’s shoulder.

She’s going to come soon. That is, if Quinn will let her.

Oh god.

And then, without a word, Quinn slows her movements and pulls Spencer into a deep, passionate kiss. Spencer pushes hard against the back of Quinn’s hand, wanting somehow for there to be even deeper places to reach, wanting all that Quinn is inside of her. She opens her mouth wider as she presses, taking Quinn in everywhere but still needing more.

But Quinn’s free hand is moving Spencer’s away, and, instead, Quinn gently places Spencer’s hand flat against her own mouth and holds it there for a moment, implying it needs to stay. She spreads Spencer’s legs wider, drawing her nearer to the counter’s edge, and watches her two fingers disappear easily inside Spencer. Quinn’s smiling, almost hungrily, dangerously.

And then Spencer feels Quinn’s tongue against her for the first time.

She falls back, one elbow propped on the counter to hold herself up as she whimpers helplessly into her other hand. Quinn’s lips are sucking hard around her clit as three fingers now thrust into her, and Spencer knows she must be in space after all, because she’s seeing stars.

Her head falls back, still grunting “Yes” and “Please” repeatedly against her palm, and she doesn’t know if it’s sweat or tears running down her face, or both. Quinn drags a hand up Spencer’s stomach and rests it flat between her breasts, digging her nails into the soft flesh there. Spencer somehow finds the strength to pull her head back up and open her eyes, looking down at this scene before her: Quinn’s hand possessively on her body, her other working Spencer so hard, mouth wrapped around Spencer’s most vulnerable skin, and hazel eyes locked on hers.

She comes harder than she ever knew she could.

Burying a high-pitched scream in the crook of her elbow, Spencer’s body tenses as the electric shocks reach all the way down to her toes and explode. Quinn sucks hard on her clit to pull her through the orgasm, then keeps hard pressure with her tongue after Spencer releases, stilling the fingers inside. The hand on her chest is tracing light designs across her breasts, but Spencer’s head is too swimmy to know just how long it’s been doing that. She jolts a few times involuntarily as her muscles reset, but otherwise, she can’t move.

After a minute, Quinn releases the pressure of her tongue and lightly drags it back and forth across the overstimulated skin before standing up. She smiles, quite pleased with herself, it seems, and uses her free hand to pull Spencer upright and meet her lips. Spencer melts into the kiss, humming at how it tastes even better now, which she hadn’t thought possible. The three fingers still inside her aren’t moving, but Spencer’s in no hurry for Quinn to leave. Everything is perfect—her head spinning with the chemical rush, body flush against Quinn, feeling sated yet truly alive. If this is what sex with a woman is always like—well, sign Spencer up.

She wraps her arms around Quinn, breaking the kiss to pull her into a hug, when suddenly a deafening BOOM rocks the ground under their feet. Quinn barely stays standing as Spencer lurches forward hard, painfully, kept only on the sink’s edge by the whiplash back. The ship settles and levels itself out, but the girls are shaking, clinging tightly to each other.
“You okay?” Quinn asks, steadying them both.

“What the hell was that? A bomb? Did we crash into something?” With earthquakes off the list, none of the remaining options are all that pleasant.

There’s a loud buzzing sound, and the intercom hisses to life just outside in the hallway. “Attention inmates, guards, and other vermin,” Sue says. “There is no cause for alarm. The slight disturbance you felt was nothing more than a meteor striking the ship at maximum velocity.”

“Oh, THAT’S ALL,” says Spencer.

“I am sad to report the sole casualty: my ninety-six-ounce protein smoothie, which is now nothing more than a sticky puddle of whey powder and children’s tears on my office floor.” She pauses and sniffs once, then continues. “Fortunately, our stabilizers are in top working condition, which is more than I can say for the rest of you. Please carry on with your pointless, lesbian lives.” A final click.

“We should get out of here,” Spencer starts, but Quinn’s eyes are frozen wide. “What?”

“I can’t…um…” Quinn looks down, and Spencer follows, seeing the toned forearm still between her legs, only…it ends at her wrist.

Spencer’s jaw drops open. “Is your WHOLE HAND in there?!” She’s still numb and tingly and honestly isn’t sure what’s going on down there.

“You slammed into me!”

“So you break my fall by fisting me?!”

Quinn stiffens and takes a defensive step back. Well, as far as one can when her hand is up a girl’s vagina. “I didn’t mean to!”

But Spencer isn’t hearing a word Quinn says, because they’re not alone anymore. A small shadow is moving along the back wall ten feet behind them, silently creeping out of a stall. The blood drains from Spencer’s face as Charlotte scurries into the light and pauses, as if stopping to stare at her prey.

“THERE IT IS!” She points and frantically tries to get her bare feet up on the counter, scaring the shit out of Quinn in the process. “KILL IT! GET IT!”

Quinn jumps and turns but doesn’t move otherwise, searching the room for any sign of a threat and finding none. But then her eyes catch movement, and she relaxes a bit. That is one tiny-ass spider.

“Right there! You see it, right?”

All of Quinn’s panic has dissipated. “I see it.”

Spencer’s only moderately relieved at this—Yay, she hasn’t been hallucinating, but omg no, it’s here. “It’s killing people! Go step on it or something!” She feels a tug deep in her core, then another.

That’s weird.

Quinn looks down at her wrist again and groans.

Spencer doesn’t like the sound of that. “What?”

“…I think…I’m stuck.”
“WHAT.”
“I don’t know! I can’t get it out!”

“PULL HARDER.”
“I’m trying!”

“I’m not some Chinese finger trap,” Spencer snaps. “If you got IN, you have to be able to get OUT.” Another strained tug. “UM, OW.”

“You said to pull harder!” After a few more attempts, Quinn starts to put a foot against the counter for leverage.

Spencer glares. “Really?!”

Quinn is exasperated. She sighs and says, “Look...just relax. I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Then fucking pick me up and carry me out of here, I don’t care! That thing is going to kill us if we don’t kill it first!” Spencer isn’t taking her eyes off Charlotte, not this time. This bullshit ends now.

“I can’t. Just...hold still so I can adjust my angle.”

It hurts—the sharp knuckles pulling against her—but Spencer refuses to die like this, a lesbian puppet, bare-ass on a prison sink in space. She winces and groans, trying to relax her muscles, but she’s just too damn scared.

A distant yet familiar voice echoes outside the bathroom. “Be ready to beg for it when I get back, girls.”

“Oh, shit. Shit, shit, shit,” Spencer mumbles, trying to crawl backward on the counter, as if her efforts would magically extricate Quinn, or perhaps allow them to hide in thin air in front of a large mirror.

“Hold still!”

But it’s too late. The door swings open, and in walks the owner of a very recognizable pink jumpsuit.

“My, my, my...What do we have here?”

Spencer immediately tries to cover herself up, but it’s pointless. The best she can do is curl into a ball with her arms around her knees and her face buried, which does nothing to hide Quinn’s precarious position. In fact, it makes it worse.

Quinn turns sharply and then sighs with an annoyed, “Fuck.”

Lucy Fabray takes two steps forward, pauses at a safe distance, and peers conspicuously between Spencer’s feet. “You know, Quinn, in many ancient cultures, it was considered polite to remove one’s hand from a vagina before engaging in conversation with guests.”

Spencer wants to die.

“Then maybe you shouldn’t talk to us,” Quinn replies.

Lucy pauses, contemplating. “Unless...oh no. Got your hand stuck in the cookie jar, again?”
Again?!

“Go away!”

Lucy’s head tilts as she considers the moment. “I didn’t think you were finally taking the fisting class? You really should consider signing up. Your technique needs some work.”

“Says the Queen of Fingerpainting.”

But unlike her counterpart, Lucy isn’t showing any sign that Quinn’s getting under her skin. “You know, if the hand is just lost anyway, there are ways of freeing your arm—”

Quinn points and yells, “Stay the FUCK away from me.”

Spencer doesn’t know what the hell is going on, but she isn’t looking up. Maybe if she keeps hiding, it’ll all just disappear and she’ll wake up back in Rosewood. She’s mortified, more than she ever has been in her life, and Charlotte has to be at least halfway across the floor by now, poised to kill her on the spot.

From the sound of things, this banter isn’t stopping anytime soon. Spencer lifts her head enough to peek a glance at the monster’s last known location but sees only grimey tiles.

Shit! Where did she go?! Okay, fuck this.

“Look, there’s a spider in here,” Spencer says to Lucy. “Somewhere over there. And we’d really appreciate if you’d go kill it.” She tries to keep her voice even but firm; the last thing she needs is someone else with influence thinking she’s crazy.

But Lucy doesn’t budge except to gasp, looking deeply offended. “Spiders are our friends! I would never hurt an animal!”

Quinn balks, “But you’ll kill forty people with a chainsaw.”

The blood leaves Spencer’s face again as she pulls her body in tighter. “WHAT?!”

Lucy ignores her. Blushing, she waves a hand as if it’s no big deal. “Thirty-seven. People aren’t animals, Quinn.”

“Yes, THEY ARE?” Spencer blurts out, then immediately regrets it and buries her face in her knees again. If she closes her eyes and wishes really, really hard, maybe she’ll disappear and none of this will be happening.

She can hear Quinn laugh at Lucy. “You would think that.”

Lifting her elbow slightly, Spencer peeks out at the staredown happening in the Not O.K. At All Corral. Even with Quinn just in profile, Spencer’s struck by how eerie the resemblance is between the two girls. She hasn’t seen them in proximity before to analyze it, but, wow. They really are like carbon copies, just different flavors. If that were a thing.

For a moment, her mind wanders again to the thought of having two Quinns, or this alternate version of that. The balled fist of rage inside her—Quinn’s literal one, that is—moves ever so slightly against her G-spot, sending an unintended jolt through Spencer.

Through the peephole, Lucy’s eyes find hers, and it snaps Spencer out of her daydream. She turns her face away again, shutting her eyes tight, and fidgets to reposition herself in her new peak level of
embarrassment. Deep inside, she feels Quinn’s hand turn a bit more freely than before.

“Quite the screamer,” Lucy says to Quinn. “No wonder you like her.”

Spencer looks up at that. “Excuse me?”

“Leave us alone!” Quinn shouts. “Go pee somewhere else!”

...Oh crap. Now I have to pee.

“But I want to help!” Lucy has the same saccharine tone she uses while teaching. It’s almost painfully sincere. “I can’t just leave you like this. You might miss dinner. You’re probably hungry after all this fun.” She bites her lip, trying not to laugh at the joke she’s about to make. “Even if Spencer’s looking a little full.”

“Get out before I stab you in the eye.” Quinn is not kidding even a little bit.

Lucy laughs good-heartedly. “With what, your other hand? I recommend focusing on penetrating one girl at a time, while you’re still learning.” Lucy turns her attention to Spencer, as if she’s Exhibit A. “The real question is, does Spencer want me to leave?”

“Uh…” Spencer looks at Quinn, whose eyebrows are prompting the obvious “YES!” but she honestly isn’t sure. As mortifying as this is, maybe they need Lucy’s help to carry her to the infirmary or something.

Before she can say more, Lucy takes a cautious step forward. “I think you need me. I think Spencer needs me.”

What is it about that voice?

Quinn bites back, “Get the fuck out of here, I swear to god.”

“I bet I can help solve your little problem. I’m very good with my hands, you know. Spencer’s seen it”—and she looks at Spencer now, speaking one word at a time—“how the slick, wet paint slides beneath my fingers, moving faster and faster in perfect circles until I can feel the friction building. I just love that combination of wetness and heat, don’t you?”

Oh god. Oh god. Oh god.

Quinn looks too dumbstruck to verbalize a retort. Her face isn’t moving, but her hand is.

“Oh god. Oh god. Oh god. Oh god.”

Or driving my fingers deep into a soft, moist mound of clay, feeling it warm all around me before I press it hard to bend it to my will. You know I like to take my time shaping it to my innermost desires. I can make it do whatever I want. Make it be whatever I want. I can make it come alive.”

Oh god. Oh god. Oh god.

“You know, maybe I teach a class not just because I like showing others how to use their bodies, or even because I want more time to practice my own skills...I just want someone to watch me while I do it.”

OH GOD. OH GOD. OH GOD. OH GOD.

Quinn’s had enough. “Okay, THAT’S IT—” and rears back to punch Lucy Fabray in the fucking face...not even realizing her hand has just slid right out of Spencer like the damn Excalibur sword. It’s quite pruned and still a bit contorted.
Lucy probably deserves to be punched with that.

But Quinn just looks at Spencer, quite confused, and Spencer doesn’t know what she could possibly say here. She rushes to close herself off once and for all, crossing her ankles and pulling her knees to her chest protectively as Quinn narrows her eyes.

Lucy gives a small laugh and says, “Happy to help.” She’s just about to turn around and leave but then leans in toward Quinn. “Be sure to wash that before dinner.” And with that, she strolls out of the bathroom. There’s a squeak and a thud as the door closes, then a long silence.

“I would like to leave now,” Spencer says quietly.

But Quinn’s not going anywhere. “What the hell just happened?” Her wrinkled hand is pointing toward the door.

Spencer rolls her eyes and climbs off the counter to pick up her discarded jumpsuit. “I don’t know,” she says, not convincing at all. “You were stuck, then you weren’t. Hooray.”

Quinn’s eyes harden, staring at Spencer in disbelief. “She turns you on.”

“What? No, she doesn’t.” She’s looking around the floor and above her head for Charlotte. While Spencer can’t escape the bathroom with her dignity, she might still escape it with her life. With a shiver, she shakes out her clothing, jumps up and down on it, and slams it against the counter a few times for good measure.

Quinn, meanwhile, couldn’t care less about a damn spider. “She said all those things, and it actually turned you on.” Her tone implies she might find it hilarious if she wasn’t so pissed off.

“And that’s surprising?!” Spencer finally turns to face Quinn, armed with her anger. “SHE LOOKS AND SOUNDS JUST LIKE YOU.” Spencer zips up the jumpsuit halfway, sleeves dangled loosely around her waist, and sets to retrieving her sneakers and her one and only Secret from Victoria.

“And yet I stayed stuck until she arrived. Funny.”

Spencer doesn’t have time for this jealousy crap, which is quickly ruining what had been the best sex of her life. “Just...let me get my stuff and we’ll get out of here, okay? Talk later.” She carefully approaches the last stall and checks in all directions before stepping inside.

Quinn crosses her arms and leans against the sticky counter. “You put your clothes in the toilet?”

“Under it. I couldn’t just leave them ou—” she starts, leaning down to grab her shoes and...thin air. “No.”

Quinn doesn’t respond.

“They were right here!” Spencer stares at the yellow tile, hoping her blue panties will magically materialize before her very eyes. They were right here on top of her shoes, she swears it. Giving the Keds a good shake and slipping her feet inside, she comes barreling out of the stall and into the neighboring one, then back out and into the third. “I have no underwear. I’m in prison, and I have no underwear.”

“You sure you didn't give them to Lucy?” Quinn offers under her breath.

But even as a joke, it doesn’t make sense that Lucy would have them, as she was on the opposite side of the bathroom the whole time. But nobody else came in or out, so who could’ve taken them?
“Oh my god.” Spencer freezes, then looks left, right, left, down, up, right, and behind her again. “Charlotte.”

Quinn starts walking toward the door.

“THAT BITCH TOOK MY PANTIES.” She looks at the walls again, zoning out in blind rage. “I’m gonna kill her.”

Quinn doesn’t look back. “You do that.”

Spencer can’t believe what she’s seeing. “Wait, you’re not gonna help me? I need them!”

Quinn pauses and turns, squinting through her messy pink bangs. “I don’t plan on dropping my panties for anyone anytime soon, so I should be fine.” A pointed glare. “Guess you can’t say the same.”

“Come on. That’s not fair.” Spencer wants to shout, “I just let you fuck me on a bathroom sink, for christ’s sake!” but doesn’t.

Any emotion on Quinn’s face fades. “Nothing’s fair here.”

And with that, she takes the final few steps to the door, leaving Spencer topless and commando and rejected and sore and feeling not at all like this afternoon turned out the way it was supposed to.
“It’s not like this day could get any worse,” Spencer tells herself as she follows Paulie into the Mess Hall for dinner two hours later, walking a bit gingerly and hoping no one notices. She can’t tell what the entrée is supposed to be from here. Something suspect. Spencer peers over at Lexa’s tray, trying to get a closer look, and suddenly comes face-to-face with Santana Lopez, one of Lucy’s flunkies.

Spencer’s seen her many times before, but they’ve not yet spoken, so she’s taken quite off-guard by how forward Santana is—slinging an arm around Spencer’s neck like they’re old friends. That, or she’s about to kill her and just wants to be chummy first.

“So, Shit-mess,” Santana starts.

“Oh, great.

“I hear I have you to thank.” She’s much too close to Spencer’s face for comfort, like she might lick her cheek or something. It’s fucking creepy.

Spencer stares forward, and tries to subtly shrug Santana’s arm off. “Um…okay.” She twitches and flinches as Santana tightens the lock around her neck.

“Lucy was in such a good mood after classes. Something about ‘feeling inspired to teach a new student her best tricks.’ Which she then demonstrated on me.” Santana is clearly trying to brag, lucky girl that she feels she is. “She almost had me ready to call mercy, and I’m the Allen County bedroom rodeo champion. You must’ve really gotten her going.” She leans in right by Spencer’s ear and whispers, “Thanks.”

Spencer tries again to shove her off, because this moment couldn’t possibly be any more uncomfortable. It’s bad enough she feels every slight shift of her uniform against her bare and slightly sore ladyparts. Now, the added nausea from hearing the inner details of Lucy Fabray’s sex life, after enduring the horrific embarrassment of her own. The list of Awful Things About Today continues to grow.

“Um…I didn’t…” Spencer starts, but the elbow around her neck tightens, and she can barely breathe.

“Don’t worry, your secret’s safe with me, Hastings,” Santana smirks. “Or should I say...Fistings?”

She slips away, grinning like the Cheshire Cat and leaving Spencer stunned.

Before she can come up with a clever retort—or anything at all—Spencer feels a slap on the back that nearly knocks her into Paulie.

“Nice work!” It’s Graham.

For the sake of her own sanity, Spencer grants the benefit of the doubt. Maybe she liked my Taxidermy project, all five minutes I spent working on it. It’s possible.
Graham walks backward for a few steps to look Spencer in the eye as she says, “You and Quinn should stop by my class next week and give us some pointers.” Then, with a wicked wink, she turns around and continues on to find her seat.

An image of the course listing flashes before Spencer’s eyes, and she remembers which one is assigned to Graham.

Fisting.

“Oh, that’s right!” Santana bellows from across the room at Lucy’s table. “I meant your secret’s safe with me and a few of my closest friends!” She motions all around her, indicating the entire prison.

Their laughter echoes in Spencer’s ears as she inches forward in line. Please let the ground open and swallow me whole, she thinks. Or, more accurately, let it suck me out into the cold void of space. At least it’s quiet out there.

She passes by her old cell’s table, and Mack is so bug-eyed with loathing that Spencer’s sure she’d turn to stone if she looked directly at her. (She’d take the easy out right now if she thought it would work.)

As she walks on, she hears Mack’s voice. “No. Don’t even think I’m gonna let you come near me with that hand after it’s been in Hastings’ vag.”

Spencer can’t see or hear Quinn’s response, but maybe that’s for the best, anyway. She makes her way to her seat and sits, wincing a bit but trying to hide it. The food isn’t much better than the company, and the patty that just looked a bit off from afar is pretty terrifying close-up. It’s large, oddly lumpy, and covered in some kind of sauce-like substance that’s more translucent than gravy should be.

Across the cafeteria, Jessica Huang’s voice carries over the noise. “THIS FOOD IS MADE OF GARBAGE!”

Spencer arches an eyebrow at Paulie, who’s halfway through her personal slab of garbage food. “What crawled on your tray and died?”

Paulie shrugs and takes another bite. “BSM.”

Spencer can’t have heard that right. “The whips and slaves thing?” It seems unlikely that the kitchen doubles as a sex dungeon, even here.

“Big Sweaty Meat, duh,” Paulie says, chewing with her mouth open.

Oh, well, of course that’s what it is. How silly of me not to have known that.

Spencer carves out a small fraction of the patty with her fork and brings it to her mouth, despite her brain fighting her every step of the way. It tastes even worse than she expects, and she only makes it through a few bites before giving up, pushing her tray aside but not far away enough.

She used to have a different life, right? Long ago, before everything turned to shit? Spencer wants to believe she did, but it feels so far away, like a dream.

“Okay,” she begins, angling toward Paulie, “You work with this Martha woman, right? Please verify there’s an actual person back there, because this—” she gestures to her tray “is frightening. There has to be something fit for human consumption.”
Paulie grins as she takes another bite. “You’re funny, New Girl. I like you. It’s too bad that pretty face is gonna get scraped off with a cheese grater.”

“Mmmmm,” Dark Willow agrees.

But that’s not why Spencer’s eyes are doubled in size. “There’s cheese back there?!”

Paulie laughs once. “Go on, tell her what you just said. It’s your funeral.”

Spencer glances over toward the kitchen and almost considers it. She’s not going to starve to death without a fight.

“There are some scary people up here. But that Martha Slewgurt”—Paulie points toward the kitchen with her fork—“just might be the most terrifying of all.”

“Martha Slewgurt? That’s someone’s actual name.”

“What kind of name is ‘Spencer Hastings’?” Dark Willow mocks.

“That doesn’t sound made up to you?” Spencer asks. “Slewgurt?” Her voice is louder than she means it to be, and a few heads turn a few tables down, then laugh like they’re about to watch someone get a beatdown.

“She’s gonna hear you!” Paulie says in a hushed whisper, looking toward the kitchen to see if a monster is emerging.

“It sounds like…” Spencer’s brain stops for a moment. Or maybe the room stops around her instead as her brain connects some dots. “Like someone’s doing a bad job of hiding who they are.” She looks back toward the kitchen and opens her mouth, but the words don’t come out right away. “You don’t think…that’s not…Martha Stewart back there.” She regrets it as soon as she’s said it. “Because that would be crazy. Right?”

“I told you like six times, New Girl. It’s Martha Slewgurt.”

“I KNOW.” Spencer’s gonna lose her damn mind if she hears that word one more time. “And I’m saying, what if it’s really Martha Stewart? But I guess she doesn’t want people to know it’s her and that’s why she changed her name.”

Dark Willow raises an eyebrow. “Like, Martha Stewart the famous cook and ruler of a home decoration empire? That Martha Stewart?”

Spencer forces down another bite of BSM. “Makes a lot more sense than someone named Martha Slewgurt cooking for us.”

Dark Willow’s confused. “But Martha Stewart’s not a criminal.”

“Yes, she is!” Spencer says, again a little too loudly. “She was convicted for lying to the SEC about a stock trade. She was supposed to lose over forty-thousand dollars, but she got some inside information and—”

Dark Willow rolls her eyes. “Bored now.”

Spencer raises her eyebrows. “They sent her to jail. Maybe they sent her here.”

Dark Willow looks toward the kitchen for a moment, considering the possibility. “I used to love her holiday specials, back before I was evil. My mom and I would watch them every year and tape them
so we could try out her recipes. Once, Xander tried to make her cranberry popcorn balls, but we ended up spending Christmas with the Sunnydale Fire Department. They were very nice.” Dark Willow takes a breath and sighs, “She always makes it look so easy on TV!”

“You’re both crazier than River, here,” Paulie says, chomping heartily on a big bite of meat and nodding at their cellmate.

River’s BSM patty has been cut into dozens of small, precise pieces and stacked into a tower that must be over a foot high. She gives a small shrug at the comment, then stands to reach the top-most piece of the tower with her mouth, carefully eating it off without toppling the whole thing down.

“I guess I’ll see for myself,” Spencer says. She finishes the last of her cup of water and sets it down on the tray. “I’ll be right back.” Grabbing her dirty dishes, she makes her way toward the drop-off bucket. The kitchen is open and exposed, but Spencer can’t see anyone back there despite the noise of clanking pots in the far back area, out of sight. She tries to peek around the corner, but she’s holding up the line and looking like a creeper. All she needs is confirmation that she’s right, and then she’ll go back to staying out of everyone’s way.

At the same time, how could it be Martha Stewart? It’s a billion-to-one chance. She fights to ignore the pain in her stomach muscles as she leans hard against the counter, trying to see around the industrial stove. Her feet leave the ground, and she almost topples over into the kitchen before Big Boo grabs her by the uniform and pulls her back.

“Whoa there, Thin Mint. Save some for tomorrow.”

Spencer feels sillier by the minute. Why did she even suggest this? There are a hundred reasons why THE Martha Stewart wouldn’t be here on the Uterius.

She’s a talented chef!
She’s rich and famous!
She’s not a lesbian!
Well.

But one thing Spencer’s damn sure about: the actual living and breathing Martha Stewart wouldn’t be caught dead anywhere near something called Big Sweaty Meat.

...Right?

“Told you,” Paulie says as Spencer sits back down. But before she can respond, the intercom crackles to life.

Plink, plink.

A collective wall of sound erupts in the Mess Hall, everything from frustrated groans to outright anger. Any further plinking is drowned out by the noise, but Sue’s familiar announcement eventually rings out to confirm the inevitable. Shark Week has returned.

Near the back of the cafeteria, Vasquez stands and holds her plastic spork out like a weapon. “WHO DID IT!”

One of Vee’s crew yells, “If you wanted to bleed, I’d just CUT YOU! Damn!”
The room falls into chaos and turns on itself. Food flies over Spencer’s head as the crowd dissolves into utter chaos, and she hears the plop of a BSM patty hitting Alice, the Zombies instructor, in the face nearby. Kat pelts another one over to the far end of the Mess Hall, arm pumping in celebration as it lands right on Violet’s tattooed breast. Spencer can’t tell if these women are trying to blame each other for the upcoming lockdown or just getting their last joyride in first.

The party’s quickly shut down, though, with a blaring horn and Boomer banging loudly on the nearest table. Part of Spencer wanted to see just how it was all going to play out. Maybe a food fight would draw out the mystery chef? But she’s mostly glad for a reprieve while she’s still clean. It’s been a fucking long enough day already.

And then she feels a soggy thud on her back.

Of course.

“CRAZY EYES,” Boomer shouts. “KNOCK IT OFF.”

Spencer doesn’t know anyone named Crazy Eyes and sure as hell doesn’t want to, but then she hears, “For your girl, Cauliflower!”

Oh. Yes, hi, Suzanne.

“You tell her that’s from me!”

Spencer’s brow furrows, but she doesn’t turn around to engage. Has she unwittingly become part of a Suzanne/Quinn love triangle, of all things? Because that’s exactly what she needs right now. Or, wait, does Suzanne think Spencer’s with one of her new cellmates now?

Whatever the hell is going on, she needs to get out of here. There’s a wet spot between her shoulder blades and a room full of prisoners laughing at her, and Spencer just wants to go home. She gets up and hurries toward the door with her head down. The argument with Paulie can keep until later. She’ll check the office files for Slewgurt, Martha next time she gets a chance. Though, wouldn’t she have seen it by now?

The guards start ushering the prisoners back to their cells, leaving behind a particularly gross, half-eaten mess strewn across the tables. A thin layer of slime now covers the floor, making a lovely splick noise with every step. Spencer sees Aphasia slip on the mess and almost fall, but Quinn stabilizes her.

Spencer catches Quinn’s eye for a moment. They seem to be the only two not freaking out or exhibiting any emotion at all. But Quinn pushes through the herd to get away and is soon lost in a sea of black jumpsuits and oily hair.

Spencer is the first one back to cell 11, and she climbs up to her bunk to think about the new implications of Shark Week. She’s not on this cycle yet, thankfully—she still has no underwear. So, that’s a win, but it’s the only one coming to mind. What about when the gravity goes out tonight? They don’t have seat belts in here, and there’s no Quinn to hold her close and breathe softly against her neck and make her feel safe. That’s the one thing Spencer misses the most. If she’d known that would be the only time they had together...

But then Spencer pushes past the memory of lips and tongues and hands, and she remembers the entire reason she was in Quinn’s bunk in the first place.

Charlotte.
That bitch killed Jenny Schecter, and she killed Aeryn Sun and probably Stacey and Alex what’s-her-face, too. Was it a coincidence that Alex went missing during the last Shark Week? What about the others? And how is Spencer supposed to protect herself from being next with nobody in her corner?

She spends the next several minutes scrawling possible ways to kill a spider in blue on the near wall. For whatever reason, Spencer doesn’t think something as simple as stepping on Charlotte will do the trick. Better to be prepared for war. She keeps writing.

At one point, Dark Willow asks what she’s doing, but Spencer answers with an unintelligible grunt and adds “fireballs” to the list. Thinking back to the first day of Funhouse and Dark Willow’s nostalgia for pets, Spencer hopes she doesn’t share Lucy’s pro-life views on the entire non-human animal kingdom.

*Speaking of: Tiny hammers.* She puts a star next to it for her own nostalgic reasons.

Spencer completes her mental tour of the prison, having searched for artillery of any kind, and is now back where she started. She leans back to examine her first draft. It isn’t very long, and it reads more like a garage sale listing than the arsenal from Clue. But it makes Spencer feel a bit safer and in control all the same. She’s included things like a *trophy* (from Sue’s office, maybe?) and a *shovel* (Aphasia? Because, why not?) and Boomer’s taser, if she can get her hands on it. Spencer doesn’t know if it could even latch onto a spider, but she will zap the fucking hell out of Charlotte if it can.

She loses herself in a momentary train of thought, imagining eight little legs trembling and sizzling as the tiniest of screams reaches her ears, and Spencer wonders what her life has become.

**************

She wakes the next morning not remembering how she managed to get to sleep. In fact, Spencer can’t think about anything except, *Oh god, I’m going to puke.*

She rolls over, head aching as the room spins with her, and she somehow dismounts from the bed and collapses into a heap. Dragging herself toward the toilet, she half-expects it to be full of brown chunks already, but then remembers Mack’s not here. Still, the very idea of Pruno is enough to empty Spencer’s stomach.

She retches loudly, painfully, wondering why the hell this is happening to her. Spencer’s first instinct is to blame the Big Sweaty Meat, but would two bites do all of this? She looks over to her cellmates to see if they’re suffering the same fate.

That’s when she sees the web.

Spencer scrambles to her unsteady feet, a chorus of “*Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck,*” echoing on repeat in her pounding head. Stumbling forward, she grabs the frame of Paulie’s bunk to take a closer look.

Paulie’s very empty bunk.

**GIRLY-GIRL SUCKY-SUCK**

“Not as impressive as the last one,” mumbles a voice right next to Spencer’s ear, making her jump.

“You can see that?” she asks River. She’s suddenly feeling much more awake.

River reaches a hand out and traces a finger over the first G. “Written on air.”

“Where’s Paulie?” Spencer asks.
She shakes her head almost imperceptibly, like a twitch, or a robot glitching. “Absent.”

Yes, thank you.

But then River adds, “Floated away,” now sounding higher than a hippie at a Grateful Dead concert, and Spencer goes into panic mode.

“Did the gravity go out last night?” Her mind is reeling. Did she just hover above her bed for a while and then fall back onto it without waking up? She’s starting to wish she had a bottom bunk again. It could be a miracle she didn’t fall five feet down to the floor.

“We’re all floating.” River finds a very interesting molecule of air to stare at.

Spencer’s tired of this already. “It’s a yes or no question.”

River looks at her blankly, then examines the lengths of her fingers as if she’s never seen her hand before. “You snore.”

Spencer stands and gets in River’s face to show her she’s for real. “Tell me about when this happened before,” she says, pointing to the web. “What did it say?”

River’s looking at the web now, too. “Words. Thin and frail, like bones.”

Spencer stands and gets in River’s face to show her she’s for real. “Tell me about when this happened before,” she says, pointing to the web. “What did it say?”

River’s looking at the web now, too. “Words. Thin and frail, like bones.”

Spencer grabs River’s shoulders. “Did you see the spider?”

Looking wistfully off to the side, she says, “Jenny.”

Spencer’s eyes go wide. “Jenny was a spider?!”

River gives her the patronizing look she deserves.

Oh. Right.

“Jenny Schecter,” Spencer starts again, shaking it off. “That girl who disappeared. She saw it?”

“She taught a class. Empty chairs don’t write.”

“Yeah, I kn—”

“And then Elizabeth came.”

Spencer hasn’t heard of any prisoners by that name. “Who?”

River pauses and takes a breath, as if she’s about to lose her trademark even keel. “The spider.” Spencer’s clearly getting on her last nerve.

“The same spider that killed her.”

River furrows her brow and dismisses it outright. “Unfounded.”

“It wrote ‘I killed Jenny Schecter’ in a web,” Spencer fumes. “I saw it. So did they.” She points to next door. “That seems pretty founded to me.”

River slips into La La Land for a minute, presumably thinking this over, then climbs up to her bunk in one smooth motion that Spencer finds unnervingly graceful. Reaching under her mattress, River pulls out a brown, thin, leather-bound book and holds it out.
Spencer just stares at it for a moment, not moving, trying to guess what this magical item could be. Hopefully not more smut.

River’s waiting. “Take it.”

Spencer opens it and sees it’s a journal. A very detailed, personal account of a victim’s life in space prison. “This was hers?”

*Holy new evidence, Batman.* It’s clearly well-worn and must be at least fifty pages. This could open all kinds of doors. At the same time, Spencer’s more than a little jealous that this dead woman had a whole notebook and a ballpoint pen when Spencer’s been begging for book covers and old highlighters.

But anyway.

Spencer takes in the possibilities, overwhelmed, and it gives her flashbacks to when they found Alison’s journal back in Rosewood. With the pounding in her head, the memories move like a viscous liquid, blurry and faded. But those pages revealed dark clues that pointed them in scary new directions. Something like this is a window into the mind of a dead girl, for better or worse, and it’s important to keep it out of the wrong hands. If someone like Sue...

Spencer meets River’s eyes again. “Why do you have this?” It’s a fair question, considering this cell wasn’t Jenny's final destination.

“I know many secrets,” River says. “I keep them safe.” When that vague answer doesn’t seem to be enough for Spencer, River blinks and admits, “I traded my bra for it.”

That rings a bell. Spencer remembers Aphasia saying something about River having ‘her book’ the day she first arrived. Was this it? This feels like Spencer’s first big break in weeks. She almost asks, “Do you know where my panties are?” but that would probably be pushing it.

The bed behind her rumbles as Dark Willow wakes up groggily and slurs, “Whuss goin’ on?”

“Paulie’s gone,” Spencer says. “Get Boomer.”

“Ah, shit.” Dark Willow rolls back over to face the wall, sounding like she, too, is battling a migraine from hell. “Doesn’t she ever take a day off?”

Spencer shudders at the very mention of her. “Doesn’t she ever take a day off?”

She starts climbing up to her bed with the journal. If she has to deal with Boomer today, she’s going to do it from a safe distance. It takes some extra time and effort to get there safely without motion sickness. River, meanwhile, is sitting crisscross on her bed and doesn’t seem to be the least bit panicked or ill. Spencer would love to know what that feels like. She pulls herself up the rest of the way and steadies her hand on the wall. From this angle, she can see a small puddle of vomit on the end of River’s bed. It’s oddly reassuring.

A long, good nap sounds nice right about now, and Spencer’s eyelids are heavy. But Paulie’s probably dead, there’s now a fifth possible victim, and someone else besides her can see the cryptic messages, so there’s no time to lose. She gathers all her strength and yells into the corridor to draw the guard over, but fortunately, Buffy’s the one on duty.

“Our cellmate Paulie is missing,” Spencer says as the blonde approaches. “We woke up and she was gone. I think she was taken. Who was on guard last night?”
Buffy peers curiously at the empty bunk but doesn’t appear to be in any hurry to open the door and investigate further. “Will?” she asks over Spencer’s shoulder.

“Yep,” Dark Willow mumbles loudly into her pillow without looking up. “Gone.”

That seems to be good enough for Buffy. “I’ll tell Sue.” With that, she starts to walk away.

“That’s it?” Spencer protests. A note on the warden's desk is hardly an adequate response from the so-called security force. Isn’t there some kind of emergency code for this? All staff on high alert or something? A manhunt, perhaps?

Walking backwards, Buffy gives her two thumbs up. “Good work, Lassie!” Then she turns to continue down the corridor without another word.

Spencer’s pretty sure she can hear Mack laughing next door.

_Bitch._

Spencer climbs back onto her bed, steaming. “How is she even a prison guard, anyway? She’s barely qualified to hold a ladder.”

“Actually,” Dark Willow says, eyes still closed, “we took this test in high school that told you what careers you’d be good at, and she got prison guard. Some people just have a higher calling.”

“I still think she sucks.”

Spencer isn’t about to sit and wait for the inquisition squad that’s never coming. The very least she owes Paulie is to try. Since they’re on lockdown, she’s got nothing but time to sit and work on the case. And something tells her Jenny Schecter’s personal notes are a veritable goldmine of information.

For the first time in a month, Spencer has something to read that’s not vintage pornography. Beautiful, glorious day. She opens the cover and takes a deep breath. Two points make a line, but three points make a pattern. If Paulie’s already lost and Spencer's hunch is right—that there's a connection between the disappearances and Shark Week—then she still has four weeks to figure out how to stop Charlotte before someone else dies.

At least now she has a starting place.
Dear Diary

Chapter Notes

Here’s the character photo index.

Jenny Schecter’s diary contains the hideously verbose ramblings of a lesbian madwoman who is way too full of herself. Anecdotes and opinions about Christmas, feminism, bees, birth control, poetry, Thai food, adultery, art, living in LA, ex-girlfriends, books, healthcare—you name it. Some of it is coherent, some not. But overall, it’s a very detailed, very pretentious account of Jenny’s superior (yet incredibly boring) life.

Thankfully, it gets better about ten pages in when Spencer finds scattered mentions of a spider that Jenny calls “Elizabeth” and a writing class that Spencer assumes must be that Pussy thing. (I really, really hate that word.) A new pattern emerges of drawings of words in webs with scribbled essays beneath them, but nothing seems too threatening or like it could relate to the killings. In fact, the only things dying around here, according to Jenny, are some of Idgie’s bees, when the spider can catch them, maggots from the kitchen food (????), and Jenny’s will to live.

At the bottom of page twelve, Spencer parses the scrawled sentence, “We boasted to live like kings, she and I, and feasted upon stolen treasures, but the jar is now as empty as the well of my hopes.”

Spencer rolls her eyes. Good lord, this girl is dramatic.

Wait... Aphasia’s bug jar! Charlotte WAS eating them. Ha!

...Oh god, Jenny wasn’t eating them too, was she?

Spencer prays there was a bag of M&Ms in there as well. And now she wants chocolate. Moving on.

There’s more complaining about overall prison conditions and an essay about the lack of rigorous creative and educational opportunities in the so-called curriculum. Spencer nods along, strangely pleased to have found a like mind on this point, even a dead one. This place makes Rosewood Community College look like Stanford.

Though, it can’t be good for Spencer that she and Jenny Schecter keep having more and more in common. Serial killers have types, and what if she is Charlotte’s? Spencer’s heart plummets as she realizes Paulie’s a young, long-haired brunette, too. Shit. She’ll bet anything that Stacey, Aeryn, and Vause were as well.

At that sobering thought, Spencer takes a deep breath and reads on, pushing through the exhaustion and headache. Twenty minutes later, Jenny’s bitching about none other than Stacey Merkin, providing details that prove they knew—and hated—each other back on Earth, before they were incarcerated.

That’s new information.

The wheels turn in Spencer’s mind, assimilating the data, fitting the pieces together. The detailed accounts of what Stacey did to her—buttering her up for information about her book, only to turn
around and write a scathing review of it—paint an ugly picture of a nasty feud. (Jenny got revenge by seducing Stacey's girlfriend? Well, then.) Spencer doesn’t know why Jenny was imprisoned in the first place, but if she killed back home…who’s to say she wouldn’t do it again?

Do I have it all wrong? Did Jenny kill Stacey?

Spencer’s theory flips over on itself as she considers this new angle. After all, anything’s possible in here, she’s learning. Maybe Jenny took out her nemesis and bragged about it to the spider, who wrote “Fuck You Stacey Merkin” as a show of support. All this time, Spencer’s been thinking about Jenny the Victim without even considering the angles of Jenny the Criminal.

It’s more than a little unsettling that anyone and everyone around here can be—and probably already is—a murderer.

Aww, just like back home.

Paragraph after paragraph of the crazy backstory makes Spencer’s pulse quicken, as it has to be leading to a revealing climax, but then it seems to end with no resolution. Or, at least, not the evidence Spencer’s seeking.

“I speak daily of this loathing to my dearest Elizabeth, but it brings me little comfort. There’s nothing a mere spider can do to cleanse the darkness in my past. Stacey remains an unhealed wound, a thorn in the flesh of my memories. Together we will rot like discarded peels in this bin of sin and shame. What’s done is done.”

It’s hardly a confession of murder or intent. If anything, it sounds like coming to prison finally closed that chapter in Jenny’s mind. After all that build-up, Jenny was just a madwoman venting to her pet. The thought brings up a flash of Lucy Fabray and her “cat,” and Spencer shakes it off.

If the Stacey/Jenny chapter really was over, is it a coincidence both women ended up dead?

“What’s done is done…” Okay, but what if it wasn’t?

Could that mean Jenny told her little friend to go kill her enemy, finishing her once and for all? Stacey, ‘rotting’ as a corpse, and Jenny, living with her sin? It could fit their story. From what Spencer’s reading, Jenny certainly seems vindictive enough to put out the hit, and “Elizabeth” sounds doting enough to comply.

Maybe Spencer will test her theory by asking Charlotte to kill Mack. It’s a nice thought.

If Jenny was the one calling the shots about Stacey's murder, then what about the other one after her own death? There isn’t a simple one-size-fits-all answer for these five disappearances.

...Right?

But if the spider’s intelligent enough to take directions, Spencer has to entertain the notion that Charlotte can make decisions for herself. In which case…

What if dear little “Elizabeth” sought out revenge on behalf of her beloved owner? Are spiders capable of that level of cognizance and emotion? That’s some seriously advanced shit. Sure, before now Spencer’s been convinced Charlotte is responsible for these deaths, but it was for primal reasons. Basic survival. Food. Maybe territoriality. Not, “You were mean to my friend.” It feels more than a little crazy personifying a spider to this degree, and Spencer’s not sure it’s a path she wants to follow. Even without this emotional layer, the Killer Spider Theory already cost her three allies, two uncomfortable interrogations, and a cell transfer.
It’s now feeling a lot like lose/lose: Either there’s a calculating monster plotting the murder of its enemies, or there’s an eight-legged mercenary killing on command. Both versions have successfully managed to evade capture and taunt the witnesses, all without creating any hard evidence or interest from the authorities.

And, whatever happened to Stacey, Spencer still can’t explain how Jenny ended up dead a few short months later. Did Charlotte turn right around to kill her, too? …Do spiders even understand the concept of loose ends?

Spencer cringes, falling victim to her own wordplay. Of course they do. If anyone wants things tied up neatly, it’s a web-making, meal-spinning murderer.

She clearly hasn’t been giving this bitch enough credit.

But, wait, no—Wouldn’t it have been easier for Charlotte to just let the authorities punish Jenny—the obvious suspect—for Stacey’s murder? Eliminating Jenny would only draw more attention or create confusion. There must be something else at play, some piece of the puzzle Spencer isn’t seeing. Did Charlotte think Jenny would turn her in to the authorities, so she struck first? The thought of a tiny spider in miniature handcuffs is both adorable and absurd. And, if Charlotte didn’t trust Jenny in the first place, why would she have killed for her? It just isn’t adding up.

Reviewing her mental evidence list, Spencer realizes she doesn’t have any hard proof that the spider did kill Jenny Schecter. And of course, there isn’t going to be any in this journal, either. The yellow string “confession” web was probably just Mack fucking with her again. But Jenny’s still dead either way, and this “airlocked” line everyone keeps feeding her has always reeked of bullshit, even though it’s clear Sue knows more about these deaths than she’s letting on.

And then, in a moment of true space dementia, Spencer has a deeply unsettling thought.

What if Charlotte is working for Sue?

What if the warden was sending Charlotte out to do recon in the prison, to find out who was plotting a mutiny and deserved to die? It seems like the kind of thing you’d ask a guard to do, but whatever. They’re in space; all bets are off. It’s much easier to eavesdrop when you’re the size of a quarter. Sue could use her tiny killing machine and blame it on inmate violence, which is expected in a prison, anyway. It’s kind of brilliant.

But, wait—Mack said if the authorities were killing people, they’d use it to keep the population in line. Why, then, did Sue deny that anything like that was going on? Maybe she feared Spencer might figure out her methods and expose them, or worse—kill the spider on sight. So, Sue sent her to Umbridge, which ultimately got her transferred, breaking Spencer away from her only allies. She must have been on the right track.

Is Umbridge in on the scam? What about the guards? Am I just another in a long line of girls they’ve put through these motions when we got too close? Is this why Jenny died? Did she figure it out, too?

Spencer’s mind turns and turns. There’s excitement in connecting lines and building leads as the pieces interlock, bringing her ever closer to the truth, but the joy is quickly replaced by fear. Sue has eyes and ears all over the prison, even in Spencer’s own bed, and she suddenly feels a lot less safe behind these steel bars.

By taking her theory to Sue, Spencer may have just signed her own death warrant. Only time will tell. If her similarities to Jenny are any indication, she’s already a Dead Woman Walking.
All this spider business is really starting to make Spencer's skin crawl. Thinking again about the yellow I KILD JENE SHEKTR web constructed while she was sleeping, Spencer feels less and less sure of Mack's involvement. She's not that great of an actress, and they all looked truly surprised by its presence. (Plus, how would she have gotten out of class early to do it, or into the locked cell without a guard there?)

...A guard...

What if Boomer came in while she was passed out and made the web on Sue's orders? It seems unlikely that Spencer wouldn't have heard the door open or any of the work being done, but she can't rule it out entirely. After all, last night she slept through a goddamn kidnapping. Any guard could've easily overheard Spencer freaking out about the nightmare weeks before. It's not like she wasn't screaming loud enough. But then, why put all the effort into messing with her? If they want her dead, wouldn't she be dead by now?

Spencer's head is really starting to hurt from all these questions. If prison wasn’t so goddamn boring, her mind would have something else to do than go down these endless rabbit holes. It’s times like these that she wishes she wasn’t a problem solver by nature. She hates how obsessive she gets when there are new leads in a case. Too often, she ends up tugging on the wrong thread. Her neck hurts and she wants so much to just rest, but she can't—not yet.

Playing Devil's Advocate with herself, if only to help her sleep with both eyes closed tonight, she'll give Sue the benefit of the doubt. Suppose she was telling the truth—the disappearing girls aren’t dead at all, they're just released for one reason or another. Legitimately, legally, purposefully. It happens in regular prisons all the time. Still, it's hard to believe that anyone in this prison could earn release on good behavior and doubtful that any of them would truly become a productive member of society again from their stint here. It's not like Spencer, herself, is feeling any more rehabili—

...Holy shit.

The motto on the emblem of the ship.

The Uterius: Where prisoners aren't rehabilitated, they're reborn!

Sue isn't planning on turning any of these women into taxpaying, law-abiding citizens. She's...what? Encouraging them to stay criminals and releasing them back into the wild? Sending them on covert missions for something? The list of classes is basically College for Murderers (and Weirdos). Are violent girls brought in here to learn how to be even worse? Is Sue hand-picking certain inmates and grooming them to become a part of some mafia-type organization? She tells the other prisoners they're released or transferred or something else innocuous, and she tells the President they're dead. They're out of the system, and no one's the wiser, and Sue makes whatever profit she's arranged with her new spies and the space mafia.

Oh, oh wow.

Maybe Sue's the one not getting enough credit.

Now back to square one all over again, Spencer doesn't know if she likes this any more than the killer spider theory. It means the girls might still be alive, which is an upside. Probably. But they could just be killing other people. Either way, they're still disappearing and not coming back. Spencer folds down the corner of the page and continues on.

Jenny's diary just gets more and more out there as it goes. The web sketches become more frequent as Jenny's sanity erodes away. Charlotte definitely wrote to Jenny more than she’s ever written to
Spencer, but then, Charlotte seems to have made herself scarce now that Spencer’s on to her. If Jenny never suspected Charlotte was a killer, they could’ve had a longer relationship, and a deadly one.

 Skipping the essays now, if only to spare her very tired brain, Spencer looks at Charlotte’s messages in isolation. Most of the writing seems pretty innocuous and/or vague, but it’s all definitely weird.

 **READ TO ME**

 **LUSTY WOMEN**

 **NO**

 **PINK LADY**

 **RADIANT**

 **LEZ GIRLS**

 **WHY**

 **PUSSY GREAT**

 **BEWARE**

 **BLACK HOLE**

 **MARY CHRISTMAS**

 **STOP HER**

 **HAPPY NEW YEAR**

 **ON MY WAY**

 **BLOODY MARY**

 **QUEEN B**

 **YES**

 **MONDAY**

 **COURAGE**

 **TRUST ME**

 This reading strategy doesn't make it any better.

 Holiday greetings and obvious small talk aside, Spencer can guess what many of the rest are about. She’s seen Little Lusty Women in the library. There’s what she hopes is a reference to Jenny’s writing class and not just a declaration of sexual preference. And, wouldn’t you know, Charlotte’s a fan of Raven’s vodka with tomato juice, assuming Martha Slewgurt even has some in stock. But at this point, it’s more likely to be a Bloody Mary with actual blood. A sudden memory of Mack’s
Pruno brings up a horrible taste in her mouth.

She looks again at the downright chilling messages.

**BEWARE**

**STOP HER**

*Stop who?* Every one of these webs must have an accompanying story, only Jenny doesn’t seem to be in a sharing mood.

*Great. Thanks for nothing.*

The fact of the matter is, Spencer’s so damn paranoid at this point and the web messages are so vague, they could mean anything she wants them to be, like a teen magazine horoscope. That’s both the good news and the bad news. She’s already talked herself into and out of, what, six different theories in the last three hours alone? There’s no way to know which words are actual clues and what’s irrelevant. She’ll never be able to escape the shadow of doubt, not with this as her Bible.

Spencer’s going to go mad in here.

At the sound of approaching footsteps, she quickly hides the journal under her thigh and tries to pretend she’s just sitting there doing nothing. Maybe Buffy has an update on the manhunt. “Any news?”

“Chow time,” Buffy says, sliding three small bowls through the door grate without ceremony. It looks like lumpy, brown mush. Most definitely not the pick-me-up Spencer had in mind, and Buffy’s gone before she can press for any further developments.

*Fantastic.*

Spencer’s system needs nourishment after all these mental gymnastics, but there’s no way that congealed mass is going to do more good than harm. Even if it were possible to convince herself it’s mashed potatoes with gravy already mixed in, her mind’s far too tired for that leap of imagination right now. And she doesn’t want to think about how it greatly resembles the small pile of vomit still at the end of River’s bed. So, Spencer pushes on and turns another page.

There are more than few rants about various cellmates, and you’d think Jenny Schecter lived in a sorority the way she’s dropping names and gossip. Just when the details start getting interesting, a transfer is mentioned, then again and again a few pages later. Spencer can only assume Jenny kept getting passed around because nobody wanted to live with her. At the very least, she lived in cells 2, 14, 6, 18, 11, and finally 10.

Spencer turns the page and the tone shifts entirely. She discovers a series of rage-fueled drawings of Xs over faces and repeated tirades, like stepping inside someone’s mental breakdown. All work and no play did not make Jenny a dull girl, not at *all.* Spencer sits straight up and feasts her eyes on the delicious crazy before her.

*Another winter is passed, bleak and dark. Moments repeat, each as much without purpose as those before. Time here has no meaning without the fiery sun burning our eyes, burning our skin, burning us through from the outside. We forget who we are when we cannot feel a primal connection to our own world, cannot feel the grass between our toes and the worm-ridden soil caked on our hands. Without earth, we are no longer human. We are but flesh and hair and grime and spite, choking on our own insipidity.*
Who needs lunch when Spencer has this overdramatic, demented space poetry to keep her going? She turns the page.

*But I am connected to something primal. Something ancient. Inside me there is a beast lurking, waiting, hungry, pressing its claws against my surface to break through. It speaks to me in my dreams. Each morning I wonder if this will be its day of birth. If I will shed this skin of acquiescence and complacence and bring forth the manifestation of my rage. If my claws will finally rip the smugness from her lips. If my teeth will tear the pink linen to reveal a trembling, pathetic weakling, powerless in the dark of its own shadow, shrunken to nothingness without the sycophants and sheep at her side. The patrons of her “art” in the incarceration whorehouse will wake from their labored slumber and view Lucyfer in her true form: NOTHINGNESS.*

“Jesus!” It's...a lot. But then Spencer reads it again to be sure she saw it right.

...Lucy?! Dr. Umbridge must've had a field day with this one.

Lucy’s batshit crazy, but she doesn’t seem *that* bad. Not Actual-Hell-Demon bad. “What did Lucy do to this girl?” Spencer wonders to herself and starts scanning the next paragraph.

She can’t find any specifics on what transpired between them, but there’s plenty more that seems relevant. If Mack is the president of the We Love Lucy club, Jenny was the captain of team Die Lucy Die. All this time, Spencer thought she held a certain amount of animosity toward Lucy Fabray, but Jenny had her outdone by a country mile. It’s inspiring. And, to Spencer’s delight, it looks like Jenny pulled her same trick, infiltrating Play-Doh Funhouse under false pretenses. Or, really, Spencer pulled Jenny’s trick. The similarities between them keep piling up.

*But why? Was Jenny doing recon on Lucy, too?*

It seems so unfortunate that Spencer never got to meet this girl. She would’ve been great to interview. Quinn even said she wasn’t so bad after all. They could’ve been a bang-up team. Despite the obvious crazy, Spencer’s sorry Jenny died.

But what’s more unfortunate, the frenzied writing doesn’t seem to reveal anything new about Lucy that Spencer doesn’t already know or believe, herself. Spencer’s even willing to blindly agree to Jenny’s claim that her Pussy writing class (name notwithstanding) was superior to anything involving arts and crafts.

She reads on, if only because she can’t seem to look away. Underneath a particularly antagonistic sketch of Lucy (with snakes for hair), Spencer comes across a passage that makes her blood runs cold.

*Where would I be without my Elizabeth? My only trusted ally in this iron purgatory, my sole confidante and friend. She reads the blood-soaked words dripping from my fingers and shares my taste for vengeance. She will stand on my shoulder, towering over the slaughtered tatters of the fallen Hell queen, tickling with laughter and feasting upon her flesh. And we will rise to claim what is ours, reborn like Spring itself, stretching toward the sun with new life.*

Spencer just stares.


And just like that, the killer spider theory is back in play. With wide eyes, she rereads those words, “feasting upon her flesh,” over and over. Jenny clearly has a flair for the dramatic, but Spencer can’t help but wonder how literal that bit might be. Sure, maybe Jenny’s just projecting her own feelings
onto the little spider and misinterpreting a good listener for an ally. Either way, it seems Jenny’s convinced that Charlotte is capable of killing, and that’s enough for Spencer.

Casting this lens on the whole diary, Spencer looks back over the final string of web messages, and a narrative begins to emerge:

**STOP HER**

**QUEEN B**

**YES**

**MONDAY**

**COURAGE**

**TRUST ME**

Spencer stares again with wide eyes.

Charlotte was going to help Jenny take out the queen bee, Lucy Fabray, in her very own Funhouse—the prized Monday class.

*Oh my god.*

What was supposed to happen? Did *something* happen? When was this? Why *did I not hear about it?* Surely an attack on the Princess of Prison would’ve been hot gossip for weeks to come. Or at the very least, a fun story to tell a new inmate. Right?

Spencer folds down the page corner and makes a mental note to ask her cellmates when they’re done sleeping off their nausea. Dark Willow is bound to remember something. If not, maybe she can find a way to bring it up at Group Therapy aka Murder Talk. It’s a blessing that Spencer doesn’t have to rely on asking Mack—though, Mack wouldn’t have witnessed what went down, anyway, as she only joined the class because Jenny was out.

That gets Spencer’s mind digging back through her mental calendar to that first week…when she arrived on a Tuesday. As in, the day after Monday.

Spencer stops breathing as the realization hits her. She arrived here the day after Charlotte and Jenny tried killing Lucy. Maybe even the same day Jenny herself was killed.

*It has to be.*

Aphasia thought Spencer was Jenny when she walked into the cell. Surely, she wouldn’t have made that mistake if a week or more had passed.

Spencer’s chest tightens again at the thought. She was so thrown by the sheer absurdity of being in space prison, drugged and abandoned, she hadn’t realized just what she was stepping into that day. It was a new beginning for her, but it was hardly a fresh start for the others. Life had been going on there long before she arrived—stories, trouble, problems. Murders. The air was still thick with whatever chaos came the day before, and Spencer had no real idea of what that meant. No fucking idea whatsoever. She was walking right into a horror movie, her cold bunk a freshly vacant grave.

And, even piecing this together, Spencer *still* has no details around Jenny’s death. That’s the most maddening part of all. Hours learning every superficial and demented thing about this girl, and
Spencer’s not any closer to the truth. Saying Jenny was airlocked seems like such an easy cover-up for an act of violence, especially when the body’s gone. Everyone hated her, so it could’ve been any of them. Maybe Lucy caught wind of the plan and dealt with Jenny herself…somehow. Maybe an angry mob of inmates got sick of her prima donna bullshit and beat her to a pulp. Maybe she drove her cellmates crazy and Mack caved her skull in with her spank paddle. Maybe what’s left of Jenny is sitting in a prison toilet bowl nearby. Really, it could be anyone or anything, and Spencer’s more afraid now than ever. Because, regardless of how Jenny died, there’s still a killer on the loose, and no one is safe.

There aren’t many resources at the prisoners’ disposal (well, other than Aphasia, apparently), so when the journal ends, Spencer spends a few minutes working down her list of potential weapons and trying to imagine how Jenny might’ve gone after Lucy. It’s quite a pleasant daydream, all told. Maybe Jenny wanted to stab Lucy to death with popsicle sticks or glue her airways shut or pour containers of glitter down her throat. Anything could’ve gone down that day. There was clearly a plan in place. Did it just go wrong?

…TRUST ME…

The last two words in the journal aren’t the resolution and tidy ending Spencer wants. Hopefully they brought Jenny more comfort than they’re bringing her right now. Though, maybe trusting Charlotte was Jenny’s final and fatal mistake.

The gears in Spencer’s head turn once again, and suddenly her eyes go wide. Maybe Charlotte —goddamnit, ELIZABETH —was actually in league with Lucy the whole time. Maybe the spider’s making her way around the prison and talking to everyone, not just Jenny (and me). Assuming Lucy was here before Jenny, who’s to say the spider didn’t befriend her first?

Spencer flashes back to one of Charlotte’s very first messages.

MY PLAYGROUND

Holy shit.

The eight-legged monster could have been going back and forth between cells, passing along messages to Lucy about how much Jenny hated her. Maybe she was infiltrating Jenny’s bunk and faking adoration, luring her into thinking she was her friend, just like Jenny did to Lucy in class! Maybe Elizabeth killed Stacey Merkin to build Jenny’s trust, but then double-crossed Jenny on Lucy’s command.

Oh, this is rich. It’s also insane. But what a story if it's true.

What kind of endgame does Lucy have, then, Spencer wonders. Was this all just to fuck with Jenny’s head somehow? Lucy did kill thirty-seven people with a chainsaw, by her own admission. Maybe her thirst for blood didn’t end there, but she just can’t continue her killing spree behind bars. So, she enlists a ninja like Elizabeth to do her dirty work, and together they take out Stacey, Aeryn, Vause, and now Paulie.

No wonder Lucy wouldn’t kill the spider in the bathroom the other day. Friend to animals, my ass. She just didn’t want to lose her pet serial killer. The same one who took out her Enemy Number One: Jenny Schecter.

The more Spencer thinks about it, the more it makes sense, and the more she believes it.

It’s starting to feel like Survivor up here, with girls getting voted off the island every Shark Week.
But Spencer doubts there’s a million dollars waiting for her at the end, should she survive, and Lucy’s the only one voting. Spencer could use an immunity idol right about now. Or a gun.

Sue and the guards might really be in the dark about this after all, she thinks. Maybe they know something is going on but aren’t sure what. Even if they believed Spencer’s spider theory for a minute, they can’t admit it. Any apparent shift of power, however slight, practically begs for a mutiny. Maybe they’re scrambling to identify the owner of the killer spider so they can throw her in Solitary or something. Spencer can only hope. But then, if she’s wrong about this, she’d better watch out or she’ll be the one going into Solitary.

…but she’s not. She’s the one now... …TRUST ME…

With a chill of fear, Spencer slams the journal shut and tosses it away like it’s carrying a deadly disease. It hits the floor with a loud smack, but fortunately her cellmates don’t stir. Spencer's pulse is racing, and she places a hand on the cold wall, looking around to ground herself in reality and regain control of the moment.

The creepy-ass diary feels like both a blessing and a curse. Spencer’s getting three new questions for every answer, just like that stupid Lost marathon Hanna made her sit through in middle school. But in her gut, she knows that Lucy Fabray is involved in this craziness, somehow, some way.

Spencer looks over at Paulie’s empty bed and wonders what she or Aeryn Sun or Alex Vause ever did to cross her. Maybe they just happened to get in Lucy’s way, or were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Maybe they earned it.

A jolt shoots down Spencer’s spine, struck by the terrifying realization that now, after the bathroom incident, she’s got to be on Lucy’s shit list (hit list?), too. Yes, it was mostly Quinn doing the antagonizing, but Spencer didn’t help. And considering the only other person who’s known to converse with Elizabeth the spider is now dead, Spencer’s not putting that in her plus column. If her theory stands, she could easily be Lucy’s next target. She just keeps giving Lucy reasons.

But if she’s not at the top of the list, then that means Quinn probably is, and that makes Spencer’s heart stop.

She looks around the cell again, listening to the thick, still silence hanging in the air. If Lucy wanted to get to her, she certainly proved last night that she can. Maybe Paulie was just a warning shot. A message to show Spencer how vulnerable they are behind these bars. There’s nowhere to hide.

But—lesson #71 of staying alive in Rosewood: Hide in plain sight. Spencer outlived a psychotic fuck coming after her for two years, and this isn’t any different. Well, okay, it’s completely different, but she can’t let that shake her confidence. Spencer Hastings didn’t come this far just to be taken down by a goddamn art hippie and a thing the size of her fingernail. At least, that’s what she’s telling herself.

If only Emily, Aria, and Hanna were here. They’d know what to do. Spencer closes her eyes and mentally sends out the SOS text. It’d feel stupid if she weren’t scared to her very core.

River and Dark Willow have somehow slept through this entire day of revelation and near-mental-breakdown like nothing’s happened. But really, everything has changed. Spencer can’t go back to pretending nothing’s going on. She can’t just laugh and joke with her new friends about what ice cream they miss most and what politicians they hope are dead by the time their sentences end. Camaraderie or not, she can’t stay here. Spencer Hastings isn’t just going to sit around and wait to
die.

Keep your friends close but your enemies closer.

Climbing down from her bunk, she picks the journal off the floor and tucks it under the bra strap against her back. The lunch is still sitting cold and discolored. Her cellmate is still missing. Her life is still in danger. Everything is still terrible.

Spencer takes a deep breath, and bangs on the bars five times as hard as she can. Fortunately, Dark Willow’s ensuing fireball misses her head by several feet.

It doesn’t take much acting on her part to play the role of Still Freaked Out and Panicking Cellmate of the Disappeared Girl when Buffy appears. As Spencer passes through the cell block, each whispering voice could be a new rumor train starting, given how many check-ups she’s had lately, but she can’t worry about that now.

The guard ushers her through the vault door and past the infirmary, where one of the doctors is quietly discussing a chart with a beautiful, curly-blonde woman in a lab coat Spencer’s never seen before. They close the door as Spencer passes, like she’s not supposed to see them, but it feels a bit abrupt. This place seems to have no shortage of attractive blonde doctors, that’s for sure. Spencer can’t help but assume this woman’s named Lewis-Burke-Robbins, too. Why wouldn’t she be?

Continuing around the curved corridor, Spencer finds herself stepping into Dr. Umbridge’s office once more. It’s exactly as she remembers it, kittens and pink and lace and ugh, but she’s going to have to suck it up, because her life—and Quinn’s—might depend on how this conversation goes.

The room is empty, aside from the cat snoozing in front of the fire, so Spencer takes a moment to scan over the items meticulously arranged atop the mahogany desk. Her eye catches sight of a manila folder labeled Ripley, Ellen, with an enormous, red DANGEROUS stamp covering much of it. Spencer’s pretty sure she hasn’t met or heard that name at any point during her time here, and she’s starting to feel like that’s a good thing. Still, curiosity gets the better of her. Even a picture would let her know who to avoid. She reaches out to flick open the top cover, but before she can, a toilet flushes in the adjoining room, and Spencer scrambles to replace the folder as she found it.

Dr. Umbridge is humming some off-tune melody as she steps into the room, wiping her hands. “Ah!” she says upon seeing Spencer, who’s sitting like someone shoved a broom straight up her ass. “Miss Hastings. Pleasure to see you again. Is everything all right with your new cellmates?”

Spencer may have turned on the waterworks for Buffy, but she’s not pulling any punches here. “Well, Paulie’s dead.”

Dr. Umbridge doesn’t look surprised or aghast, exactly, but her eyes do widen a bit at the news. “And how does that make you feel?” she asks, tilting her head to one side.

Spencer blinks as her eyebrows raise. "How do I feel? I feel like this is seriously messed up! I feel like my life is in danger!"

“Grief has many stages,” Dr. Umbridge starts, "and it’s—"

“I want a transfer.” It’s a demand.
“But dear, you’ve barely just settled into your new home! Why don’t you give it some time—”

“I’m not safe there!” Spencer has to navigate this point without going into the spider business, or she’ll never get her way. “Girls are disappearing into thin air.”

That piques Umbridge’s interest more than anything else she’s said. “Really, now? Tell me more.”

“Uh…” Spencer didn’t have anything to follow that. “They were here and now they’re not?”

“But surely they must have gone somewhere. People don’t just vanish into nothing.”

Yes, they go into a little spider belly. Or possibly into the space mafia. Can we get back on track here?

“Tell me, Spencer,” Umbridge continues, “Have you ever seen someone disappear into thin air, as you say? Right in front of you?”

This sets off warning bells—something’s not right. Did this conversation just become about Hermione? Spencer remembers what Aphasia told her—Don’t trust Umbridge. “Just what everyone else has seen, I guess. In the Mess Hall.”

Umbridge leans forward a bit, hands folded in front of her, with the slightest trace of a grin. It’s unnerving. “You mean Miss Granger.”

“Who?”

“Hermione. Granger,” Umbridge repeats. “She seems to have a way of...slipping through the bars, so to speak.”

Spencer’s heart is pounding, torn between wanting to know more about all this and not wanting to betray one of the only friends she has here. Aphasia’s never given Spencer a reason not to trust her. The least she can do is return that favor. “I really don’t know anything about that.”

“Don’t you?”

“No.” Spencer’s more than a little annoyed. “If I knew where girls were going, I wouldn’t have come to you in the first place to ask what was going on.”

“Well,” Umbridge offers, “don’t you think it’s possible that we’re closer to the truth than you realize? Tell me—have you ever suspected Miss Granger of taking any of your personal property?”

“I—” Spencer pauses abruptly at the question. From what she’s seen, Hermione is no thief, but her girlfriend most certainly is. “No. But then, I don’t really have any personal property to take.”

Umbridge huffs almost imperceptibly. “How very lucky for you.” She leans back in her chair and moves her hands to slide down the armrests and grip tightly. “Or perhaps Miss Granger is taking your friends outside these walls.”

Spencer swallows around the lump in her throat. It looks like she’s not the only one with this theory. But if Hermione’s behind this and the authorities haven’t figured out how, Spencer’s not about to help them get any closer to stopping her. She wants a way out as much as the next person. “Miss Umbridge,” she begins.

“Doctor.”

Spencer flinches. “Dr. Umbridge.” She closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. If she can’t land this
argument, she might blow everything. “I don’t know this Hermione girl, I swear. I’ve seen her, but I’ve never spoken to her. You know I don’t have any friends. That’s why you moved me in the first place! So, no, I don’t know if she’s taking people out of here. I don’t even know how that could be possible. Can you not see how scared I am? I’m terrified. And I thought it was your job to help fix that.”

It’s not what the good doctor wants to hear, but she isn’t swallowing Spencer whole, so that’s something. “I’m listening.”

“Something happened to Paulie, something terrible while she was sleeping in a locked cell, and I don’t want to be next. I have rights, and I need to feel safe here.” She takes another breath. “I want a transfer. Please.” She waits a beat before adding, “to Lucy Fabray’s cell.”

The expression on Dr. Umbridge’s face changes completely, shifting into equal parts intrigue and amusement.

_Bingo._

The fire crackles loudly behind them, but Dr. Umbridge doesn’t even blink. “And why would I approve such a request?”

“For my protection. And because I think I could learn more from her than anyone else in here.”

“Learn what, exactly?”


Spencer blinks again to clear all those thoughts. “Survival.”

Dr. Umbridge purses her lips and narrows her eyes while she carefully considers the proposal. After what feels like an entire minute of beady-eyed scrutiny, she pushes a button on her intercom and says, “Miss Summers, please prepare Miss Hastings for immediate transfer.”

Spencer bites back a smile as she stands and thanks her.

_Step one, success. Here’s hoping I survive step two._
It's funny—Spencer's passed this room every day since she arrived over a month ago, but it looks different now that she's stepping inside it for the first time. Cell 1, on the very far end of the block, is the closest to the showers and Mess Hall, meaning it's also the quietest, as it's separated from the rest of the population. But the silence doesn't make Spencer feel any safer as she's pushed inside.

The cell looks the same as the rest, except for how the entire back wall is tiled from floor to ceiling in fingerpaintings—white rectangle pages covered in every color of the rainbow, each with a different...animal? Monster? Alien? Spencer can't identify any on sight, but maybe she just needs to be closer. Or five. Or drunk. A drunk five-year-old would certainly have some opinions on these masterpieces.

She's becoming all too familiar with this New Kid at School feeling, but at least this time she knew exactly what she was getting into. You've got to be a special kind of crazy to volunteer for the lion's den.

Faith rolls over on the top right bunk, looking at Spencer like something she just found on the bottom of her shoe. “We babysitting now?”

“New roomie,” Buffy says from the other side of the bars. She adds, “Play nice,” in a tone that sounds much more sexual than Spencer's okay with.

Santana looks up from the bottom-left bed. “No, really. Is this Sue's idea of a joke? Because I'm not laughing.”

“Afraid not.” Spencer steps cautiously toward the empty bunk above Santana. She is sure to keep her distance by using the end frame to pull herself up, even though it's harder that way. Spencer takes off her shoes but leaves them at the foot of her bed, not wanting to risk losing any of her precious little property. Her page of notes is tucked into her sock, along with her beloved toothbrush—and they both scratch like hell—but she can tolerate it while she's the center of attention.

Lucy sits up on the bunk under Faith’s. “Now, now, girls, let's not be rude.”

Spencer's got a clear line of sight from this vantage point. There was a one-in-three chance they'd be sharing a side, which would've made it much trickier to keep watch on her target. But this feels like a win already. From here, she can see everything and every move that Lucy makes. Though, it's not lost on Spencer that it's the same angle Quinn had on her, back in cell 10.

Focus.

“If she's here,” Lucy continues, “there must be a good reason for it.”

Faith and Lucy stare at Spencer like they're waiting for her to answer, but Spencer doesn't know what to say. Suddenly, she feels Santana's foot kick the frame under her. “Hey!”

Here’s the character photo index.
“Spill it,” Santana says.

“I don’t know! I’m just here!” Spencer tries to shift her body to the edge of the bed, back against the wall, to avoid any further attacks from below.

“We don’t get new cellmates,” Faith says like Spencer’s an idiot. “It’s not like they’re out of cold beds. And we don’t know you. Doesn’t add up.”

“Why’s it such a big deal?” There's no way to make the question sound as innocent as she wants it to be, so she adds, “It's not like I'm some kind of spy or something.”

**OH GOD. WHY DID I SAY THAT?**

**ABORT, ABORT.**

**I'M A FUCKING MORON.**

But the others don’t seem fazed. Santana huffs at the idea like it's meant to be funny. Lucy gets off her bed and walks toward Spencer, locking eye contact as she moves. “Do you play nicely with others, Spencer?”

She blinks, a bit thrown by the question. Is Lucy threatening her? *Jeez, that didn't take long.* “Um. Yes?”

Lucy breaks her gaze and turns to walk toward the back of the cell, admiring her wall of work. “That's too bad.”

This is just getting weirder by the minute. “Why?”

Circling back, Lucy stops in front of a painting with far too much red on it. From where Spencer's sitting, she can just make out the faint outline of a person among the pools of what must be blood. Lucy keeps her eyes on the painting as she speaks but seems to intentionally position her body so it doesn't block Spencer's view of it. “I was hoping from now on, you'd only play with us.” And in a flash, Lucy's demeanor changes. She turns to Spencer, and the kind smile dissolves into a terrifying glower.

Spencer's blood runs cold. “Uh...sure.” She's too scared to say anything else and shifts uncomfortably on the bed, curling up into a ball without even realizing it.

And just like that, Lucy shifts back into a beaming, saintly smile. “Wonderful! I'm glad that's settled. Welcome, Spencer. You're one of us now.”

Spencer forces a smile and tries to look appreciative, but it's hard when you've been adopted by a Satanic cult.

********************

It doesn't take long for the adrenaline rush of fear to fade as Spencer settles into these surroundings. It turns out this cell is just as boring as the others, if not more. Small talk only lasts so long, and she doesn’t want to push too hard for information this early on. Prison topics feel safe, but all she really learns is that Santana’s knitting class is anything but, as they're not given anything sharp to use and their stash of yarn disappeared months ago. So, it’s more just a place to make out with each other for an hour. *Which, no thank you.* Right now anything that reminds her of Quinn is just frustrating, so Spencer shuts down her own conversation upon hearing Santana’s *also* from Ohio. Enough is enough.
Five hours into her new home and it’s back to staring at the ceiling and counting screws in the metal plates. She realizes how much she took Aphasia for granted. Crazy and unpredictable as her hoarding was, it gave them ways to pass the time. Spencer would kill for something to do right now. A tennis ball or some building blocks. A rubber band. Dental floss. Pencil sharpening. Window washing. Anything remotely constructive. She’s almost bored enough to try fingerpainting. Almost.

Raven comes by and trades Lucy a small sealed can for some glue and pipe cleaners from her craft supplies. Lucy hands the vodka off to Faith right away without a glance at Spencer. Not that she wanted it anyway. Though, getting drunk would at least be something to do.

She’s already read Jenny Schecter’s journal cover to cover three times, and the inside of that girl’s mind is a terrifying place, Spencer’s decided. She’s gone through and tried to align the timeline of the four disappearances with what she knows about Hermione, but there just isn’t enough information to gain traction. Besides, she’s only come and gone twice—not four times—and never left during Shark Week, which is when the girls go. So, yeah. If Hermione’s pulling that off somehow, she’s got Spencer stumped and her brain hurts just thinking about it. She wants to believe Umbridge. It’s certainly the most appealing theory of them all, what with it not involving flesh-eating monsters, but it’s not any more likely than the rest right now.

Spencer needs something new to think about. Something not about death. Oh, what she wouldn’t give for one of Quinn’s weird romance novels right—

“Buffy!” A high-pitched voice pierces the air from across the cell. Spencer turns over to find a most frightening sight: Faith is lying on her bed, bare feet crossed, probably drunk, hands raised and talking to each other. With sock puppets. “If you’re going to lesbian with anyone, you should lesbian with me! Your super-duper gay not-at-all-out-of-nowhere friend, Willow!”

Spencer’s eyes widen in fear.

“But Willow,” Faith talks back with her other hand, using a very low and grumbly voice, “this stake up my ass means I would never even consider something so amazing as banging a woman.”

What is happening right now?

“You’re really missing out.”—Faith's back to the super high voice—“Ladies surrrrre are delicious. You should think about getting it on with that gorgeous evil slayer. I hear she's an absolute Viking in the sack.”

“Okay,” Santana cuts in, “Even I think this is creepy.”

Thank you.

“If you want Buffy,” Lucy says from below, not looking up from the green rolls of Play-Doh she's molding, “I'm sure something can be arranged.” Her words are thick with suggestion, and Spencer wonders if Lucy has as much pull over the guards in here as she does the other inmates.

“Show her your little puppet show,” mocks Santana, “I can already hear her panties hitting the floor. Oh wait, no—just your pathetic desperation.”

Faith makes a face at her, then yanks the socks off to put them back where they belong. “Screw you.”

“Wash your hands first.” Santana roughly adjusts her position, rocking the bunk under Spencer.

“Faith is working out her feelings in healthy ways,” Lucy reminds her. “You know I enjoy roleplay.
Sometimes there are things we can only say when we're not ourselves.”

“It's creepy,” Santana repeats.

Lucy looks up at Spencer now. “Do you have anything you need to say?” The words attack her, thick with insinuation, though Spencer has no idea what Lucy’s implying. “I'd be happy to help you find your words. I'm a very good teacher.”

The last thing Spencer wants to do is let this psychopath inside her head. There's far too much in there that needs to be said. She doesn't know where she could begin. Okay, that's a lie. But she can't imagine solving all her communication problems with Quinn by putting her damn socks on her hands, and Spencer will eat them before she lets her cellmates know anything about her personal life.

The truth is, of course, Spencer does have so very much to say to Quinn with her hands. Just not like that.

****************

The next day, Saturday, Spencer’s on the toilet when she sees Santana reach under her mattress and pull out what looks like a deck of cards. “Oh, thank god.” A never-ending round of War sounds delightfully tedious right now, even with this sparring partner.

“Nosy, much?” Santana says, but then Lucy coughs suggestively. Santana looks over with a glare. “What?”

“Maybe you have some wisdom for our new friend.”

Based on what Spencer's learned about Santana thus far, she can't imagine what pearls of strategy this deviant criminal is withholding. It’s not like Spencer doesn’t know how to shoot the moon; Santana’s hardly going to school her in Hearts. Maybe they want to play Spades in teams?

Santana and Lucy stare each other down for what feels like forever before Santana finally caves. “Ugh, fine. Come on, woodland creature.” Scooting over on the bed, Santana turns her back to the cell door and motions for Spencer to sit across from her on the bunk, anxious to get it over with.

Spencer finishes her business and wipes her rinsed hands on her uniform, which is regrettably the best she can do. It seems rude to handle Santana's cards like this, but whatever. Everything here is filthy, anyway.

She ducks under the frame and sits down, right leg bent on the bed, and waits for Santana to deal the cards. Spencer's scared to ask what game they're going to play, and it doesn't really matter anyway, so long as it passes the time and she makes it out with all limbs intact.

Santana lays four cards face up between them and just stares for a minute, thinking.

“What are we playing?” Spencer hasn't been dealt any cards and doesn't know what to do.

Santana keeps looking down at the queen, 5, 7, and 10. She turns a new card over from the deck, placing an 8 of diamonds on top of the black queen. “This is pretty sad.” She then turns over a black 9 on top of the 5. “Oh, wow,” she laughs at a joke that only she is in on. Santana looks up at Spencer like she can't believe what she just learned.

“What?!” Spencer's finding all of this far less funny. “Are you going to tell me the rules or not?”

“It isn’t a game,” Lucy cuts in. “She's reading your cards.”
Even if Spencer believed in that wishy-washy Tarot crap, there's no way she'd be buying it here, like this. “You can't do that with these.”

“How else am I supposed to do it?” Santana asks with equal parts sincerity and condescension. “It's not my fault your cards are shit.”

“You shuffled.”

Santana holds up a hand and makes a silencing motion. “My psychic Mexican third eye is never wrong.”

Spencer blinks. “That’s not a thing.”

“This right here,” Santana points to the 9 of clubs she just laid down, “means you're really bad in bed.”

“I am not!” Spencer looks around for back-up and finds only a pity face from Lucy.

Faith doesn't even bother to muffle her laugh.

“And this one here”—Santana points to the 8 on the queen—“means you love getting fisted, but whatever, we already knew that.”

Spencer's mouth falls open and she immediately turns to Lucy. “Yes, THANKS SO MUCH FOR THAT.”

“I like stories,” Lucy shrugs without a shred of guilt.

Santana still seems half bored but goes with it. “Let's see what other interesting tidbits we can learn about our new playmate...” She turns a red King. “Your favorite food is bologna? Ew.”

“What? No, it isn't.”

But Santana's not listening. She flips a 10 onto the 7. “You can't swim?”

“Of course I can swim.”

The jack of diamonds. “You're allergic to maple syrup? How is Maple Tits allergic to syrup?” Santana frowns. “That's like being allergic to breakfast.”

Spencer’s losing patience. “I'm not—”

Faith interjects, “I banged this girl once who was allergic to eggs. Can’t even be near 'em. Weird, right? Then once I was face-plowing her outside during the church Easter Egg Hunt, and there was this pink one we didn’t see right by where she was lying down, and her face got all swollen and bloated—”

“I'M NOT ALLERGIC TO MAPLE SYRUP.”

But then Santana flips up the 3 of spades, and her eyes go wide. She gasps and looks up, her demeanor suddenly shifted from disdain to pure delight as she laughs. “Well played, Hastings, well played. I think I'm finally not bored with you. I mean, it's a total cliché, but still. Didn't think you had it in you. So to speak.”

Spencer's looking back and forth from the card to Santana's face, trying to figure out what in the world she could be alluding to. “What?” she and Faith say simultaneously.
"She fucked her English teacher."

"No, I didn't!" But considering her best friend did, this is getting way too close for comfort now.

Lucy looks over with an expression of confusion and concern. "Weren't you quite young when you learned English?"

...Huh?

"Okay." Spencer grabs the deck out of Santana's hand. "New game." She clears away the cards and deals four new ones: a 2, 9, ace, and another jack. She turns a red 3 onto the jack and exclaims, "Aha! I knew it!" God only knows what she's about to say.

Santana leans back against the wall with her arms crossed, looking thoroughly bored again. "Enlighten me."

"You have...a poor relationship with your mother!" Spencer's improvises. "And you think your father never loved you!"

"Nice try, Dr. Phil. Keep fishing in that desert."

Spencer turns over a 6 on top of the ace and tries to think of something interesting to say. Making things up as you go is something she used to be good at. "You turned to crime because you were a poor student,...and secretly you were jealous of all the smarter people around you, so you retaliated!"

Santana looks at Lucy. "Could you ask Buffy to bring me a new sheet? My bed seems to have a giant pile of bullshit on it."

But, no, Spencer's not going to be the laughing stock of this cell too. Not when she's worked so hard to get here. "AND THIS!" she shouts, holding up the next card for Santana to see before realizing she doesn't even know what the hell it is. Grabbing a quick glance, Spencer continues screaming, fire in her eyes, "THE FOUR OF HEARTS MEANS WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE IN HERE."

A silence hangs over them for a moment as the echo resonates, but then Santana simply an eyebrow at her. "You really suck at this."

Spencer's breathing hard, pulse pounding in her ears, and she can't believe how calm the rest of them are. Did they not hear what she said?

"Four of hearts?" Faith asks suggestively. "Mmm, even I know what that card means."

Uh oh.
Spencer’s little tarot reading ended with more questions than answers. Whatever the girls have in store for her—public humiliation, water torture, ritual sacrifice—they're drawing it out and making her wait. For four excruciatingly long days now she's jumped at every word spoken to her and napped with one eye open. Not knowing what they're planning is much worse than whatever they’ll eventually do. Probably.

It’s late on Wednesday night. The cards are still stowed away and cell 10’s well out of hearing range, so Spencer’s considering it a double win. She’s quite happy to not be the center of attention. Faith and Santana are busy playing what Spencer can only interpret as some cruder version of “Hot or Not.” It seems to consist solely of whether or not they would go down on particular inmates.

Lucy's working on a fingerpainting masterpiece in the back of the cell, so Santana is lying on Lucy's bunk for a change of scenery. Spencer tries to ignore the conversation, but there's just nothing else to distract her. She is dragged against her will down the entire prison roster on a wild and crude cunnilingus adventure.

“Shay,” Faith offers.

“Oh, definitely.” Santana *hmms* in approval of her decision. “Firefighters have that nice, smoked flavor.” Faith laughs, and Santana grins as she presents her offering. “The good doc.”

“Mmm, I can’t resist the blondes. You know that.” Faith’s lost in her thoughts for a moment before volleying back to Santana, “Okay—Corky.”

“Butch girls do taste the sweetest,” Santana says with a grin. She holds up a warning finger as her expression changes in a flash. “But not her raspy slut girlfriend who throws herself at all the new inmates. No me gusta. Get some standards.”

Spencer doesn't want to think about the fact that she's been one of those new inmates. Instead, she laughs quietly to herself at how Santana has no place to throw stones. They’ve been playing this game for half an hour now and Spencer’s only heard two “no” votes from Santana, assuming Violet counts. (Amusingly, the other was Mack because, “She’d probably taste like that bullshit wine she makes.” Spencer doesn't disagree.) Unless she's lost count, Spencer thinks there are thirty-six women in this prison her bunkmate would bury her face in.

*Wow. Santana’s kind of a ho.*

“Shaw,” Santana offers to Faith.

“Roger that,” Faith grins. “She’s mean. I like it.” She shifts on the bed and says, “Ooh, speaking of blondes, Moriarty.”

“Move her in here and see how long she lasts,” Santana grins dangerously. “Please.”
It takes Spencer a minute to remember who that is—one of Shaw’s cellmates two doors down. Strikingly beautiful, though Spencer’s never been close enough for a conversation. The other cellmate is Shaw’s girlfriend…Plant or Leaf or something like that. Everyone in prison has such weird names.

Faith laughs, and they settle into a natural silence for a minute or so, considering their next selections.

Suddenly, a voice carries over from next door. “I’m blonde too, you know! Well, kind of.”

Santana turns around and calls into the corridor, “Heroin-dusted tips don’t count.” She settles back into her bunk and inspects her nails. “Nosy bitch.”

“Nicky’s alright,” Faith says in her defense.

But then a different loud voice comes from next door. “I’LL fuck you so hard, I’ll turn you blonde. Does that count?”

Santana shouts back—eyes on Spencer, putting on a show—“Hey Spencer, d’you know we call her ‘Boo’ because her Hairy Manilow is so terrifying, it literally scares girls to death?”

Spencer isn’t sure what’s worse, the term “Hairy Manilow” or being pulled into this neighbors’ quarrel. She’s trying to remember who all’s even over there—Nichols and Big Boo, both of whom Spencer’s seen in classes but not spoken to, and Morello, who never shuts up. There’s also that Johanna girl who just looks sad all the time. Spencer heard people talking about her after Katniss left, but she doesn’t know the story there. Nor does she care to, really.

“What don’t you come see for yourself?” Boo counters.

“Fuck off,” Santana says. She turns back Lucy and asks, “Can we kill them?”

Without looking up from her painting, Lucy replies, “Not today.”

Spencer has no idea just how much of a joke any of that is.

The game seems to have come to a halt, but then Faith takes another turn. “I assume your position on Quinn is unchanged.”

Santana waves her hand and announces, “Been there, done that, would eat again.”

Well, that sure gets Spencer’s attention—and Lucy’s too, though she simply glares and then goes back to her art. But Spencer feels like she’s been slapped in the face. If the game continues, she’s not hearing a thing because Santana’s seven words are just repeating on loop in her head.

Why did Quinn never mention a history with Santana? Was Santana Quinn’s conquest before her? Is that all Spencer is to Quinn now, another prison fling? Or maybe it all happened before they even came to prison. And here Spencer thought it was all just a coincidence that they were both from Ohio. What a fucking idiot.

Ugh, feelings.

GAY feelings.

Her head hurts. And she’s been reminded how gross she thinks the expression “eat out” is. But now that she’s let her mind go there, Spencer can’t shake the thought of Santana’s face buried between Quinn’s legs, looking up occasionally to grin and run her deft tongue slowly along the soft skin as
Quinn’s back arches into her. Santana’s fingers digging into Quinn’s hipbones as she pulls herself closer, deeper into the warmth, tasting her...It’s not fair. Spencer hasn’t gotten to do that, and it’s been killing her. Knowing now that her crass—*What did Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins call it? “Aggressively promiscuous”?*—cellmate has already been where she so badly wants to go…

Spencer doesn’t want to be in this cell anymore.

“Okay, okay, hang on,” Faith says, like she’s got a good one next. A dramatic pause. “Old Maid Rip.”

*Who?*

Santana’s hand is up in the air, as if to push away the very image itself as she cringes. “Fuck me. Okay, game over. That is disgusting.”

“Since when do you not like older women?”

“When they don’t shower more than once a fucking year.”

Spencer breaks her silence now, welcoming the change of topic. “Wait, what?”

Faith looks over. “You don’t know about Ripley?”

“This chick has some major hygiene issues,” says Santana. “Pretty sure her uniform is its own fungal colony.”

Spencer shifts uncomfortably, still panty-less and now feeling much grosser about it. “Why? What’s her deal?”

Faith jumps down and lowers herself to the ground for some exercise. “She’s been in Solitary longer than you’ve been alive, kid.”

“They only let her out once a year as a warning to the rest of us,” Santana says. “She’s like the Ghost of Christmas Please-Bathe.”

Faith laughs heartily, then holds out her hands like she’s framing a picture for Spencer. “Imagine a holiday slasher film: Fun and death for the whole family!”

Santana starts singing, “*You better not shout, you better not cry, you better watch out ‘cause you’re gonna die*…”

Faith’s cracking up, but Spencer’s the furthest thing from amused. “She kills people? In here?” And that’s when she places the name.

**Ripley, Ellen.**

The **DANGEROUS** file in Umbridge’s office.

Terrific. She wonders how many different things can be killing inmates in this prison, all at the same time.

“Surviving Christmas is kind of an extreme sport around here,” says Faith in between one-armed push-ups. “Like, ho ho ho, oops, you’re dead.”

Spencer’s eyes go even wider. “Quinn said something once about people fighting at Christmas, but I thought it was over gifts or something.” It sounds even stupider when she says it out loud, so
Spencer quickly adds, “Or she was kidding.”

Santana stretches out on her bed like a cat in the sun. “Sorry, chica. The only gift you get in here is to keep breathing.”

It’s just not making sense. “If they know who’s doing the killing, why don’t they stop her? Sue knows about this, right?”

Faith grins devilishly again. “Who do you think’s giving the kill order?”

The blood drains from Spencer’s face.

“Fall in line and eat your Wheaties, Fistings,” Santana says, examining her fingernails. “Mommy’s always watching. You don’t want to be on the Naughty list this year.”

Given the fact that she’s already bristled Sue in her short time here, Spencer’s quite glad it’s only April. At least, she thinks it is. Chances are someone else will fuck up more than she has between now and then. Or she’ll get eaten by a killer spider first.

The wheels in Spencer’s brain are turning frantically. She’d been so focused on the pattern emerging since her arrival—the Shark Week disappearances—that she didn’t realize there were other patterns already in place. Like Santa Claus bringing murder each year to the bad little girls in space prison. It sounds too weird to be true, just like Santa himself.

“Who was it last year?”

“Kennedy,” Faith says. ”I hated that bitch.”

What kind of girl’s name is Kennedy?

“No, that was the year before,” Santana says. “I specifically remember it was Quinn’s first Christmas, and Dark Willow wigged out and skinned everyone’s corn dogs, and this one chunk of bread flew right in her eye. Comedy gold.”

Quinn…

“Right, right. Then the year before that was Carmilla,” Faith says.

“Yep.”

“Carmilla?” Spencer asks with a look of disbelief. “You knew someone named Carmilla?” She’s had it up to here with these names.

They just ignore her. Faith says to Santana, “And Xena was the year before that. That’s right.”

“XENA?” Spencer cries. “Are you not hearing yourselves?”


That’s the funniest thing Faith’s heard all day.

Rolling her eyes, Spencer tries to collect herself. If there’s a connection between Ripley and the string of disappearances, she’ll need to find out who was targeted four months ago. Right now the thought of a sixth murder in her case file is—
“You know, I think I missed her this year,” Santana says to Faith. “I enjoy a good thinning of the herd as much as the next bitch. As long as it’s not me.”

Lucy hums in agreement from the far side of the cell, dabbing at a new color of paint. Spencer had almost forgotten she was even in here.

Faith grunts through another push-up and shakes her head in regret. “Katniss and I had this perfect hiding spot worked out.”

*Katniss can kiss my ass*, Spencer thinks. *But, hang on—* “Wait, so, they didn’t let Ripley out?” Now she’s confused again. “Nobody died. That’s good, right?”

Santana props her feet up on the bed frame and shrugs. “Guess they finally got tired of the same old routine.”

“Holiday entertainment just isn’t what it used to be,” Faith sighs.

“True that.” The cell is quiet for a moment before Santana offers a new theory. “Maybe she rotted to death down in Solitary.”

“I thought I smelled something nasty at dinner the other day,” Faith quips as she climbs back up to her bunk.

“Tu madre.”

“Oh, you’re eating my dead mother now? You should be so lucky.”

“Speaking of,” Santana prompts, and the girls laugh and resume their original game as Santana gives Starbuck two enthusiastic thumbs up. Spencer has a hundred more questions about the Ripley situation, but maybe if there was more to know, her cellmates would’ve said so. They don’t seem too concerned, so Spencer doesn’t want to be, either. This place just continues to confound her. But if she’s in for another three hours of sex conversation, Spencer’s just going to bed. She learned to tune out the sound of Quinn’s spanking, and she can meditate through this, too.

“What about her little ex-girlfriend Kat?” Faith says, picking at a loose thread on her uniform.

Santana gives a *psshh* and waves her hand. “I don’t even know why she’s in here. One small drug deal or something? Please. My abuela is scarier than that runt.”

Against her better judgment, Spencer rolls back over in her bunk to face them. Other than the gang in cell 10, this is the first she’s heard of inmates *not* being murderers. Right now, any glimmer of hope that this place isn’t all terrible is a rabbit hole worth exploring. “Kat didn’t kill anyone?”

“Her?” Faith sneers.

“Right?” Spencer clarifies.

They both laugh again, and Santana says, “Yeah, she’s a killer, and I’m Ronald McDonald.”

“So, what’s she doing up here?” Spencer asks.

Santana turns to face her. “Ding, ding, that’s the million-dollar question.”

Spencer’s mind flashes to Quinn, who was more than anything just an accessory to her cellmates’ crimes. Well, okay, hacking a bank is technically Not Good, but it’s nothing compared to Mack’s rampage. Quinn didn’t kill anyone that day. *Right?* The thought gives her pause, but she pushes past
it, because, no. She’d know. Quinn just teamed up with the wrong people. If anyone knows what that’s like, it’s Spencer.

Santana’s starting to wonder just who’s trying to team up with her at the moment. “Hell, what are you doing up here?”

Spencer sits up. “I killed someone.” She also vaguely recalls something about counts of “excessive bitchery” but chooses not to share. It feels messed up enough to be defending her actions like this, trying to prove her place here, but nobody belittles Spencer Hastings uncontested.

“One as in ‘less than two’?” asks Faith.

“That’s not enough?”

“Okay, rich girl,” Santana says, humoring her. “Enjoy your stay.”

Spencer also hates being patronized.

There’s so much she wants to say, so many ways she wants to punch this girl in her beautiful, stupid face. But Spencer's here to gather information, and she’s already learned a lot from these two. They clearly have been around the block awhile. If she can keep her mouth shut, who knows how much more info she can get. Still, this imbalance of power is loathsome; they know they can gang up on her like this and make her feel stupid, and Spencer has nothing to throw back at them. She won’t press it any further today.

But now her mind is spinning with all kinds of new questions, like what changed with Ripley, or how many times she killed on Christmas before now, or what connection—if any—is there between that and Charlotte’s killings? Spencer couldn’t imagine an alliance between a spider and someone in Solitary, but anything seems possible in here at this point.

And what about all the individual stories of these women she’s slowly getting to know? There’s no way she can get herself transferred into every cell and meet them all before the proverbial uterine clock runs out. She’ll have to figure out if she needs to focus on the killers or the non-killers first. Maybe the non-killers have bigger secrets to hide. What is it about this place that draws this specific inmate population? What’s the common item on each person’s paperwork that makes some clerical assistant say, “Ahh, TO SPACE WITH YOU!”

Spencer’s been wondering that a lot lately. Why the hell is she here instead of in a regular prison? She’d accepted her fate and laid it to rest weeks ago, but now the wound’s been opened again, and it’s just as painful. Spencer knows deep down that she won’t be able to move forward until her origin story is brought to light. She needs someone to blame, an object for her frustration. Maybe she’s been hoping she’ll come across the magical answer to everything if she just looks hard enough. Maybe all of this digging around in the name of others has been selfishly motivated all along.

She lies on her back, staring up at the underside of the bed frame, and tries to lose herself in the surrounding vastness of space, but the crude laughter of her cellmates keeps her hopelessly grounded. Her mind repeats the same question, over and over, without end.

*How did I get here?*

************************

The next morning about an hour before lunch, the **ALL CLEAR** sounds throughout the corridor and Faith leaps down in a blur before Spencer can register what's happening. Her bed shakes as Faith's body lands on Santana's bunk, and all Spencer can hear now are moans and wet smacking sounds
and zippers. She buries her head in her pillow, trying not to think about the fact that they haven’t showered in a week.

“Now, now, girls,” Lucy says, peering over from her bed. “Don’t be rude.” The movement below stops, but Spencer doesn’t know why. And then Lucy's looking up at her. “Come down.”

*Um. “I'm good up here.”*

Lucy tilts her head slightly. “You don’t want to be a part of our group? I thought that’s why you were here.”

The words catch her off-guard, like Lucy’s calling her bluff and Spencer’s got to show her hand. She never gave them any real reason for her transfer at the time, but it’s better that Lucy believe this than the truth. Spencer has to sell the story. “It is.”

Lucy stands up and takes a few steps toward Spencer’s bed, not breaking eye contact as she moves. Stopping in the center of the room, she repeats, “Then come down.”

And just like that, Spencer Hastings is double-dog-dared by the scariest girl in space prison.

Weighing her options, she realizes it's better to play along and earn their trust, even though they're probably going to kill her, anyway. They're locked in a room together, so it's not like there's anywhere to hide. Unless you're Katniss, apparently.

It doesn’t take nearly long enough to climb down to the floor. Spencer puts two feet on the ground and two eyes on the compromising position of Faith on top of Santana, jumpsuits unzipped and boobs hanging out. It's quite the sight. Not that Spencer's staring.

“Right here,” Lucy says, back on her bed and patting the empty spot next to her.

Spencer sits down nervously, now front row for all the action, and it's awkward as hell but she can't think of anything to do about it.

“We're ready,” Lucy says to them, and without missing another beat Faith takes one of Santana's nipples into her mouth as her hands find the other breast.

*Okay, whoa.*

Spencer's never been this uncomfortable in her life. What's she supposed to do? Watch this? Provide commentary? Offer critique?

*Oh god... Join in?!

But then Lucy's voice cuts in over the sound of her thoughts. “They play so nicely together.”

That isn't exactly the word Spencer would use to describe it. It seems kind of...angry. The girls are tearing away each other's uniforms, pulling Santana’s zipper right off its track. There's a combination of moans and muffled cries of pain as Faith yanks Santana's hair to get access to her neck while fingernails dig into her back like claws. Spencer doesn't know how they're even staying on the bed at all.

“Spencer,” Lucy says.

Her voice sounds distant, like a dream, but Spencer blinks and turns to face her cellmate.

Lucy's eyes soften for a moment. “Do you think I'm pretty?”
Spencer blinks again. The tone of the question seems out of place, considering the symphony of sex and violence happening just a few feet away. But it's hard to look away from Lucy's eyes, though Spencer tries. And fails. “Yeah. Of course.” Are you hitting on me? Or do you just need a pep talk? She’d ask, but her brain isn’t firing on all cylinders at the moment. Spencer blames the Gayest Show On Earth in the background.

Everything feels weird and out of place, and Spencer's deeply regretting this transfer with every fiber of her being. At least, she thinks. Because the way Lucy is looking at her is making—

“Do you want to kiss me?” Lucy's voice is steady and strong, in stark contrast her expression. It almost feels like another dare.

Spencer hasn't taken a breath since she heard the word “pretty.” It's not that she hasn't thought about Lucy like this, it's that she kind of hates herself for it. It takes her back to the bathroom and all the fear and humiliation and *Quinn*. The resemblance really is uncanny.

But Spencer isn't afraid of Quinn, not like she is of Lucy. Not even close. Spencer's afraid of losing *Quinn*, and that makes all the difference. And maybe, just maybe, if she can never have Quinn, she's afraid of losing herself in Lucy. Spencer can't begin to know what she wants, but she knows Lucy's going to need an answer. What the hell is she supposed to say?

“I'd rather kiss your identical, less-deranged twin?”

Spencer swallows nervously and says the only thing she can. “Do you want me to?” Her voice is raspy, due to a sudden case of dry-mouth, but she manages to get the words out over the loud grunting to her left.

“I ask the questions,” Lucy says, steeling a bit. “You answer them.”

Spencer Hastings doesn't do ultimatums. And she sure as hell doesn't like relinquishing control. “Or what?” she laughs, if only to break the tension.

Lucy doesn't think it's funny at all. She faces Faith and Santana again, watching distantly. “I have a lot of power here.” It isn't a threat, merely an observation. “I can share some of that with you. I *will* share it with you.” She meets Spencer's eyes once more. “If you share yourself in return.”

“What do you want to know?”

Lucy exhales a quiet laugh with a small smile. “Still asking questions. You'll learn.”

The fire rising in Spencer's chest is white hot, a conflation of anger and defiance and sexual tension that she can't begin to sort out. Exhaling hard and closing her eyes, she tries to re-center herself and remember why she's here in the first place. Information. Solve the mystery. Try not to die. And if that means going along with whatever Lucy Fabray wants, then, well. Spencer just might have to give in.

“Oh yeah!” Santana's voice cuts through the air. “Fuck me!”

There's nothing Spencer can do to tune it out, and she'd be lying if she said it wasn't getting her blood pumping. Flashes of Quinn dance in her mind, too distant to cling to but too clear to ignore. And somehow, Lucy has those same intense, bottomless hazel eyes that Spencer wants to drown in.

It's time to stop fighting. “Yes,” she says, drawing Lucy's attention. “I want to kiss you.”

Lucy smiles, but it's dangerous. Predatory. “Good.” There's something in those eyes that Quinn doesn't have. Something villainous.
Spencer waits in anticipation for her request to be fulfilled, but Lucy isn’t moving any closer. As if she’s intentionally maintaining distance now that Spencer's revealed she wants to close it.

“What else do you want to do?” Lucy’s tone makes it very clear that Spencer better answer the goddamn question.

Make the pounding in my ears stop, for one.

Trust that you won't slit my throat in my sleep.

Go back to being cyber-stalked in Pennsylvania, because that was a cakewalk compared to this.

But if she's being honest with herself, Spencer doesn't want any of those things. And after all the lies, all the cloak and dagger, she wonders where a little truth might take her. Go big or go...

Well. There is no going home. So, that makes her decision much simpler. “I want to have sex with you.”

The words almost feel romantic as they roll off her tongue—almost—but then there's another cry of “Yeah! Fuck me! Yeah!” from the opposite bunk. The moment shatters and Spencer's left feeling kind of cheap, like she's negotiating with an escort. But it's too late, it's out there. She said it. And the scary part is, she meant it.

Lucy seems pleased at the declaration and she turns briefly to smile at the other girls, who are very naked and sweaty and making quite a go of it. Lucy shifts her body to face Spencer and takes one of her hands. She lightly strokes Spencer's fingers, weaving them together as Spencer opens to let her in. It's a delicate gesture, a tender touch. Nothing at all like what Faith's fingers are doing to Santana, but Spencer supposes there's time for that later.

“Do you trust me?” Lucy asks. Judging from the look in her eyes, she couldn't be more serious.

Spencer's mouth opens slightly but the words get lost inside. Spencer doesn't know what to say. How could she trust a convicted chainsaw murderer? The lunatic mind behind prison kindergarten art hour? The one who blabbed to the whole prison about her bungled sex with Quinn in the bathroom? The same woman who's probably somehow responsible for killing at least four people just in the last few months?

Lucy can see her hesitation but doesn't soften to appease her. “Choose your words carefully, Spencer. You get one per answer.”

So, this is how it's going to go.

Lucy tightens the grip on Spencer's hand. It's not painful, more of a warning to tread with caution. “Can you follow my rules?”

Spencer steels her resolve and squeezes back. This question is easier. “Yes.” She hasn’t lost her power as long as she still has the truth.

“Good. Girls who follow the rules get what they want.” Lucy raises an eyebrow toward the fornicators still banging away five feet from them. “Girls who don't follow the rules get punished.”

Punished? She’s taking this whole preschool teacher thing a bit too far, isn't she? What’s she going to do, put Spencer in time out? Ground her for a week? Bend her over her knee and sp—
Spencer's mind jumps to Quinn and Mack, and she instantly closes that door.

“You will speak only when spoken to,” Lucy says, stone-faced. She is not fucking around.

It's time to start following the rules. No questions. One word at a time. Spencer swallows and says, “Okay.”

“I'll ask again, because this is very important, Spencer. I can't give you what I give them, can't give you what you want, unless we make our terms. Communication is very important in any kind of relationship.”

Which is why I only get one-word answers. Sure.

Wait—relationship?!

“So, I need to know,” Lucy continues, “before we can go any further—do you trust me?”

Their eyes lock, and Spencer's head is spinning. It's either yes or no, make or break. No more room for lies. Spencer takes a moment to think about everything she has left of herself here in this place. Because she's about to give it all to Lucy Fabray, and Spencer has a feeling she might not ever get it back.

“Yes.”
Lucy's Funhouse

Chapter Notes

If smut is truly not your thing, you have my permission to skip ahead to chapter 34.

Here’s the character photo index.

And just like that, Spencer has agreed to submit to Lucy Fabray.

Lucy's eyes light up, and she squeezes Spencer's hand again, lovingly this time. “I’m so glad to hear that. You and I are going to have so much fun together!”

If only Spencer shared that confidence. But, judging from the rollicking romp that's somehow still going over there, this doesn't look like the worst club to join. (It’s still better than Bees class.) Santana's already come twice.

“Now,” Lucy says, “if I'm going to give you what you want, we need to establish some ground rules first. Your safety is important to me.”

Yes, I'm sure you were the captain of your elementary school's safety patrol. Stop, drop, and roll… INTO MY CHAINSAW.

“What's your safeword?” Lucy asks.

Spencer's brow furrows. Is this like a password or something? Like Lucy would say, “Open sesame,” and Spencer's legs would spread before her?

Lucy clarifies, “Something you would never usually say during sex. If I hear your safeword, I'll stop whatever I'm doing, no matter what. It's typically for if you're pushed beyond your limits. But you can also say it if you no longer consent to what’s happening.”

And now Spencer really doesn't know what the hell she's gotten herself into.

“Faith's safeword is 'Giles,’” says Lucy, “which I think is some kind of demon. She said it was 'the un-sexiest thing she could possibly think of.' Santana's is 'fin', like a shark.”

Spencer opens her mouth to say something, but remembers she can only reply to the original question. Pausing to consider her answer, she finally says, “Lannister.”

“Lannister,” Lucy repeats. “That will work fine.” Then, she tells the others, very much interrupting the moment, “Did you hear that, girls? Spencer's new safeword is 'Lannister'!”


“Great!” Lucy says. “Now that's settled. Mine is 'papier-mâché,' but I've never had to use it.”

Spencer nods in acknowledgment and wonders just how much weirder her day is about to get.
Lucy smiles at her cellmates, who have now shifted so Santana can go down on Faith for a while. ("Hey, no biting!") But when she turns back to Spencer, it's clear that her attention is no longer divided. It's like they're the only two in the room.

"Spencer," Lucy begins, meeting her eyes. "Now that we've established trust, I need for you to show me some. Can you do that?"

*Are you about to ask me to kill someone for you? Is this how the mafia works? Am I being Godfathered?*

"Sure."

Lucy takes a breath. "May I kiss you?"

...Oh.

It sounds more contractual than sexy, but Spencer feels the chill up her spine all the same. Things are about to happen, right here, right now. She nods and looks at Lucy's mouth, watching for the slight movement toward her. She closes her eyes before it starts, but now the anticipation has her skin tingling. Spencer's quite glad she's sitting down, because her knees would have given out by now.

"I have to hear you say it." It's stern, and Spencer's eyes open at the shift in tone. "So there's no doubt you want what you get."

The conviction in Lucy's voice turns her on even more. Somehow, Spencer finds a little strength of her own and answers, "Yes."

Lucy's body shifts now, scooting toward Spencer to close the space between them. Only...Lucy doesn't kiss her. Instead, she glances down at Spencer's jumpsuit, as if unzipping it with her eyes.

"May I touch you?"

It's such a simple question, but there isn't anything simple about this for Spencer. She can't help but think about the last time someone negotiated consent with her. Quinn liked to use words, too, but it wasn't like this. Hers were words of power, putting Spencer in her place, but with an underlying kindness and sympathy. The look on her face as they touched was one of awe, like she couldn't believe they could feel so much intimacy for each other after such a short time.

But that isn't what Spencer sees in Lucy's eyes. No, this time it's the words that are laced with consideration and chivalry, spoken softly to reassure her safety. Still, Spencer can see flashes of power in those eyes, as if waiting just beneath the surface for the right moment to pounce. Spencer has to admit both approaches are effective, as her damp uniform can attest. Lucy knows unequivocally what Spencer wants. She's just toying with her, drawing it out and proving it because she likes to.

Maybe Quinn and Lucy are alike after all. And the line between wanting Quinn versus wanting Lucy is blurring and mixing more and more with each passing second.

"Yes."

Lucy's leaning in now, inches from Spencer's mouth but still not making contact. "May I put my fingers inside you?"

Spencer's eyes flutter closed at the breath against her lips, and she can barely hear herself whisper, "Yes," but her mind is screaming it. She repeats herself, stronger, just to be sure.
With one hand, Lucy takes hold of the zipper and starts to pull it down, slowly, carefully, not moving her face away from Spencer's. As their lips brush together ever so slightly, Spencer's breath hitches. Her body's paralyzed, quivering, and Spencer doesn't know or care where the rest of the world has gone. It's completely fallen away.

“May I taste you everywhere?”

There's oxygen flowing into the cell's air vents, but none of it is getting to Spencer. She wonders if Lucy can feel how fast she's breathing, how hard she's trembling. How absolutely weak she is at Lucy's touch. Spencer shamefully remembers this isn't the first time she's melted into a puddle at Lucy's way with words, but at least this time it's the start of something, not the end.

“Yes,” she exhales, but it's barely even a word. If Lucy doesn't kiss her soon, Spencer just might dissolve away into nothing.

Why is this taking so long?

But no, Lucy's not kissing her. Instead, she's moving over toward Spencer’s ear. Tracing a fingertip down her jawline on the opposite side, Lucy leans in and whispers, “May I make you come?”

Spencer’s posture collapses with a whimper as she tightens one hand around Lucy's and grabs a fistful of pink uniform with the other. She fights to find Lucy's mouth, but Lucy's stronger than she looks, and she keeps Spencer at a painful distance. Without releasing the pressure on Spencer’s collarbone, she tilts Spencer’s chin up so they’re eye to eye once more.

“I said,” Lucy repeats, “may I make you come?”

“Yes,” Spencer pants, self-aware of how pathetic and desperate she sounds. It doesn't matter. Nothing matters right now except needing Lucy's mouth and hands and body all over her. She pushes as hard as she dares against the hand at the base of her neck but gains no ground.

Lucy releases hold of Spencer’s chin and traces fingers up to her forehead, gently brushing aside the strands of hair there. There's a loving look in Lucy’s eyes as she watches her movements. Her fingers follow across and down the side of Spencer's face, over her ear, and come to rest cupping the back of her head. As Lucy leans down toward Spencer's lips, she suddenly tightens her fingers around a fistful of Spencer's hair, pulling it taut and maintaining a distance between them.

Spencer gasps, surprised both by the act itself and how much it hurts.

She likes it.

Lucy's got Spencer leaning back at an angle as she hovers over her. Right where Lucy wants her. The eyebrow rises again as Lucy asks, thick with insinuation, “Are you going to be a good girl and follow the rules while I do?”

Spencer’s back arches a bit at the words “good girl,” like she’s already fighting the notion. There’s nothing angelic about this situation and nothing innocent about her anymore. Being turned on by fear is what led her into Toby's arms years ago, and part of why she killed him, and why she has now bedded two convicted felons in as many months. Being bad feels really damn good sometimes. And Spencer’s going to do what Lucy says because she knows she shouldn’t.

“Yes.”

The world comes crashing down as Lucy's mouth finally meets hers. Lucy and Quinn may have the same skin, the same eyes, the same voice, but there is no doubt Spencer is kissing someone new.
Spencer opens her mouth wider, discovering the taste of Lucy Fabray and wanting more and more. Lucy’s tongue grazes across hers, and Spencer fights against the hand still wrapped tightly in her hair, wanting more of it, wanting so much at once.

But no, she doesn’t get to move unless Lucy wills it. Fortunately, Lucy pulls her down soon after and leads her to lie fully back on the bed. Spencer feels Lucy's weight carefully lower onto her, but it's not cumbersome. It's warm and comfortable. Just enough pressure to make Spencer know she’s trapped. Just enough pressure to make her want more.

She reaches for Lucy's face as they kiss, needing to feel the softness and pull her closer, but Lucy immediately grabs Spencer's wrist at the touch and pulls her away. The kiss freezes for a moment in Spencer’s shock at the rejection.

Am I not allowed to touch you? What did I do wrong?

This “no talking” thing is getting harder.

Lucy tightens her grip on Spencer's hair, and Spencer's eyes drift open, meeting Lucy's gaze. She’s so goddamn beautiful. Spencer wants to be everywhere at once, touching and connecting and feeling. Instead, Lucy moves Spencer's errant hand back to reach the bar on the bed frame, releasing her fingers to curl them around the cold metal. “Don't let go. Do you understand?” The command is clear, as is the threat behind it.

“Yes.” But that's only one of her hands, and Spencer doesn't know what she's supposed to do with the other one, or allowed to do, and she's desperate to feel the softness of Lucy's skin beneath her fingers.

Lucy kisses her again, and Spencer's lost in the sensation of Lucy's breasts pressing into her own, feeling the way their legs shift to find safe passage. And then they've each got a knee where it matters most, and they're pushing, pressing, and Spencer moans in need against Lucy's lips. Her hand finds Lucy's back, slipping down to her ass to pull her closer, and——

With one swift move, Lucy breaks the kiss, yanks Spencer's hair, and wraps her other hand around Spencer's neck. Spencer’s free hand jerks away while the one gripping the bar holds on for dear life. Her instinct is to push the aggressor off of her, but that might only make it worse. Lucy's not actually choking her—yet—but it wouldn't take much more pressure to impact her air flow. It's an assertive hold—corrective. Spencer can still breathe, but it hurts, just enough. She’s supposed to learn from this mistake.

“You don't have permission to touch me yet,” Lucy says into Spencer's frightened eyes. “You have to earn it.”

Without breaking eye contact, Lucy releases the grip on her hair to move Spencer's other hand to the bed frame. She’s not technically tied up, but she might as well be. The fingers around Spencer’s neck tighten as the change is made, and Lucy’s stare intensifies as well. Spencer takes hold of the dirty metal, shifting her body until she's more comfortable. But it's hard to get comfortable, exactly, when you're being choked by a murderer. And when your clothing is soaked through because of it.

Spencer feels more vulnerable now that her sides are on display, and she wonders if Lucy's about to snap out of Crazy Dominatrix mode and tickle her. But, no, once Spencer's situated and the power balance is restored, Lucy releases the hold on her neck and begins unzipping Spencer's uniform, slowly.

Lucy’s not looking at her, but Spencer doesn’t look away from her face. The helplessness of her
situation is intoxicating, this relinquishing control. She really has no choice but to wait for whatever is coming. And of course, now her nose starts to itch.

*Great.*

Lucy's eyes follow the small piece of metal down, down, until she’s looking just below Spencer's navel. There’s a quiver as she comes to a halt, and Spencer shifts to watch Lucy's hands now, because god only knows what they're going to do next.

As if merely pulling back the curtains on a sunny day, Lucy opens Spencer's uniform to expose her bra. She sits straddling Spencer's legs, examining the scene and thinking, but Spencer doesn't know what she's waiting for. Unless the waiting is the point.

“When I release you,” Lucy says, “you may let go of the bar. You have ten seconds to strip down and resume your position. Can you do that, Spencer?”

It seems reasonable enough, assuming she still remembers how to move her limbs. And how clothes work. It's occurring to Spencer that this crossed over from “strategy for gathering valuable intel” to “I am so sincerely into you” miles and miles back. She just doesn't know when. Or care. “Yes.”

Lucy shifts back to sit at the end of the bed, wholly untangled from her partner. “Now.”

There's no verbal clock, but Spencer's counting in her head, frantically sliding her bra over her head and kicking off the uniform. It's hardly a graceful process, but it doesn't need to be. She's back in place, naked, nose thoroughly scratched and hands on the bar, with three seconds to spare.

“Good girl. That's much better, don't you think?”

For various definitions of “better,” perhaps, but none that Spencer knows. She’s both cold and sweaty at the same time, and suddenly very aware she hasn’t shaved anything in a long while. If she felt self-conscious sixty seconds ago, it's nothing compared to this—fresh meat on a spit, on display for hungry eyes.

Lucy's looking her up and down like she's trying to decide what to sink her teeth into first. But then she simply says, “Watch me.”

Getting off the bed, Lucy walks over to stand right next to Spencer's face. Spencer can feel Lucy's eyes on her, but she's watching the way the pink jumpsuit's zipper lowers one inch at a time. It ends almost at eye level, and Spencer's breath catches in her throat. She can see the shadows of Lucy's breasts, though the light's bad from this angle. It's the proximity that's affecting her now. That, and the fact that she's not allowed to do anything about it.

And then the jumpsuit slides gracefully off Lucy's shoulders and falls to the floor in a soft ruffle. Spencer can hear the sound—and notices it. It's suddenly very quiet in the cell. Too quiet. She looks around Lucy’s hip to see Faith and Santana sitting casually on their bed, side by side, watching the show. Santana fucking waves, “*Hi!*” with a cheesy grin as Faith muffles a laugh.

*Outstanding. I'm a zoo exhibit.*

Spencer wants to snap back at them, but it's not worth it, not right now. Even if their mockery is against the rules, she doesn't want to break the moment. It’s hard to think about anything else when Lucy's in just a bra and underwear, standing so close to Spencer's face that she can smell her.

Spencer's eyes flutter closed as she takes a steadying breath, realizing, *yeah,* whatever Lucy's doing to her is working. Which is funny, considering Lucy's barely done anything at all.
That needs to change.

Fortunately, Lucy seems to agree and repositions herself on top of Spencer's legs. Reaching forward, she places one fingertip on Spencer's mouth, silencing her. It's a gentle action. “I like you, Spencer.”

Spencer doesn't know if she should react. Her legs shift instinctively to open wider, but she fights to hold them still. Very little of her body is within her control right now. Spencer's lips open slightly, maybe to let air out, maybe to let Lucy's finger in. But Lucy’s hand is already leaving, trailing down her chin onto her neck.

“You're very strong. I like that.”

The fingertip grazes between her breasts, too slowly, and across her stomach before coming to a rest at the edge of dark hairs. Instead of continuing down, Lucy removes her hand entirely with a daring grin.

Spencer opens her legs wider, pleading silently, desperate for contact. She can't see Lucy's hands anymore, but suddenly she feels what must be two light fingertips tracing up along either side of her most sensitive skin. A gasp escapes before she can bite it back. Luckily that doesn't seem to violate their speech code, because Lucy's repeating the action, grazing upward ever so delicately, over and over in circles.

Spencer buries her face into her raised arm, biting her lip hard and breathing heavily. She's lost any remaining shreds of dignity and doesn't give a fuck. Her knees are practically at her chest, not just granting Lucy full access to her body, but begging for it. The metal bar is Spencer's lifeline, clutched firmly in sweaty fists, and the only thing grounding her and keeping her from floating away. Lucy must have known exactly how much Spencer would need something to hold on to. Though, five more minutes of this and Spencer's going to pull the bar right out of the frame.

Through the rising pulse pounding in her head, Spencer hears Lucy's voice. “Do you know what I like to do to strong women, Spencer?”

She squeezes her eyes shut tight, biting into her shoulder and trying not to cry. Spencer can think of a hundred things she needs Lucy to say right now, things she needs so very badly.

*Say my name again.*

*Keep touching me.*

*Tell me how strong I am.*

*Make me believe it.*

*Make me come.*

*PLEASE.*

But she's only allowed one word, and it's honest. “No.” Her voice is shaking along with her fragile body. She's never known fear and want could mix like this, not with Toby or even with Quinn. But then, when the hand withdraws and the touch is gone, Spencer dares to open her eyes.

Lucy is leaning in close, as if she was waiting for Spencer to look at her. “Break them.”

The words fall like a weight on Spencer's chest, pushing all air out of her lungs. Possibilities cloud her mind with darkness and Spencer's heart stops, just momentarily, until she's brought back by a
surge of sensation coursing through her body. Lucy's two fingers drive into her, hard, and Spencer's back arches high off the mattress as she cries out. She pushes against Lucy's hand, holding the bar for dear life, because there must be a way to get even more of Lucy inside of her. She feels a supporting hand on her lower back as Lucy shifts to straddle her right leg, and now Lucy's pulling Spencer's body closer without relinquishing her hold.

“You like this, don't you?” Lucy punctuates the question with a firm press deep inside her.

Spencer throws her head back and moans again, eyes clenched tight, and says “Yes!” a bit louder than she means to. Self-control isn't exactly her forte at the moment.

Lucy's working Spencer firmly, aided by the wetness her questions induced. But she's not moving in a steady rhythm or pattern. It's clear she knows what she's doing, hitting all the right spots with quick bursts of strength and maintaining enough speed to make Spencer's blood boil. Minute after minute, Lucy continues to fuck her, relentlessly, passionately. But Lucy's not letting Spencer get too comfortable. She's keeping her edge, keeping the power.

If Lucy lets her relax and feel safe, Spencer might come.

Right as this realization hits her, the motion stops. Lucy withdraws only for a moment as she shifts her body forward to sit on Spencer's stomach. It would be easier without the top bunk in her way, but it forces Lucy’s face closer to Spencer’s. Dangerously close.

“Now,” Lucy begins. Her eyes trace over Spencer's breasts, and her left hand drags a fingertip along their path. “Since I'm being so generous and giving you all the things you want”—she pinches Spencer's nipple tightly, and Spencer gasps in high pitch—“I think it's time you showed some appreciation.”

Oh god, yes. Please.

Anything. Whatever you want.

Please let me touch you.

It's all a blur in Spencer's head—everything she wants to do to Lucy, everything she still wants Lucy to do to her, everything she never got to do with Quinn...there's just too much. It's overwhelming. And she doesn't know if her clit has ever throbbed so intensely, desperate for attention.

Lucy's finger traces up to Spencer's neck and reclaims a choking hold on it, but tighter this time. It's a warning, and it gets Spencer's attention immediately. She meets Lucy's eyes, and she doesn't know how she's not supposed to lose herself entirely in them.

“Tell me the truth,” Lucy says, staring right through her. “You asked to be moved here, didn't you?”

Spencer's mouth goes dry. There's nowhere she can hide. And right now, she's too worked up to even consider lying. What's a little more vulnerability when she's already completely compromised? “Yes.”

Lucy smiles. “I thought so.” Her eyes look over Spencer's neck and face, examining every inch of her. “You belong to me now, Spencer.” But it's not a threat. It's soft, like a piece of news shared between friends. It makes the hairs on the not-choked part of Spencer's neck stand up all the same. “I will make you feel so good. I think you know now that I can.” Without breaking eye contact, Lucy reaches her right hand back, all the way until she finds Spencer's wetness, making sure she brushes nothing above it. She clearly doesn't want to give Spencer any undue satisfaction, not yet.
But Lucy doesn't go in, merely hovers her fingertips at the entrance, teasing with little traces and
flicks. Spencer licks her lip and bites it, eyes pressed closed. Another weak whimper escapes when
Lucy’s fingertip grazes a sensitive spot.

“Tell me you want me,” Lucy says, pressing harder down on Spencer's neck. It's vertical pressure,
pinning Spencer to the bed more than choking her. She can breathe, she just can't move.

Spencer wonders if Lucy can feel her pulse pounding. “Yes.”

“It wasn't a question.” Lucy sounds angry now and tightens the chokehold, withdrawing her right
hand entirely.

Spencer blinks, confused, but then realizes Lucy's meaning. The rules have now changed. She's been
promoted to full sentences. “I want you,” Spencer says. It's weak and dry-mouthed, almost raspy, but
Lucy hears it.

“Louder.”

YOU’RE STRANGLING MY WINDPIPE.

Spencer takes as deep a breath as she can and says, clearer, looking back into Lucy's eyes, “I want
you.”

Suddenly, there’s a loud clanging noise just a few feet away, like banging on the bars. Spencer jolts,
turning her head toward the cell door in alarm. She feels much more exposed now that she’s pulled
out of the moment, but to her relief, there’s no one there. It must’ve come from next door.

Spencer tries to settle back in and refocus on Lucy, but she can’t shake the weird feeling.
Something’s different now.

Retaking control of the situation, Lucy begins tracing her finger around Spencer's entrance once
more, drawing the attention back where it belongs. “Say it again.”

“I want you,” Spencer repeats, a little louder this time, though it's hard to fucking focus when Lucy's
doing that.

“Where do you want me, Spencer?” Lucy gives extra flicks of her fingertips. “Say it.”

“I want,” Spencer starts, but it's hard when Lucy isn't loosening her grip, “you inside me.”

Lucy lifts that very dangerous eyebrow and moves her fingers slowly inside. “Here?”

Spencer exhales at the movement, one step closer to release, and nods. “Yes.”

Lucy keeps moving inward until the full length of her fingers is inside Spencer. She bends her two
fingers, curling to take hold. She mirrors the pressure by strengthening her hold on the base of
Spencer’s neck as well. “Here?” she asks, pressing hard on Spencer's G-spot.

“Yes, please,” she pants, blinking away the spots in her blurred vision. The explosion of colors isn’t
only hiding behind her eyelids anymore. “Please, Lucy. Please.”

Lucy looks into Spencer's eyes, more discerning this time. She slides back out before pushing inward
and up once more, probably with three fingers, almost lifting Spencer off the mattress with her force.
Lucy holds her down with the simultaneous pressure on her chest. “Are you sure?”

Spencer cries out as her head dips back, and she doesn't know how much longer she can take this
without release.

Lucy withdraws her right hand and wipes it on the sheet. She brings a finger up to gently stroke Spencer's forehead, tucking the loose strands of hair behind her ear. It's a loving motion in stark contrast to the hand still firmly around her neck, and Spencer knows there's going to be a lasting bruise, if there isn't already. Then, without warning, Lucy takes Spencer's throat in both hands, sliding them up so her thumbs are outstretched, digging sharply under Spencer's chin, forcing her head all the way back. She's practically holding Spencer at knifepoint.

It hurts, and Spencer can't speak or Lucy's thumbs will just dig in even harder. She lashes out with one of her legs, but it's a weak gesture, more instinct than anything. Spencer's too scared to use any real strength to fight against what Lucy's doing. If she's being honest, she doesn't want to, anyway.

Lucy gives a pleasant smile, leaning over to whisper in Spencer's ear. “The problem is...I don't believe you.”

What?! Why not?

“I do!” Spencer starts to say, but there's nowhere for her jaw to move. She's completely at Lucy's mercy. And her captor is staring her down harder than ever.

“Don't lie to me.” All sundries and politeness are gone now. The look in Lucy's eyes is cold and unforgiving.

Spencer's certain now that this is how she's going to die. Naked, strangled to death, and dripping wet. In space.

“I know what you want.” Lucy presses a little harder, planning her attack. “But since you're lying to me, I don't think I want to give it to you.”

Spencer's eyes are pleading, screaming for Lucy to release her—one way or another. But she doesn't know what else she can do. This has gone from bad to worse, fast.

And then, Lucy shifts, releasing Spencer's throat to tangle one hand tightly in Spencer's hair as the other moves to her breast. With a calculated look, she takes Spencer's nipple between her fingertips and squeezes, watching it carefully. She doesn't meet Spencer's eyes when she says, “Tell me the truth. Beg for it.”

The pinch sends a jolt through Spencer's body as her back arches again, pushing hard against Lucy's weight holding her stomach down. If she could think clearly, maybe she'd know what the hell she's supposed to be begging for, exactly. For her freedom? For the right to touch her? For the right to scratch that itchy spot on her head that's driving her crazy? For Lucy to fuck her into oblivion? ...For her life?

Every sensation coursing through Spencer is channeling between her legs, and Spencer might cry from need if Lucy keeps drawing this out. But then, that might be what Lucy's been wanting the whole time.

Spencer's out of options. She's completely at Lucy's mercy. “Please,” she whimpers, barely above a whisper. “Please, Lucy.”

Another nipple tweak, this time the most painful yet. “Please what?”

“Please...” But Spencer can't think, can't focus, she just needs pressure, now. “Touch me...there,”
she says, her lip trembling as she tries to hold herself together. She doesn’t want to use the words. She just wants this to happen like it’s supposed to. “Please.” The tears start to brim, but Lucy isn’t changing her position. Spencer's about to have a total breakdown. “I need to…I need you so much.”

She hears the words but doesn’t realize they’ve come from her mouth until Lucy's face changes. And then it's too late to take them back, too late to explain them away with a line. But there is no explanation, anyway, because it's absolutely true.

Lucy lets go of Spencer with both hands, reaching instead to cup her cheek as Lucy brings their lips together. There's a different energy this time, like Lucy is trying to give her something instead of take something away.

But then, Lucy's lips break away, again, and Spencer wonders why this is happening to her, why she's being put through this. She's so wrapped up in her frustration that she doesn't see Lucy scooting down, placing herself between Spencer's legs. But suddenly Spencer’s thighs are being pushed up and apart, and Lucy's tongue is dragging its way slowly to where Spencer needs it most.

Squeezing the bed frame with the last of her remaining strength, Spencer pushes forward and moans at the sensation, wanting so much to bury her hands in Lucy's hair but not wanting to ruin this now by breaking the rules. Her arms are heavy and numb, and they hurt from the lack of circulation, but it doesn’t matter as long as Lucy doesn’t stop. Spencer buries her face in her bicep, both to muffle her pathetic cries and to hide just how much this is affecting her. It's written all over her face; she can feel it. Just like how she can feel Lucy's tongue circling and grinding, relentlessly.

And then two fingers are back inside of her, pumping in time with Lucy's tongue. All the tension from the last hour—hell, from the last two months—is reaching critical mass, and Spencer can feel it rising. She closes her eyes and drowns in the feeling as her mind drifts to Quinn, then back to Lucy, and back to Quinn again. Everything's conflating and swirling together. There's sweat dripping down her legs, and she's tightening inside, and, god, Spencer wants this so badly.

It’s been at least ten minutes now, but Lucy hasn't slowed down. Eventually she pauses and adjusts her position, and Spencer takes a muchly needed deep breath, looking down at the hungry eyes staring back at her.

Lucy flicks her tongue out, nicking Spencer's clit once, before she says, “Don't come yet.” Her voice is stern; it's unquestionably a command.

Spencer's frustration is too much at the surface to push it back down now. She groans, almost angrily, clenching the metal frame as tightly as she can. “Please!”

Lucy hooks the two fingers back in and pulls hard, drawing a pained cry from Spencer. “Count back from ten.”

It feels patronizing, elementary, but Spencer does it anyway. If it means she's guaranteed her orgasm, she'll count in Japanese if Lucy wants.

“Ten...” Spencer says, and Lucy's tongue presses into her aching clit once more. “Nine...” She's not counting fast, to let her body catch up. “Eight...” Her mind takes her far away, out of this shitty cell, across the stars, where all she can feel is how fucking good Lucy's face feels between her legs. “Seven...” She imagines those eyes watching her, burning into her, but Spencer keeps her own shut tight. “Six...” Her breathing is unsteady, and it’s hard to think about stupid things like numbers when there's such important friction getting faster and faster. “F-Five...” Lucy settles into a rhythm that Spencer's riding like a surfboard, and she's starting to feel the swell of the wave approaching.
She can already tell it's going to suffocate her.

But then, it's not her own voice anymore that's counting—it's Quinn's. The mental image is clear. Pink hair tickles Spencer's cheek as Quinn whispers, "Give us everything." The sensation of Quinn's tongue circling Spencer's ear, matching time with Lucy's motions on her clit, starts a fire inside Spencer that might burn down the prison. "You know you want to." Quinn's words fill her head and don't fade away.

"Four," Spencer pants. The tingling starts in her back and stretches down to her toes. Even if Spencer could stop it, she doesn't want to. "Three..." Saying the number solidifies the image in her mind—Lucy and Quinn both there with her, wanting her, touching her. And with that, the rush fills Spencer up and she can't take any more. Her body tenses to prepare for the oncoming shockwave.

But before it hits, Lucy withdraws completely, breaking all contact. She sits up and maintains her distance, watching as the body beneath her jerks and contracts.

Spencer cries out again in frustration, still holding on to the goddamn metal frame. She twists and pulls her knees up, pressing her thighs together tightly, as if that would somehow create the pressure she needs. But it's useless. As quickly as it came, the wave passes by, and the half-orgasm is quick and weak and unfulfilling. Spencer's not even sure she had it at all, but her body relaxes, indicating a chemical release.

After everything she just endured—the torture of waiting, only for her sexual frustration to be wasted—Spencer's desire shifts to anger and disappointment. She opens her eyes and looks at Lucy, suddenly more aware of how wet and messy she is now that the energy has dissipated. She's just a naked girl on a prison bed with an audience and nowhere to hide. "Why...What the hell?"

Lucy stands without a word and picks up the crumpled pink heap from the floor. She slips the jumpsuit back on, zips it up, and fixes her hair, then walks back to Faith and Santana. "Does anyone feel like painting?"

"Are you serious?!" All three girls turn to look at Spencer. "That's it? After all that. You just STOP?"

Lucy's eyes narrow as she takes two steps forward, until she's casting a shadow on Spencer's face. "You broke the rules."

Spencer's eyes widen in disbelief at the absurdity of this, that she was flat-out denied what she literally begged for—repeatedly!—because she couldn't hold on for two more seconds. Spencer releases the frame and sits up, leaning over for her clothes on the floor.

Lucy's expression hardens, eyes blazing. "I didn't say you could let go."

"Yeah, well, too bad. Game's over. I guess I lost." Spencer slips on her bra and steps into the black jumpsuit. It's still damp, and she's even more pissed she still doesn't have underwear.

Lucy's eyes are widening now, as if surprised by the act of defiance.

"Definitely gonna lose something..." Faith offers, picking at a scab on her arm.

Lucy reaches down and grabs Spencer's chin, pulling upward until she their eyes meet. "We're not done until I say so."

"Yeah?" Spencer pushes Lucy's hand away to free her face from the grip. "Well, I didn't agree to that. Go play sadist with one of them." She turns to face the wall, curling into a ball. She knows it's
stupid to be acting like this, to be angering someone so dangerous and crazy, but she can't help it. Spencer just wants to be left alone, to close her eyes and make all of this go away. And then she remembers that she's on Lucy's bed.

_Godfuckingdamnit._

In a huff, she sits up quickly and escapes off the bunk, grateful that Lucy doesn't grab her or stab her or whatever else as she passes by. Faith and Santana exchange looks of disbelief and amusement, and Santana tuts with a wave of her finger, as if to say, _You shouldn't have done that._

Spencer ignores her, pulling herself up to the top bunk and reclaims her fetal position.

“I'll remember this, Spencer,” comes the threatening voice from behind her.

_Yeah, so will I._

It takes a few minutes before Spencer stops shaking, but she's eventually convinced that Lucy's no longer standing there watching her.

“Nine of clubs,” Santana says from below. “It’s never wrong.”

They fall back into random conversation, and Spencer lets her eyes close when it seems safe enough to drop away. Humiliated and exhausted, she can’t help but replay the events over and over in her mind. Fortunately, the limbo period for sleep isn’t nearly as long or withholding.
Lessons

Chapter Notes

Here’s the character photo index.

The next week is...strange, to say the least.

Now that the red cloud is lifted, so to speak, Spencer’s cellmates seem to be on this perpetual sex bender, like it’ll go out of style if they so much as come up for air. Spencer hasn’t been invited, so she’s left bearing witness to the Smut Festival as it plays on and on; the accidental voyeur.

Santana has taken on the role of Orgasm Machine, endlessly dispensing rewards to girls who reach a hand in. Spencer almost wishes she had a stopwatch so she could calculate Santana’s average rate, because, if she’s not faking it, it’s got to be a world record. Or, off-world record. Not that Spencer’s jealous or anything.

Meanwhile, Faith, she thinks, would make a great dental hygienist. She’s clearly comfortable in the assistant role and has a certain fascination with mouths and teeth. If she’s not putting her tongue into Santana’s mouth, she’s inserting her fingers or nipple or whatever else she can fit in there.

Though, Spencer muses, most dental hygienists don’t sit on their patient’s faces at the end of the appointment.

Probably.

Lucy’s certainly the power player in the equation, the last one naked and the last one touched, always in charge of every scene. The rules seem to change depending on her mood, or maybe on the day—Spencer can’t tell yet. Sometimes it’s tender and genuine, other times it’s rough and borderline violent. Most days they’re loud, not holding anything back. Occasionally the rule is not to make a sound. But one thing is always the same: They never use Santana’s bunk, because they want Spencer to see them.

She’s resisting as much as she can. After two days of lying on her side uncomfortably facing the wall, Spencer’s arm and shoulder couldn’t take it anymore. Staring at the ceiling wasn’t any better. So, eventually she gave up trying to hide from it and now tries to pretend it’s just not happening. If she can push past the shock factor, she’ll get used to it. It could even grow boring. It’s scientific fact—too much of anything gets old at some point.

Only, these girls might be the exception that proves the rule.

Lucy’s caught Spencer watching on multiple occasions. It’s always that same sly smirk and the raised eyebrow; the way Lucy runs her tongue along her lip and drives her fingers harder into Santana as if to say, “Don’t you wish I was doing this to you, instead?”

But she doesn’t. Really.

It’s morbidly intriguing, the way Santana gets her leg behind her head like that, or how Faith’s shoulder doesn’t dislocate pumping that hard for so long, or wondering what awful names Lucy will
call them next or how she’ll make them play her stupid power trip games. Spencer’s grossed out and frustrated and livid that she got herself put into this Fuck Factory in the first place, but the last thing she feels is jealous.

Except, well. That’s a lie. She’s *insanely* jealous.

Unless it’s all just a very, very convincing and well-performed show, the sex sounds mind-blowing, and Spencer hasn’t had anything like that since Quinn in the bathroom, what, a month ago? Longer? Every day seems the same up here, making it very difficult to track time. She doesn’t even trust her own monthly cycle as an indicator anymore. Everything is wrong, and she never gets anything she needs, and why won’t they just STOP MOANING, FOR THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

Spencer lets out a long overdue scream of frustration into her pillow, folding her arms over her head and pulling fistfuls of her hair tight. She doesn’t want to cry over this, she really, really doesn’t, but thinking about not wanting to just makes her start anyway.

*Why can’t the spider come put me out of my misery already?*

**************

Dinner is a brief reprieve from the Orgy of the Elite, but it also means seeing Quinn, and that’s hardly any easier to endure. Her face—that beautiful, gorgeous fucking face—is literally everywhere. Spencer can’t escape it. Yet, there’s a clearer difference between them now, more than just their hair and uniforms. There’s a distance in Quinn’s eyes that Spencer hasn’t seen before, and she flinches a bit at first sight, even across the expanse of the Mess Hall.

Their eyes meet, but Quinn looks right through her.

It’s like Spencer’s not even there, not standing awkwardly in the aisle with her tray in hand, mouth hanging open as she clumsily grasps at words to say. But then she feels a sharp shoulder jut into her back, knocking her aside with a curse to let the others pass by, and Spencer blinks to regain her center of reality. When she looks back, Quinn’s engrossed in conversation with Aphasia and Mack, decidedly uninterested and a world away.

“Let’s go.” Santana rolls her eyes and grabs Spencer’s tray to set it on the table. When Spencer doesn’t sit down, Santana reaches a finger into the small pile of peanut butter on Spencer’s tray, hooks a sizable glop, and brings it into her mouth, sucking hard and moaning as she slowly retracts.

The awkward noise gets her attention. “Hey,” Spencer says, finally noticing what’s happening. She sits down and moves her tray closer in front of her, guarding it with her arm. But she’s not really hungry; Spencer just slumps over her food and pokes at it with her plastic spork.

It’s quiet for a moment between them, though the typical hum of conversation continues to buzz all around. Spencer tries to dip a pretzel stick into the uncontaminated sections of her peanut butter, because she knows exactly where Santana’s finger has been today. The very thought makes her lose her appetite altogether, and she crushes the pretzel in her hand instead. It seems like a good idea, but now she’s covered in crumbs.

“Look,” Faith offers, “whatever went down between you and Pink Panther”—she takes a pretzel stick off Spencer’s tray and manages to scoop most of the remaining peanut butter onto it—“it’s ancient history now.” She shovels the peanut butter into her mouth and says, “I never did like that class,” while chewing.

“Well, I like history.” Spencer runs a hand through her hair. “I’m good at history.”
“Maybe that’s why you suck at letting things go,” Santana says. “Hey, I know how good that fruit tastes, believe me.”

Spencer glares in a neutral direction to avoid shoving the last pretzel stick into Santana’s eye.

“But she’s not worth all of these…” Santana gestures her hand at Spencer’s whole aura, face furrowed in a scowl. “...feelings. Ew.”

Spencer picks up the roll and takes a forceful bite. With all this frustration, it feels good to rip her teeth into something. Even if Santana’s right, Spencer’s not there yet, and she’s not going to let anyone else, let alone Santana, dictate her emotions.

“Perhaps it’s time we remind Spencer who her real friends are,” Lucy says carefully.

“Oh, you’ve decided to talk to me now?” Spencer spits. After days of ignoring her and forcing her to sit through their rampant sex sessions, this is the first thing Lucy’s said to her. And of course, it’s just more bullshit. Spencer rips the rest of her roll into pieces as she keeps talking. “Have I finally gotten pathetic enough for you? Is this what you’ve been waiting for?”

“Consider your tone, Spencer,” Lucy says, fighting to keep a steeled expression. It’s the most she’s ever looked like Quinn, and that only makes things worse.

“Yes, god forbid people know I’m actually upset about something. God forbid they know I’m not happy in prison. God fucking forbid I want to have a real connection with someone, and that person isn’t you.” Spencer’s voice is rising, but she doesn’t care anymore. “But maybe you have some constructive ideas on how I should deal with my feelings? Cut her in half, maybe? Will that do it? Or should I do some fingerpainting? Is that better? Did you bring your FUCKING PLAY-DOH?”

Her outburst has gained quite the audience, both from their table and behind, as all eyes are on Lucy. Now that Spencer’s stopped talking, the ramifications are setting in with the silence. She just challenged the most powerful prisoner in space, and god only knows what’s going to happen next. Hopefully, she’ll remember how to breathe at some point. Her body is vibrating, maybe from adrenaline, maybe from life-threatening fear.

Spencer sees a montage of scenes flash in her mind as she waits for her punishment. Lucy, reaching across the table to choke her until she blacks out, maybe as Santana pins Spencer’s hands behind her so she can’t fight back. Lucy, marching over and laying Quinn out with a single punch, maybe knocking out a few teeth so Quinn has something to remember her by. Lucy, dragging Spencer over to Quinn and forcing her on her knees, ordering her to profess her love here in front of everyone. Or worse, Quinn, laughing at her and then never speaking to her again. Every possibility is as humiliating as the last.

Bringing herself to meet Lucy’s eyes, Spencer braces for the oncoming storm. The cafeteria has never seemed so quiet yet so thick with tension. Somewhere far behind Spencer, someone mutters, “Oh shit,” and another girl quickly shushes her.

But then, something in Lucy’s expression softens and the stiffness in her posture seems to melt away. “Oh, Spencer,” she says, sounding as sickeningly sweet as she did on that very first day of class. “What a fantastic idea! Yes, when we get back home, let’s do some therapeutic painting! I’m sure there is so much I can show you about channeling your anger into something constructive. I’m more than happy to teach you a lesson. And I’m proud of you for asking for help in your time of weakness!”

Spencer just sits there. Her mind replays the words, but it still isn’t computing. She must look
completely dumbfounded, but all the onlookers aren’t fazed. They’re looking at her now, content with Lucy’s response and waiting to see what’s next. Somehow, Lucy turned the tables on her without lifting a finger or giving an inch. If Spencer wasn’t so horrified with the situation, she’d marvel at the mastery of it.

She goes back to picking apart her dinner roll, but the crowd isn’t looking away. “Sure, whatever.”

The other prisoners finally turn back to their meals. The sounds of casual conversations resume, steadily building on each other, and after a minute, all is returned to normal.

Spencer chances to catch a glance at Faith, who’s staring right at her, chewing on her pretzel loudly with a smirk. In between crunches she raises her eyebrows and says, “This should be fun.”

Spencer closes her eyes and exhales deeply. This is far from over. But then again, it wouldn’t be dinnertime in prison without a giant serving of fear.

The walk back to the cell isn’t nearly long enough, and Spencer starts to think about how she could orchestrate a transfer to the very far end of the block. Provided she survives the next twenty-four hours, of course. Or the next one, for that matter.

Channeling your anger, Lucy said. Spencer remembers the tiny hammer incident in that second Funhouse class and cringes. Anyone who slices people for fun and bashes heads in as “therapy” is certainly capable of killing without tools.

Spencer walks in first, eager to get into a familiar space, though she knows these three walls don’t make her any safer.

...in your time of weakness…

She turns to see Lucy standing right behind her, arms crossed, with Faith and Santana flanked at her sides.

Buffy slams the door shut and says, “Have fun, ladies,” before walking away. As if everything is fine and normal here and Spencer’s not about to get torn limb from limb.

...I’m more than happy to teach you a lesson...

Maybe Lucy’s going to use Spencer’s blood as the medium of her next project. Maybe she’ll fashion a paintbrush from Spencer’s tibia and a lock of her hair. Maybe they’ll make a new version of her from the remains, replacing any missing parts of the corpse with Play-Doh ones until the killer spider hauls her rotting flesh away once and for all. The look on Lucy’s face says any—or all—of these are absolutely viable possibilities.

“Okay.” Spencer takes a step backward. “I got a little carried away—”

“I don’t like being spoken to that way, Spencer.” Lucy sounds more hurt than anything, but her stance is still very much on the offensive.

“I know, I’m sorry, I just—”

“Yes, you do know.” Lucy begins moving toward her one foot at a time. “There are rules.”

Spencer instinctively keeps her distance, stumbling a little on her own shoelace. “At dinner?”
“There are always rules. What happens now is your fault,” Lucy says plainly. She looks to Faith and says, “Get it ready.”

Oh god, oh god, oh god. They’re going to kill me. Oh god, oh god.

Spencer backs up until she’s against the wall, and Lucy follows her, stalking her prey, as Faith and Santana break off to do...something. Spencer’s too damn scared to look.

“She’s for real. LANNISTER!”

“You are safe.” Lucy pauses her forward motion, giving Spencer the space she has invoked. “No one’s going to touch you without consent. I already told you that. No one’s going to make you do anything you don’t want to do.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t FEEL safe,” Spencer says.

That seems to sting Lucy. “I thought you trusted me. I’ve never done anything to hurt you. Why are you so afraid?”

All of Spencer’s pent up emotions suddenly burst out as she cries, “You’ve killed A LOT OF PEOPLE. Am I just supposed to forget that?”

“I’m protecting you,” Lucy says, as if it’s all the justification she needs.

Ten miles away, Faith agrees, “She’s for real.”

Spencer meets Lucy’s eyes again, lips trembling. “I wish I could believe you.”

It’s the truth. She wants nothing more than to believe Lucy Fabray wants to be her champion and biggest ally. But trust is a scarce resource in prison, and Spencer’s not about to let her guard down that easily. Not after embarrassing the Chainsaw Princess in front of the entire prison. She knows how these things work. She’s going to be made an example of.

And now Spencer looks over and sees what the others were up to. Faith took Lucy’s mattress and put it on the floor in the middle of the room, as Santana did the same with hers. Side by side, they made a reasonably sized sleeping area for two people, which...Well. It’s probably not nap time. However, the assembled surface would be adequate for dismembering a person without staining the floor.

Lucy asks Spencer another question, but it’s hard to hear the words over the pounding in her ears. Spencer’s thinking about the few happy memories she has, clinging to them and trying to feel good about her life ending here and now. It hasn’t all been bad. There were some good summers of math camp and all the straight-A semesters and the occasional moment of love from her sister and...whatever she felt for Quinn. And, no, it doesn’t feel like enough, and she’s not ready for it to all be over. She doesn’t consent to die. Not here, not now. But what can she do? She’s locked in here with no escape and no way of protecting herself. Spencer doesn’t want to cry, but she feels the sting of tears creeping out anyway.

“Spencer?”

Pushing away the rising flood waters in her brain, Spencer’s voice cracks as she asks, “Are you going to hurt me?”

Lucy’s head tilts a bit but her voice remains low. “Do you want me to?”
“No,” Spencer says, exasperated. She can’t hide her emotions now. “No, I don’t want you to hurt me. Please don’t hurt me.” It feels ridiculous to have to say it out loud.

“Then I won’t, I promise.” Before Spencer can relax even a little, however, Lucy adds, “But you are going to be punished. You’re going to learn to control yourself.”

Spencer takes a deep breath and tries to collect herself here in this moment. She wipes at her eyes and straightens her posture, meeting Lucy’s eyes with another exhale. “Whatever you’re gonna do to me, just make it quick.” The words don’t sound nearly as brave or defiant as she wants them to.

“Oh, no, no. I can’t do that.” Lucy takes a step forward and runs a finger down Spencer’s cheek. She wipes away a tear Spencer missed and says, “Then you wouldn’t learn.”

“I will, I do, I’m sorry,” Spencer insists, her words rushed, eyes pressed shut and pushing out more tears. She’s failing at self-control already. Something about Lucy Fabray makes her a quivering mess. “I’m sorry,” she repeats.

“Words are a liar’s tool, Spencer. I think you meant every word you said at dinner.”

“Then what do you want me to say?” Spencer clenches her fists at her sides. She wants to sink into the wall and just melt away into nothing. “I was angry! You’ve been ignoring me for days! You wanted me to be scared, well, now I’m scared. You win. Again.” She wipes her face and sniffs hard, blowing the air out her mouth as her head falls back to rest on the wall.

“There.” Lucy sounds relieved. “That’s better. No more lies.” Lucy quickly glances back to their cellmates waiting patiently on the makeshift bed. “Now we can have some fun. I hope you’ll agree to play with us so you can show me just how sorry you are.” She lets the proposal breathe for a moment. “I want that very much. And I think you do, too. But, no more lies, like we said. If you really don’t want to, say so now.”

Spencer pulls her lips in between her teeth and bites hard, steadying herself. If Lucy’s true to her word, her life isn’t in any danger, but she can’t know for sure without taking the risk. Spencer hates how badly she wants to trust Lucy when every rational thought in her brain tells her not to. She hates how badly she wants Lucy to put her hands all over her body and make her feel alive. It sure beats Lucy putting her hands on her body and making her not-alive.

Why couldn’t I become infatuated with someone normal? Someone who hasn’t killed forty people?

Why do you have so much power over me?

Why do I like it so much?

She takes a quick but deep breath and once again puts her life in the hands of a murderer. “Okay. I’ll play.” Just for safe measure, she adds, “Please don’t kill me.”

Lucy breaks out into a smile. “Wonderful!” She turns and smiles at Faith and Santana, who reply with a cheeky thumbs-up and a wink, respectively. Looking back at Spencer, she crosses her arms and looks her up and down. “As much as I like when you beg me to make you scream,” Lucy says with a gentle smile, “I think you’re done talking for now. Unless you need to use your safeword as intended. Look at me and nod if you agree.”

With a long exhale, Spencer opens her eyes and meets Lucy’s, then slowly nods her head. And just like that, the game is on.

Lucy cocks her head back a little, examining the moment with a serious expression. “Take off your
clothes.” Her voice is quiet, non-threatening.

Spencer’s hands shake as she pulls the zipper down, exposing the vulnerabilities beneath her armor. The black jumpsuit crumples to a pile on the floor, leaving Spencer cold and shaking in only her bra. Lucy closes the distance between them and drags her thumb along Spencer’s jawline so hesitantly that Spencer almost doesn’t feel the brush of lips against hers before Lucy pulls away.

She tries to stay in the moment; she focuses hard on the tingling in her lips, but then there’s a soft sound that pulls her out of her daze. When Spencer opens her eyes, she sees a very naked Lucy standing before her, and her heart stops. Or, her brain stops. Maybe everything stops.

“May I kiss you?” Lucy asks.

Spencer’s heard the question before, but it’s quite different now, standing skin to skin, each afraid of the other for reasons that seem to be rapidly fading away. Her mouth falls open slightly, maybe to let in more air for her poor, failing brain. Lucy Fabray doesn’t ever look scared, per se, but she is fearful of rejection in these moments. Spencer can see it in her eyes. There’s a humanity shining through that Spencer finally feels she can trust. Fixating on Lucy’s lips, Spencer nods and holds her breath.

Before she can even close her eyes, Lucy is kissing her. Any shades of fear quickly melt away in the heat as both girls feel their confidence rising. The taste of Lucy Fabray on her tongue makes Spencer weak in the knees, so she reaches back to the wall to brace herself. They kiss for minutes on end, deeply, intensely, until Spencer loses all touch with reality. It’s only when Lucy breaks away that she remembers who she is or why she’s standing naked in a prison cell being really gay. Her body is cold without Lucy’s against it, but she doesn’t know if she should—

Suddenly, the intercom blares the sound of keyboards as Madonna’s “Give It 2 Me” starts.

Santana throws her head back with a laugh and claps three times. “Perfect!” Rising from her seat, she pulls Faith in close, unzipping each other’s jumpsuits as they begin making out.

Lucy walks over toward them and steps onto the mattresses, turning to hold out her hand to Spencer.

It’s all just so much—the heightened emotions and the frustration and the fear and the want. Just minutes ago, she thought everything was ending, and now it looks like some kind of new beginning. Spencer would be lying if she said she didn’t want it. Still, she wonders if it’s better to stay put, to not be drawn into whatever tangled mess the three girls have together. Lucy wants to punish her bad behavior; Spencer hasn’t forgotten.

She could say no to Lucy, right?

Deep in the back of Spencer’s mind, the truth nags at her—Yes, she could if she wanted to. But she doesn’t want to. Not even a little bit.

And then Faith’s hand slips between Santana’s legs, and Lucy raises one eyebrow, and Spencer’s three steps from the wall before she even realizes she’s moving.

Her mouth meets Lucy’s in a collision of wills, hands grasping for skin and strongholds as they pull each other closer, harder. She hasn’t been allowed to use her hands before, and suddenly she wants them everywhere at once. Spencer reaches down to Lucy’s perfect ass, sliding her palm along the smooth skin. She’s missed the warmth of contact, the rush that impact brings, and she wants to take all of Lucy in with her fingertips, one inch at a time. But as soon as she reaches for new ground, Lucy pulls away entirely and walks to the foot of the bed.

“Lie down.”
Spencer crawls onto the middle of the left mattress—Lucy’s—as its owner stands at the end, staring down at her. Then, Lucy circles around to the far end, standing between Spencer and the cell bars, and gestures for Spencer to spin around to face her.

“Take that off,” Lucy motions to Spencer’s bra. A swift movement later, and Lucy’s staring down at Spencer with a newly appreciative look. “It’s time you learned your lesson, Spencer.”

“W—” She starts to protest but catches herself in time. There are rules in play. Taking a deep breath to steady the pounding in her very bare chest, Spencer tries to remember that whole “Trust the murderer” thing. Even if Lucy does kill her, this should be a hell of a way to die.

“Faith,” Lucy says, not breaking eye contact with Spencer, “hold her down.”

At the sound of those words, Spencer’s heart races faster. She’s suddenly very aware of her hands, as they’re about to be pinned behind her head. She fights the urge to squirm in protest of what’s coming.

Faith breaks away from Santana and says, “My pleasure.” She steps over Spencer’s stomach, straddling it and standing proudly like king of the damn mountain.

Spencer has...quite the view of her, and it’s hard not to look, well, right there. She tries to make eye contact with Faith, but there are nipples and that devilish grin, and Spencer tries to half-turn to look away but doesn’t want to seem insulting.

Faith squats down, balancing on her toes with her knees wide open, awkwardly close to Spencer’s face. Now, Spencer can smell her, and it’s new and intoxicating, and her body is reacting in ways she doesn’t want—not with her. Not like this.

Faith brushes the hair off Spencer’s collarbone and shoulders, then drags a fingertip across her throat. “Looks like I get the fun job.”

If it’s meant to be intimidating, well, it’s working. Spencer swallows hard and braces for the hands around her throat she knows are coming. She remembers how Lucy plays. Surely she’s trained Faith in her reindeer games.

“Hands over your head,” Faith says.

Oh god.

Spencer slowly drags her arms out from where they’ve been pinned by Faith’s feet. They’re free now, with full range of motion. Spencer lifts them over her head, unsure if she’s supposed to be holding on to something like before or just not touching anything. The stakes are too high to get things wrong. Spencer never studied for this test, but she doesn’t want to fail.

Faith must see the look of fear in her wide eyes, because she laughs once and offers, “You’re gonna need ‘em,” with a wink.

Lucy walks over and stands behind Spencer’s head, facing Faith, and then lowers herself until she’s squatting next to Spencer’s ear. (Spencer almost has an aneurysm watching her move down.)

“We’re going to help you get over her,” Lucy says, and gently strokes Spencer’s hair. It’s sweet and only a little terrifying having not one but two scary, naked women hovering over her like this, appearing to care. And then, as soon as Spencer’s starting to feel comfortable in the moment, it’s gone, because Lucy stands up and walks out of view. “But if you want us to put you first, you have to show that you can put us first, too.” She circles around so Spencer can see her again. “Can you do
that, Spencer? Can you make Faith believe you?"

Faith leans down slightly with a smirk. “I’m ready to listen if your mouth’s got something to say.”

“Truth time,” Lucy says. “Look at me and nod if you’re ready to show us just how much you want to belong here.”

Spencer’s heart is crashing into her ribcage over and over, threatening to burst out. She feels the blood rushing to her head, and everything in her body is aching with how much she wants this. These goddamn hormones are going to be the death of her. Literally.

“If you want out,” Lucy adds, “put a hand flat on her stomach. That’s your safe sign. Otherwise, I’ll expect you won’t stop until I say you can. Do you understand?”

Looking at Lucy once more, Spencer lifts her head off the floor and nods, then turns her eyes back to Faith.

Spencer hears Lucy’s final words of encouragement over the pounding in her ears. “Don’t disappoint us.”

Faith gives a wicked grin. “Ride or die.” Then, she shifts herself forward and tilts her knees toward the ground, positioning herself right on Spencer’s mouth.

Everything goes dark, and it’s sudden and intrusive and heavy and suffocating and salty and claustrophobic. Spencer immediately makes a sound of protest, bending her knees in, and her elbows press into Faith’s thighs as she tries to push herself free. With a slight adjustment, her nose is unsmooshed and she can breathe more easily. Spencer takes in a fast rush of air, and the scent is intoxicating.

Faith weaves her fingers into Spencer’s hair, not to pull but just to hold her still, and Spencer relents at the touch. Then, to her surprise, something instinctive kicks in as the soft, wet skin moves against her mouth, and Spencer freezes, letting her mind catch up to her tense, scared body. She’s never been in this position before, but it’s not like she hasn’t thought about it, hasn’t wanted it. Not with Faith per se, but still. She’s needed this.

Closing her eyes, Spencer slowly brings her lips together, brushing them tentatively along the slick skin like a nervous first kiss. She repeats the motion, bigger and more precise, then finds new ground and does it a third time. With gaining confidence, she slips her tongue out and glides it along the curved edge, getting a first true taste of what she’s been missing all this time.

It’s fucking amazing.

“Yeah, you like that?” Faith asks, and Spencer hums in approval as she pushes in toward the source of the wetness.

Spencer moves faster, wider, deeper as she goes, exploring each twist and turn with increasing energy. It’s getting harder to breathe as her nose is blocked again, and she fights to do what she can before coming up for air. But then, Spencer remembers she’s allowed to use her hands. And that changes everything.

Now, with added control, precision, and leverage, she makes room to breathe and pushes harder into Faith, grinding her tongue on Faith’s clit like her life depends on it—because, hell, it honestly might. In the fleeting moments when she’s not lost in her actions, when she can think objectively about what she’s doing right here, right now, her brain malfunctions. How did she go from Rosewood’s darling, girlfriend of the outsider bad boy and dutiful daughter, to eating out a convicted murderer in
a prison cell in outer space?

And who knew she’d be so damn good at this? The noises Faith’s making are quite encouraging and push Spencer to work even harder. But then, she always was the overachiever.

Beyond the sounds of her eager tongue and Faith’s pleasure, somewhere in the moments Faith’s thighs aren’t pressed right against her ears, Spencer hears Lucy’s muffled voice close by.

“Good girl. Don’t stop. Make her believe you.”

The words are cold and matter-of-fact, and Spencer’s drive for approval only makes her work harder. Spencer’s eager to prove herself. Her muscles are getting fatigued, but she’s determined to finish what she started. She can do this. She can get someone off on her first time trying.

She’s a Hastings, goddamnit.

But then her thighs are being pushed open and angled back, and Spencer’s suddenly on display for anyone to see. For all she knows, there’s a line of guards a few feet away taking in the view and laughing at her. (At the moment, Spencer’s just grateful this prison only has cells on one side of the block.) But, no, she can’t let herself think about any of that. It doesn’t change anything. All she can see is Faith, so she closes her eyes and tries to regain her focus on her task.

*It’s all just a test. I’m good at tests.*

But then, without warning, a tongue drags slowly through Spencer’s wetness. She groans against Faith’s skin, crying out in shock at the sensation. It shoots up her spine as her back arches in response, and everything else stops.

“Keep going,” Lucy’s voice says, still close. It seems to be coming from behind Spencer, which must mean Santana is the one between her legs.

Faith’s sitting on her face, Santana’s going down on her, and Lucy Fabray is watching. But Spencer’s fine. Really. Only, she’s not at all, because Santana’s tongue is circling her clit, and she’s forgotten how to breathe.

A sudden pull on her hair kickstarts her lungs with a gasp, and Lucy’s right by her ear now, whispering forcefully, “I said... Keep. Going. You don’t get to stop until I say so.”

Electricity fires in Spencer’s brain, but she can’t make sense of any of it. She’s lost all control of her body, now moving on its own in response to whatever Santana’s doing. Spencer whimpers into Faith’s skin, both of them wet and messy and warm, and Lucy tightens the hold in Spencer’s hair, pushing her deeper into Faith. Lucy’s hand shifts to the back of Spencer’s head and supports it, keeping her close in. Nice as it is to have some relief for her neck, it also restricts her range of motion, eliminating the option of retreat, save for the safety signal.

No, Spencer isn’t stopping. The test just got a hell of a lot harder with this goddamn distraction between her legs, too. She feels like she’s drowning, but she’s still alive.

Adapting to her competition, Spencer tries to mirror what Santana’s doing, because it sure is fucking effective. Her body is humming with energy. But it’s difficult enough staying focused on the clit in front of her, much less ignoring her own as it pulses hard against Santana’s warm, skilled tongue.

“Faster,” Faith says, and she sounds displeased, which can’t bode well for Spencer’s health. As if right on cue, she feels a sharp pain on her inner thigh.
OW! Did that bitch just BITE me?

There’s Sexy Love Bite and then there’s Painful Boundary-Crossing Bite, and this was definitely the latter. Spencer promises herself she’ll give the safe sign if it happens again. For now, Santana is making it up to her in spades, sucking hard on her aching clit. Spencer wonders if the bite is her so-called punishment, or if worse is still coming. Somehow, she digs deep and finds the strength to move her aching tongue faster. The sooner she gets Faith to climax, the better she can focus on her own. Haphazardly, she makes uneven circles around Faith’s clit, trying to establish a steady rhythm but lacking the strength to maintain it. Even with her hands making room, each breath is a struggle.

“Don’t let her come,” Lucy orders.

Spencer prays she’s the one being spoken to, because she’s quickly losing this battle and doesn’t know if Faith’s anywhere close. It’s got to have been at least ten minutes now, but Spencer realizes she has no idea how long it takes for a girl to come this way. No one’s ever been down on her long enough to find out.

“Not until she proves she’s learned her lesson.”

And now Spencer knows she’s fucked. Well, so to speak.

Her mouth is sore, and she considers reaching for Faith’s stomach if only for reprieve. But no, Spencer’s still too scared to know what they’ll do if she surrenders. She wants to get through this, and somehow, some way, she will. Spencer wants to come, she needs to come so badly, and this is her moment to prove herself. Not that she’s learned whatever Lucy’s fucked up lesson is, but that she can hold her own in here. Prove that she’s the badass she thinks she is. The motherfucking, clitt-licking, lesbian badass.

Her neck is killing her, her ears are ringing, there’s a stray hair on her tongue, and she’s fairly certain she’s about to suffocate, but Spencer keeps working and tunes out the chorus of “Like a Prayer.” Unless Lucy’s voice is going to take her there, she needs Madonna to shut the hell up about it.

Digging further within herself, she finds a burst of strength and energy. She moves one hand to slide a long finger inside Faith. Taking another breath, Spencer focuses on grinding her tongue along Faith’s clit, mirroring the rhythm with her finger, pulling and digging and pressing with everything she has.

“Yeah...yeah...” Faith pants.

Spencer’s mind slips back and forth between Faith’s legs and her own, but she keeps her pace steady. She’s gaining traction now, and she’s not about to lose it. Each passing minute brings relief that much closer. Her jaw aches, her teeth have scraped the underside of her tongue raw, and she’s going to feel the cramp in her neck for days, but goddamnit, she’s making this happen.

Faith must be getting close, because she’s moaning loudly in between the phrases Lucy’s saying. “Give it to her, Faith. I want you to come for me with her fingers inside you. I want you to come hard, Faith. Do it. DO IT. NOW!”

There’s a high-pitched ringing as Faith’s thighs clamp around Spencer’s ears. The pressure increases, and the body above her shudders with a loud cry. Faith grabs fistfuls of Spencer’s hair and pushes hard, holding her tongue flush against her as the orgasm courses through. Spencer doesn’t know if she’s supposed to stop, so she keeps flicking and circling, then sucks hard when she feels Faith’s body stutter to a halt. It’s only then that she notices the steady rhythm continuing between her own legs, where Santana’s not yet been given reprieve.
“Good,” Lucy says, brushing Spencer’s hair out of her face. “Faith is a model of self-control. You can learn a lot from her.”

Faith, panting heavy breaths now, crawls off of Spencer much more awkwardly than she got on. She sits spread-eagle on the other mattress beside them, leaning back on the empty bed frame. “Not bad, rookie. You’ve got a bright future as a bicycle.”

Spencer doesn’t know if she’s allowed to wipe her face, but she does so anyway with her forearm. Closing her eyes, she tries to block out the unending awkwardness of the situation and focus just on what Santana’s tongue is doing. Only, Spencer’s imagining it’s Quinn.

“Stop,” Lucy says, and Santana obeys.

Spencer’s eyes pop right back open as she sits up, turning to face Lucy. “HEY. No! Come on!” Spencer looks to Santana for support, but she only shrugs and wipes her chin with the back of her hand. “Seriously,” she says to Lucy, “Enough with the power trip! Just let me have a goddamn orgasm!”

Any warmth in Lucy’s face drains away, and Spencer wonders why she can’t just keep her fucking mouth shut. As much as Lucy drives her crazy, it’s best not to test the limits of confessed killers. Especially ones who have promised she will be punished.

Locking eyes with Spencer, Lucy steps forward until she’s right in front of her, with Spencer’s face right there. (Spencer doesn’t know where the hell she’s supposed to look, but she’s suddenly very aware of the stray hair still on her tongue.) Lucy grabs Spencer’s chin and pulls it upward sharply, reestablishing eye contact. It’s not painful, but it’s uncomfortable, and Spencer suppresses the urge to jerk herself free. “It seems your mouth isn’t as tired as I thought. Perhaps you need another lesson?”

Much as she enjoyed going down on Faith, everything in her mouth hurts from the effort, and another round would only make it worse. The very thought is exhausting. She tries not to clench her tender jaw as she says, “No.”

Lucy squeezes Spencer’s chin tighter. “Then control yourself, or I’ll change my mind.” She releases her hold but doesn’t look away yet. “Let me be very clear: We come first tonight. Yours is optional.”

With a sickeningly sweet smile, Lucy asks, “Do you wish to continue?”

Spencer’s eyes fall closed for a second as she exhales, frustrated. Of course she wants to continue. She just doesn’t like admitting how fucking badly she wants it. “Yes.”

Looking up at the other girls, Lucy points a finger upward and makes a circular motion, some kind of signal that they both seem to understand. Suddenly, Faith grabs Spencer’s shoulders and pulls her back and away from Lucy as Santana grabs Spencer’s feet.

She kicks in protest as they attempt to reposition her. “Hey! What are you doing!” Spencer flails a bit until her foot connects soundly with Santana’s thigh.

“Chill out, jesus.”

But Spencer’s not giving in easily. So, instead, Santana shuffles over to the other mattress and sits at the foot of it, lying down so her face is in the center. (Faith scoots a bit out of the way to make room.) She looks at Spencer with a smirk, then holds her hands up. “I’m not getting any younger.”

Spencer looks up at Lucy, then Faith, then back to Lucy, waiting for instructions. How the hell is she supposed to just know what to do? It’s not like she regularly frequents lesbian prison orgies. Or any orgies, for that matter. She didn’t see the Orgy Etiquette Book in the library. Though, now that she
considers it, she wouldn’t be surprised if this library had one.

“Sit,” Lucy says to Spencer, gesturing with her head.

She looks at Santana, who’s licking her lips, because it’s Spencer’s turn to be on top. Seems easy enough, though she isn’t sure how this plays into the “You come last” bullshit unless Santana’s about to bite her into oblivion. Her legs are shaking as she stands and hobbles over to Santana, and it feels very, very awkward lowering herself over someone’s face. She isn’t sure where to put her feet or her knees, but the moment Santana’s tongue reconnects with her skin, she falls into some straddling position that works. Leaning forward against the thin, stained mattress, Spencer angles her body to what feels best, making sure to support her own weight and not suffocate her very eager partner below. But Santana seems to be doing just fine down there. Based on the skill she’s exhibiting, it’s clear this position isn’t anything new.

Spencer’s hair falls around her face as she leans forward and focuses on the swirls of Santana’s tongue. Her palms are sweaty; fingers curling to hold on for dear life as the pace increases. It’s easy enough to think of Quinn when she closes her eyes and blocks out the room. Moving in steady time with the new Madonna song, she tries to get within reach of her orgasm before Lucy has a chance to pull her back again.

As if reading her mind, Lucy moves to stand right in front of Spencer. But then she sits down, legs spread, positioning herself behind Santana’s head—and right under Spencer’s face.

No...I can’t...not like this?

And then Faith’s hands pull Spencer’s shoulders back until she’s sitting straight upright. Her weight’s thrown off, and she stumbles as she regains her balance, trying not to crush Santana’s shoulders with her legs. Spencer pushes her hair out of her face, and now she can fully see the naked, gorgeous Lucy Fabray spread out in front of her.

Lucy looks her right in the eye as she scoots herself forward, inching closer until Spencer’s knees are pushing her thighs wider and wider. “I want you to fuck me, Spencer.”

Oh, sure. It sounds so simple.

Leaning forward on her weak hand for support, Spencer reaches out and traces a fingertip along the soft curves of Lucy Fabray. She’s never touched another girl like this before. She’s wanted to do this for weeks, much longer than she’ll admit to herself—maybe from the first moment they met. It’s confusing, the jumble of emotions for Quinn and the echo of that face looking up at her now. Spencer doesn’t want Quinn to speak to her like this, so why does it make her wet when Lucy does? More importantly, why is Spencer trying to sort out her feelings when her finger’s sliding ever so easily inside her?

Lucy hums in approval and says, “More,” leaning forward into Spencer’s touch.

With the boost in confidence, Spencer slides a second finger into place and increases her speed. It makes her feel powerful, this sensation of being inside someone. She finds a rhythm that she can maintain without tiring too quickly, and then realizes she’s moving in time with the song playing overhead. (WHY does it have to be “Like a Virgin”? WHY?) Santana’s tongue beneath her isn’t slowing down, either. Spencer remembers what Quinn did to her and positions her thumb accordingly to press against Lucy’s clit as she moves. Based on the response, as Lucy arches her back with a smile and a moan, Spencer knows she’s getting somewhere.

“Mind if I join you ladies?”
Spencer had almost forgotten Faith’s right behind her. She feels fingernails trace down her back, sending a chill straight to her toes.

“That depends,” Lucy says. It sounds like she’s struggling to string words together with her usual commanding presence. It gives Spencer more pleasure than it probably should. “Has Spencer learned her lesson? Can you control yourself?”

With an angry glare, Spencer slams her hand in and out of Lucy as hard as she can, fighting through the burn in her forearms. She’s not going to be goaded like this, not anymore. Not by Lucy fucking Fabray, Play-Doh Power Princess. Spencer thinks of Quinn, of how hard she’s fighting to stay alive and get back to her somehow.

Spencer keeps moving. “Yes…I...CAN.”

Lucy finds Spencer’s eyes through the curtain of hair covering her face. “Don’t stop.” It’s not a plea, it’s an order, almost angry. “Harder, Spencer. Show me how very sorry you are. Make me believe it.”

Somewhere along the way, both the music and Santana stopped, but Spencer keeps going. The trails of sweat tickling down her face and neck, the ache of friction on her knees, the cramp in her back, the sting in her forearm—nothing matters. Not until she’s made Lucy scream. And goddamnit, she’s going to.

“Do it!” Lucy says, and Spencer takes the cue to increase her pace. It’s finally her moment to shine. She’s about to make Lucy come.

But Spencer’s suddenly bombarded by sensations as Santana pushes her tongue hard against her clit again, bringing back into sharp focus just how much Spencer’s missed that pressure. A moment later, Faith’s kneeling beside her with a hand tight around her throat, choking her firmly, mouth hovering next to Spencer’s ear. She’s being ambushed from all sides.

“She said ‘harder,’” Faith taunts, and flexes her fingers as a show of strength. “Did you need me to let go?” It’s a toying question, as Faith clearly knows what the answer will be.

Spencer shakes her head no, at least as much as she can with her neck in Faith’s grip.

Faith presses her lips to Spencer’s ear and whispers, “Then fuck her, you little bitch.”

Oh god.

Spencer can still breathe, but it’s much harder now. Her entire body is screaming for oxygen, dehydrated and numb and spent. It’s difficult to stay conscious—much less, moving—when Santana’s moaning obscenities between her legs and Faith’s tracing her tongue along Spencer’s ear like that. She gasps and stumbles as her braced arm gives out.

“Control,” Lucy reminds her.

She curses silently and switches arms, not wanting to lose her momentum. Two fingers from her left hand find their way inside Lucy easily, and Spencer adjusts her angle to get moving again. This is her weak arm; she doesn’t know if she’ll be able to finish the task. But she has to try.

Faith seems displeased by the interruption. She jerks Spencer by the throat a few inches closer. “Did you not hear me? *Fuck. Her.*”

Spencer moans loudly, leaning lower as she tries to increase her pace. Now that the music is gone,
the sounds around her are deafening—the white noise of the prisoners hollering down the hall, the hollow gasps of her own breathing, the rhythm of Santana’s tongue, the slapping of her hand against Lucy, and Faith’s vicious words in her ear. It’s a goddamn symphony, and Spencer’s the conductor.

*I had no idea that job was so exhaust----*

“This really isn’t your best angle,” Buffy’s voice cuts in, out of nowhere.

Spencer’s eyes open wide, letting in the harsh light of reality, and she tries to jerk away as if she had somewhere to go or hide. As if she wasn’t sitting on someone’s face, two fingers deep into another, and ass widely on display for any passersby.

Faith doesn’t seem bothered in the least. “Why don’t you come join us, B? I’ve been wondering just how far I can fit my fist up your tight little ass.”

“I’d rather get a root canal from a demon.” Buffy leans on the bars to make eye contact with Faith. “On my birthday.”

Spencer keeps waiting for the guard to leave but she just…doesn’t. Instead, she has a front-row seat to Spencer’s Big Day, and Spencer wants nothing more than to curl up and die. She doesn’t know why this *keeps happening* to her. Why can’t she just have mindblowing sex without being interrupted? Is that really too fucking much to ask? It’s almost like prison isn’t some perfect fantasy or something.

She closes her eyes and tries to hold on to her rapidly fading arousal. After everything she’s endured so far, she doesn’t want to have to start all over. *Again.* Shifting her weight once more, Spencer switches back to her right hand and prays there’s enough gas in the tank to reach their destination.

“Are you a quitter, Spencer?” Lucy asks dangerously. “I don’t like girls who are quitters.”

She answers with her fingers, resuming a faster pace than before, though she’s now much more self-conscious of how weird the whole thing is. Spencer Hastings is the centerpiece of an angerbang prison orgy. In the middle of a steel, space uterus. *Is this what the insignia meant by being “reborn”??*

“Harder,” Faith insists, and Spencer feels the sting of a brutal *smack!* against her ass.

She cries out loudly, matching the volume of it, and Lucy grins below her. Spencer’s muscles are on the verge of giving out. This can’t go on forever. And if Santana keeps sucking on her clit like that, she’s not long for this world, anyway.

“Let me help you,” Faith says slyly. Keeping her left hand on Spencer’s throat, she then drags the other down Spencer’s spine, across her ass, and underneath.

Spencer tries to block out the distraction and focus on giving Lucy what she wants. But then she feels Faith’s finger between her legs, right behind Santana’s hungry mouth. It starts at her wetness, tracing back and upward, then presses against the tight hole. Instinctively, Spencer presses back, letting Faith inside. A burst of stimulation courses through her, one she’s never felt before.

“Fuck!” Spencer cries out, burying her face into her braced arm. It’s all too much—the onslaught of sensations, everything that’s happening *everywhere* all at once. She can’t tell if it’s sweat running down her face now or tears. She can’t tell if her arm’s still moving or if she’s still upright or if she’s even still breathing. But she knows that Faith’s got a finger deep inside her and isn’t leaving, isn’t even retracting. She’s filling Spencer up and keeping her at her limit until she breaks.
“You like that, don’t you?” Faith asks, not slowing her steady motions. “You like how we fuck you?”

“Yes.” Spencer’s not sure how much more she can take, but she’s never felt anything like this. She didn’t know she could feel anything like this. Her muscles are tightening, it’s building, and she knows she’s close, whether she’s allowed to be or not. She presses her eyes closed and tries to hold it together somehow.

Somewhere in the distance, Lucy commands, “Say you’re sorry.”

Spencer gasps, holding her eyes firmly against her trembling arm. The salt of her sweat stings in her eyes, mixing with tears. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry,” she pants.

“Good,” Faith says. “‘Cause we never stop, Spencer.” She drives her finger in as far as she can, squeezing her hand for pressure, then pulls Spencer closer by her throat with the same strength until her lips are pressed to Spencer’s ear. “We’re gonna fuck you til you die.”

Spencer’s world comes completely undone. She falls over the edge of the mattress, involuntarily shuddering as the orgasm moves through her. A scream echoes in the room that might be hers; she doesn’t know. Spencer’s drowning in the flood of chemicals exploding in her brain. When she’s able to open her eyes, she discovers she’s on her side, curled up awkwardly with one leg tucked in and two fingers still wet from Lucy. Whom Spencer’s pretty sure she never got off.

She blinks against the light coming in from the corridor and wonders how long her arms have felt this tingly. The three girls are sitting beside her in various states of emotion ranging from amusement to boredom. Spencer’s eyes widen as she says weakly, “Am I in trouble?”

Lucy brushes the hair off Spencer’s cheek and moves closer in, taking her head into her lap. “No. You’re my star student.”

*Dr. Umbridge will be so proud.*

“We accept your apology,” Lucy adds. Her tone is sincere. “You did well.”

Spencer relaxes into the touch of Lucy’s fingertips tracing letters on her back, and her eyes droop closed again. The last thing she sees is Santana leaning back against Faith, snuggling like kids in love. It’s sweet. Spencer can’t help but think that if they really do take care of each other like this, maybe being stuck here—being absorbed into this insane dynamic— won’t be so bad after all.

“Told you,” Faith says with a smirk. “Four of hearts beats nine of clubs.”

Santana holds up a hand. “She needs work. But it’s a start.”

A few minutes later, Spencer’s halfway asleep when she hears Santana change the topic in their small talk. “Okay, but can we discuss, ‘We’ll fuck you to death’?”

Faith grins. “Like you didn’t know she’d be into that.”
The next morning, things are decidedly different in cell 1. Spencer’s included in group conversation as well as the midday sexual hijinks, like she’s been one of the gang all along. It’s an adjustment on her part, for sure, as she’s now expected to participate equally in their every whim. But it’s helping the days pass, so Spencer doesn’t complain. She’s learning the ins and outs of their particular kinks and dynamics, like how Faith has a different arrangement with Lucy for every day of the week—each with its own rules—and that Santana is more orally fixated than a dog with a bone. Spencer’s trying to find just where she fits in. For the sake of her research, of course. Not because she actually wants to belong.

...Right?

She does hate to admit that, for as much as she tells herself what a strong and independent woman she is, she’s still more comfortable in a group. Spencer understands teams and archetypes and knows how to play well with others. That’s her safe zone. This is just another group, and Lucy is her new Alison, her new…

No. Lucy is Lucy. She will never be Spencer’s new Quinn.

Still, Spencer can’t deny that her conflicted feelings of playing the emotional double agent are fading. That, or she’s simply becoming more comfortable in the role. She wonders at times just how much it’s still an act or if she truly belongs to this new family of four. Would they defend her, if a situation presented itself? And the bigger question—Would she defend them?

As she lies awake one Thursday evening listening to the gentle hum of Santana’s snoring below, Spencer thinks about the trust they’ve built together. It’s real, right? These girls are capable of a lot, but they’ve become humanized in the past week, no longer just caricatures of their most gruesome qualities. Spencer’s finding it harder and harder to believe that any of them, even Lucy, could be responsible for a spider killing spree in here. But the fact that she’s losing her objectivity about convicted murderers scares her just as much as the spider does.

If she becomes blind to the truth, will it kill her?

That chilling thought gives her the perspective she needs to step back and see the situation for what it is. After a few very long months up here, Spencer’s starting to forget everything she left behind. She’s forgetting where she comes from, who she really is. Her other life is melting away into a blur of memories, like some distant dream. The question now becomes, how hard will she fight to hold on to it?

Spencer rolls over on the hard mattress and shuffles through her mental iPod, landing on one of her favorite albums, the one she and Emily bought at the concert last September. Starting at the beginning, she quietly plays through it in her mind, whispering along to the lyrics. It’s a breath of fresh air from all the Madonna, even if she can't remember some of the verses. Her mind stumbles
over some words in the second chorus, rhymes she just can’t connect, and Spencer makes up something new and moves forward. Maybe her iPod’s battery is running low. At least she’s trying. If she doesn’t let go of her past, it’ll never be wholly gone, right? There’s still a chance she can get out of here someday, somehow. There has to be.

“We had to upgrade the ventilation system after a few scattered suffocations. Nothing too serious."

Sue’s voice carries down the corridor as she walks deftly in her cross-trainers. The clicking of a second pair of shoes echoes behind her, but Spencer can’t yet see to whom they belong. It’s taking long enough for them to make their way down the cell block. Spencer’s usually happy to have this much distance between herself and the warden, but now the curiosity is driving her crazy. She’d think Mistress Berry is back, but their dialogue sounds like an introduction.

When they’re finally close, Spencer sees a short, proper-looking woman dressed very professionally and looking from cell to cell as if seeking someone specific. Double checking the number above, she glances into #1, paying Spencer no more mind than the toilet, and then turns to Sue, clearly unhappy.

“Where’s Lopez?”

Sue blinks. “Pardon?”

“Santana. Lopez.”

Sue looks sincerely confused. “Never heard of her.”

Spencer doesn’t have any idea what’s going on, but she’s learned to keep her mouth shut. This woman looks like government, or maybe law enforcement. Sylvester must have a plan or at least some reason for lying, and Spencer’s willing to play along. Santana’s in the shower with the others and won’t be back for at least another twenty minutes. (Spencer learned just what goes on in the shower block at 2:30 the first time she accompanied them, and... no, thank you.) The more the brass talks, the more information she might get.

Spencer’s desperately curious to know what’s going on, but if Santana’s that dangerous—to warrant being moved somewhere worse than here—the last thing Spencer wants to do is cross her. God only knows what kind of connections she might have. Spencer’s questions can wait.

“I know she’s here, Warden,” the woman says, “so cut the crap and bring her out.”

“There isn’t a single prisoner on the roster named Lupe. Hand to God.”

But then the woman turns and notices Spencer listening from the middle of the cell. Her attention shifts immediately and she approaches the bars with fire in her eyes. “Miss, I’m Clarice Starling with the United States FBI.”

Holy crap, FBI?!

“I’m attempting to locate a prisoner who was formerly in our custody before we transferred her here three years ago,” the agent explains. "What can you tell me about Santana Lopez?"

“She knows nothing,” Sue interjects, walking over to pry the agent from the bars.

“She knows something! I can tell.” Agent Starling reaches into her pocket and withdraws a picture of Santana, then shouts, “LOOK AT THIS PHOTOGRAPH!” She holds it against the bars for a
moment and then suddenly pulls away and starts berating herself. “Shit! Goddamn!” She throws the picture to the ground and stomps on it, walking away from the cell in a huff.

Spencer’s completely lost (and quite afraid) but happens to glance down and see a post-it note attached to the back of the picture.

**TALK ABOUT:**

- Santana Lopez

**DO NOT TALK ABOUT:**

- Nickelback
- Paramore
- Tatiana Maslany

Collecting herself with calming breaths, the agent picks the photo back up and holds it steady in front of Spencer’s face. “Do you recognize this woman?”

It’s Santana, clear as day. It’s not a very recent picture—prison’s worn her out a bit—but you can’t forget that face. Still, Spencer’s not any closer to ratting out her cellmate. Whatever Santana’s done, it can’t be any worse than what the rest of them are in for. This agent has no leverage, and it’s not like lying to cops is new for her. She’s from Rosewood.

But then the wheels in Spencer’s big brain start turning again, considering all possible options. Maybe Santana’s being released? Maybe she’s part of a bigger conspiracy or something on the outside. It’s been months since Spencer heard any news from Earth. She has no idea what’s going on. They could be in World War III for all she knows. She has no idea what’s going on. They could be in World War III for all she knows. She doesn’t recognize the woman’s name on the post-it; it’s probably another criminal the agent’s chasing after or a prisoner Spencer hasn’t met yet.

But, still, this agent is clearly out of her mind. *Who needs a reminder to not talk about Nickelback?*

“Let me see that,” Sue says, reaching for the tattered picture. She squints and takes a good look. “Wait a second. Looks like you got bad intel, Agent Starfish. That’s Lunchbag Rodriguez!”

*Lunchbag?!*

The agent pauses. “You can’t honestly think that’s her name.”

Sue steps in closer. “I’ll have you know my great-great-great-great grandmother was named Rodriguez. You don’t want anyone to think you’re a pasty-faced racist, now. Do you, agent?”

There’s a very awkward silence as Sue stares down the agent before throwing her a bone. “She’s in the showers.”

“Send your people,” Starling says. “I’ll wait here.”

Sue motions to Boomer, who slinks off in the direction of the bathrooms. Sue follows her, walking backward. She holds two fingers up to her eyes and then points them at Starling, staring her down with a scowl.

When the warden is around the corner and out of sight, Spencer asks, “What’d she do?”

Agent Starling pauses with raised eyebrows. “I’m surprised you haven’t heard of her. Santana Lopez was the teenage bad girl of the Midwest for several years.” When Spencer doesn’t respond, Starling
adds, “She has a long history of eating young women.”

You don’t say.

“Let’s hope she at least bought them a drink first,” Spencer mutters, crossing her arms.

“Excuse me?” The agent steps forward with a judgmental squint. Cops have no sense of humor.

“Nothing.” Spencer tries to change the subject. “So. You got FBI astronaut training to fly all over the galaxy hunting lesbian offenders?”

Agent Starling seems to relax a bit, like they can just chit-chat while she waits for her delivery. “Something like that. I wanted to be in space when I was a little girl, and I wanted to make a difference. I’ve always wanted to help people. With a job like this, though... Some days are hard. You can’t let yourself forget why you got into this line of work in the first place.” She smiles to herself. “It’s just a spark, but it’s enough to keep me going.” Then her brow furrows again and she slaps her leg. “DAMNIT!”

She can have Nickelback, Spencer thinks, but now this lunatic is ruining Paramore. It's just not right. When the agent calms down, Spencer leans in and whispers, “Hey. If I told you there was a killer spider kidnapping and murdering prisoners every month during our periods...you wouldn’t...do anything to help us, right?”

Clarice stares at her.

Spencer purses her lips and nods. “Just checking.” She climbs back up to her bunk without another word.

Two minutes later, Spencer hears the incensed Spanish shouting coming down the hall. Buffy and Boomer are dragging a very wet, very naked Santana into the cell block corridor, thrashing and cursing everyone in the guards’ family trees and then some.

Boomer punches Santana twice in quick succession to shut her up, surely delivering a black eye, then tightens the cuffs behind her back. But the moment Santana sees who summoned her here, she relaxes completely and smiles.

Agent Starling takes a few steps forward and stops about two feet from Santana’s face, looking very serious.

Santana licks at her bloody lip and gives the woman’s body a long look up and down. “Hello, Clarice. Nice threads. You look good enough to eat.”

Spencer rolls her eyes, but just because it's a lame pick-up line. Not because the last person Santana buried her face in was Spencer herself. That has nothing to do with it. Really.

“Been a long time,” Santana continues. “Two years?”

“Little over three.”

“Damn. Well, it's good to see you again. If I’d known you were coming, I might’ve even gotten dressed.”

Spencer doubts that.

“After all,” Santana provokes, “these little visits are how you remind me of what I really am.”
Spencer can only see the agent in profile ten feet away, but the woman’s fist is clenched. Her new friend is about to get bitch-slapped.

“Let me guess,” Santana continues, “You want me to cook at your next clambake or hummus festival or whatever you’re into these days, so you come all the way out here because I didn’t RSVP the Evite. Perhaps you forgot my whole life-in-prison thing. Which is odd, considering you’re the one who put me here. Guess you’ll have to find another chef.”

“It’s game over, Lopez. We found your tools.” The agent sounds proud of herself.

Santana doesn’t look fazed by that. “Took you long enough. But I knew you’d eventually sniff it out. We do love a good tool box, don’t we?” Santana gives her a wink as Agent Starling turns to leave.

“Let’s go.”

“What are you taking her?” Spencer shouts, holding the bars. Are they seriously not even going to let her get dressed first?

She’s ignored yet again as they drag Santana down the cell block, laughing and throwing Spanish slander all the way. Spencer has a minute at most to process what just happened before Greggs arrives on the scene with the freshly-showered and visibly perturbed Lucy and Faith.

“What happened?” Lucy asks Spencer as the door closes behind them.

Faith’s shaking the water out of her hair onto Spencer’s bed. “Yeah, didn’t figure Hannibal Licked-her would be the first of us hauled out of here.”

“I don’t kn—” Spencer starts, but then the nickname registers.

…Oh, oh my god.

“A long history of eating young women”

The Eat or Not game...

“You look good enough to eat.”

OH MY GOD.

She’s a… ew ew ew ew ew ew ew.

And I let her...EW EW EW EW EW EW EW

“Spencer!” Lucy’s sharp voice snaps her back. “Where is she? Where did they take her?”

“I don’t know.” Spencer’s trying to hide that she’s about to have a nervous breakdown. “It was the FBI.”

Lucy prompts her to continue, with sincere interest. “What’s ‘FBI’?”

Spencer blinks. “Are you serious?”

Where is this girl from, Mars?

Faith waves her off. “Did she say anything about either of us? To the feds?”
“No.” Spencer isn’t even really sure what Santana was talking about, but no names came up.

Faith turns to Lucy and crosses her arms. “Ten bucks says this is about Brittany.”

“Bucks?”

Spencer’s starting to wonder if Lucy drinks shampoo in the shower. “She said something about finding her tools.”

Faith exhales and slinks back against the bed, running a hand through her hair. “Fuck. That’s all that was keeping her out of the chair. They tied her to the murder scenes with hair and other stuff, but they couldn’t prove shit.”

So, that was probably the last time Spencer will ever see Santana, she realizes. Given this new insight into her extra-curriculars, she can’t say she’s not relieved. (She doesn’t want to know what constitutes “other stuff” at the crime scene.) But it’s hard losing one of her new allies, just when they were starting to feel like a team. They keep getting ripped away from her.


“Ex. Story is, they were a big thing in high school. Quinn knew her, too.”

Lucy glares, hearing the name, but Spencer’s heart skips a beat.

Faith rolls up her sleeve. “They were those cheerleader bitches who date all the jocks and pee on freshmen who don’t give up their lunch money.”

Spencer doesn’t think that’s how it works, but she’s not going to interrupt.

“Ruling the school,” Faith says with a smarmy grin. “So, they’re doing it in the locker room, and Santana’s, like, biting on Brittany’s shoulder or something, then just sinks her teeth in and rips out a chunk. Tears it right off. Then she kept going back for more.”

“What?” Spencer is freaking out.

“Yeah, so she said.” Faith cracks her knuckles. “Guess there wasn’t much left of her.”

Nope, don’t miss Santana anymore.

Spencer’s going to need the longest shower of her life just to wash this off her skin. An insane cannibal person was recently face-first in her vagina. A lot. At any moment Santana could’ve sunk her teeth into…

Oh my god.

Quinn’s missing toe.

“I think it started with the Brittany thing,” Faith continues as she stretches out in her bunk. “And then there were all the college girls after that. Crime scenes were such a shit-mess, news channel thought it was bears or something. She’s proud of that.”

“Amateur,” Lucy says, then pauses, furrows her brow and asks, “What are bears?”

Spencer stares again, just so very confused. “Bears?” The terror and mystique of Lucy Fabray is rapidly deconstructing before her very eyes. And for someone who claims to love animals, she sure doesn’t fucking know of many.
Faith isn’t paying any attention to Lucy’s special brand of naivete, trapped in a world of envisioning Santana Lopez’s murder spree. “She was a big deal, once they figured out it was a person. She chewed through, like, five sororities before some bounty hunter named Polly Holliday finally hauled her gay ass to the FBI's doorstep.”

“How,” Lucy says.

“Whatever.”

Spencer can’t wrap her head around this and has to ask, “And all this time you’ve been living with her, you haven’t worried she would...you know. Eat you? With her teeth.”

“That’s crimist,” says Lucy.

Spencer makes a face. “Excuse me?”

“That’s not a word!”

“Sounds like a word to me. Just because you killed someone doesn’t mean you’re gonna kill us, right?” Faith sounds so matter-of-fact about it.

Well. Now that she knows what kind of very fucking important information her cellmates were keeping from her, Spencer’s not so sure. “Forgive me for thinking there’s a difference between assault with a deadly weapon, which we have no access to up here anyway, and EATING PEOPLE WITH YOUR FACE.”

“Dude, take a pill. She wouldn’t go for you, anyway. Hanni-bulldyke loves blondes for breakfast. Brittany, Quinn, that short chick from Wicked…”

Spencer looks to Lucy, the blondest person in space prison, with wide-eyed concern. “Um.”

Lucy grins modestly. “She’s not stupid.”

Fair enough.

Spencer’s eye catches a guard walking past their cell and waits until the coast is clear before turning back to Faith. “Did she...ever eat any prisoners?”

“Nah.” Faith picks at something on the side of her boob as she talks. “Didn’t need to, I guess, with Big Sweaty Meat on the menu. She couldn’t get enough of it.”

“No…” Spencer swallows a lump in her throat. “That’s not…”

Faith stops picking and grins devilishly at Spencer. “Ground up people chunks?”

That pushes her over the edge. Breath held in her lungs, Spencer’s feet carry her far enough to empty the contents of her stomach into the shoddy toilet.

Over the sound of her own retching, she hears Lucy say, “You can’t keep telling all the new girls that. Eventually one was going to believe you.”

Faith looks pretty proud of herself. “Hey, I’ll believe what I want. My story checks out. Sue knows you don’t eat animals, so she made a point of telling you that BSM wasn’t from animals so you’d eat it. That doesn’t look like any fancy-ass tofu I’ve ever seen. What other kind of meat could it be?”
Spencer wipes her chin and flushes, dragging herself back to the nearest bed to recover. It’s Santana’s. *Ugh.* She needs to change the subject. *Now.* “So,” she begins slowly, “The FBI put Santana in here, and they can just waltz in and take her back out. Just like that.”

“That’s the deal,” Faith says. “If you’re sent here by the system like it’s any other prison, you get paroled on schedule like anywhere else. But if you’re sent here special by someone who paid to lock you up off-planet, they’re the only ones who can undo it.”

Based on what little she remembers from her shitty lawyer, Spencer’s not sure which category she falls into, or which one she’s hoping for. “Who put you in here?” She hopes it’s not too personal a question.

“Watcher’s Council,” Faith says, but Spencer has no idea what that is. “Didn’t like my methods. When you kill things for a living, there’s gonna be collateral damage, right? I guess I just...skipped to that part.”

“She stabs anything that moves,” Lucy clarifies, then goes back to her Snow White paint-by-numbers book. She’s working on a page with the evil queen surveying her kingdom. Seems appropriate.

“What about you?” Spencer asks.

Lucy applies some water to a section that immediately turns purple. “I don’t stab people.”

“No—” Spencer closes her eyes and counts to three. “Did someone put you in here?”

Lucy’s quiet for a moment, eyes on the page, brush still in her hand. Spencer’s never seen her so hesitant and withdrawn. She looks more like Quinn than ever.

After a moment, the brush moves again and Lucy acts like the question doesn’t bother her. “I don’t really remember. It was a long time ago.”

For the first time, Spencer sees Lucy as a real, flawed, and scared person, not the prison parody she’s been trying to solve for three months. The power play is all an act to hide how much control she doesn’t have over her own life. It’s so clear now and so simple. Spencer actually feels sorry for her. “I don’t know who put me in here, either.”

They share a quiet look, and there’s a connection, however small. Spencer offers a pursed smile and a sympathetic nod. It’s a peace offering; a truce.

But then, Spencer remembers that this girl is in prison for killing dozens of people and wonders how long ago it could have been if Lucy has no memory of it. *Was she sawing people in half at age four?* Spencer doesn’t know if that makes it better or worse. She chooses her words carefully. “Where were you, before here?”

“Another ship. Where I was born.”

*Wait, what?*

Spencer couldn’t hide her reaction if she tried. “You were born on a spaceship?” Just like that, the fleeting thoughts of Lucy being a normal person are revoked. Sympathy, gone. This girl’s just batshit crazy.

“Mmhmm.” Lucy dabs more water on a green section of her paint-by-number. “I don’t remember much. But it was much nicer than this one. Everything was white and bright, like a giant canvas. It
was a facility for a company called DYAD. My family worked there, so we had living quarters onboard. They were scientists. I had my pets and some books and toys and even my own room, but I didn’t really have friends. There weren’t many kids my age. Nobody wanted to play games with me. I did a lot of arts and crafts. The grown-ups didn’t like when I drew on the walls with my crayons.”

It couldn’t have been very big, Spencer thinks. She doesn’t know anything about spacecrafts outside of NASA’s purview, much less ones that have working families on them. And she’s never heard of this company. “How many people were on the ship?”

“Thirty-seven,” Lucy says in a deeper voice, then looks at Spencer a bit pointedly before placing more water on her painting.

Spencer’s eyes widen in realization—she’s heard that number from Lucy before. “Ah.” If she hadn’t already puked, now would be a great time for that.

“I thought I came from a broken home,” Faith offers from her bunk. “At least my friends didn’t want to play Chainsaw Tag.”

“It’s more fun than you think.” The scary part is, Lucy sounds sincere. She always does.

Spencer wants to scream, “WHY?” and just break down crying, because this has to be the most vile, soulless group of people she has ever met. But she’s too overwhelmed with everything already and doesn’t think she can handle any further revelations. Not tonight. The more they talk, the worse it gets. “I need a nap.”

How is all this real? How has she been living with—*having group sex with*—such egregious, unapologetic murderers? Yeah, she didn’t really feel bad about what she did to Toby, but it was personal. It wasn’t about the act of killing, itself. This amount of crime is on a whole other level. Spencer wouldn’t go kill other people, random strangers. She’s not like that. And she sure as hell doesn’t get turned on by the thought of killing someone. Or, god, *eating* someone.

Spencer has nothing in common with these girls. She shouldn’t be here.

And that’s when she realizes—since she doesn’t know who put her here, Spencer doesn’t know who has the power to get her out. Or if they even would. If it’s her parents, then she has hope. They couldn’t leave her to rot in this hellhole. But the police? The government? *A?*! She has no idea who—or what—she’s dealing with. Two months has already been horrible enough. How is she supposed to survive thirty years? She’s already been told she won’t get past Christmas, and that’s assuming the spider grants her amnesty until then. What about all the other terrible people who love to kill so much? God, she still can’t believe Santana *eats people*. How is that possible?

Every day, Spencer learns of another horrible way to die in this place. Her mind fills with visions of Santana crouched over a random blonde’s decimated body on the steps of a sorority, face covered in blood, grinning. Or in bed with Quinn, kissing her feet playfully, sucking on a toe with a gleam in her eye, then biting down hard and ripping it off. The piercing sound of Quinn screaming in agony. Santana’s heartless laugh, echoing in her ears.

Spencer opens her eyes to let the blank, gray wall wash it away. Readjusting her position, she rubs at her eyes and reaches under her pillow to cushion her head. Her fingers scrape against the book cover of notes she took from Quinn, tucked safely inside Jenny’s journal. She pulls it out to examine it again, this mystery of prisoners disappearing, and, according to Sue, at least one pile of gnashed up remains.

Suddenly, everything feels very, very wrong.
...SANTANA.

It hasn’t been Charlotte at all. There’s no such thing as killer spiders in outer space. One little spider couldn’t break into a jail cell and remove an entire human being, gravity or not. What was she thinking? What’s wrong with her? Spencer really must be going crazy.

If Hermione hasn’t been rescuing girls, Santana’s been eating them.

Her mind races at a blinding pace, reconstructing everything that’s happened since she arrived. Santana runs Knitting class and probably has access to enough string to construct a web in her cell. Maybe she bribed a guard—Buffy, since she likes blondes so much—to let her in while Spencer slept. Or maybe Santana has a set of keys and broke these women out of their cells. Then she led them to the cafeteria with promises of wild and crazy no-gravity sex, and….

Spencer shivers. It all makes sense now. Hell, maybe Lucy helped. Or Faith. Maybe they know exactly how Santana did it.

She feels so fucking betrayed. Her heart plummets into her stomach and she feels all alone, trapped with these wild animals who could tear her apart at a moment’s notice. If she breathes a word of what she’s deduced to either of her cellmates, they could end her in cold blood. Of course they’re still loyal to Santana. If they’re complicit in her crimes, they can’t let Spencer talk to the authorities.

Getting herself transferred in here was the stupidest thing Spencer’s done yet. She’s used up her requests; they’ll never grant her a third one.

She closes her eyes again and replays the film reel over and over in her mind, like a horror movie she can’t look away from. And Spencer knows she wouldn’t be obsessing about this or feeling so fucked up about it if they hadn’t slept together. Rationally, she knows that. But it doesn’t change anything.

She tries to take comfort in the fact that if it really was Santana, the threat has been removed. She’s safe now, at least in theory. You know, from that one particular threat. It doesn’t make her feel any better, and Spencer wonders if she’ll ever be able to convince herself that she’s not in danger here.

Maybe that’s her gut trying to tell her that it wasn’t Santana. It would be all too convenient that the mystery’s just—poof!—solved, without Spencer having to actually do anything.

Fuck.

Rolling over to face the aisle, she watches Faith do pull-ups on the bed frame and thinks about their earlier conversation. The details come rushing back, and everything changes again. Faith said Santana hadn’t killed anyone here. She said it, and she meant it—and wouldn’t she know? Wouldn’t Lucy have corrected her? They were pretty forthcoming about Ripley’s murders, so it’s not like they’re trying to protect Spencer from anything. Are they?

But then, why not ever mention the cannibalism before tonight? Maybe they lied right to her face. But Faith also said Santana likes blondes, and all five women who’ve disappeared have been brunettes. That doesn’t add up, either. Santana’s smart, so it’s possible she’d throw them off the trail by choosing non-obvious targets, but it sounds like she didn’t worry about setting a pattern back on Earth. People can change, but killers rarely do.

Spencer’s new, airtight theory is suddenly rife with holes big enough for Aphasia to drive a van through. Curling up into a ball, she tries to focus on what seems the most real. The low buzz of the lights in the corridor. The scratching of the plain white sheet against her skin. The way the mattress crinkles when she shifts her weight.
Lucy’s finishing a fourth watercolor picture and enjoying the simple pleasures of prison life without a care in the world. Spencer tries to summon the memory of Quinn’s gentle touch, of drawing chalk pictures with Aphasia, of going to the mall with Aria, of playing at the beach with her sister or going to class in Rosewood. But it doesn’t feel real. She can’t remember a time when she wasn’t afraid. And that’s when Spencer finally lets herself cry.

Two months. Two horrible months, and she isn’t any closer to finding out why these girls disappeared. She’s back at square one and doesn’t know what to believe anymore.

She just has to believe in something.

Chapter End Notes

Clarice’s list is based on a list our friend made in a video once. (We love you, friend.) Also, all due credit and respect to the Tumblr infamy of Lunchbag Rodriguez, bless.
According to Spencer’s calculations, she has two and a half weeks—about eighteen days—before the next Shark Week begins. Hopefully it’s enough time to get to know Lucy better and figure out what the connection is between the spider and Jenny Schecter and Santana (and Ripley?) Maybe there are other undiscovered pieces in this puzzle. She knows there could still be something she’s missing.

Beating them means joining them, and Spencer takes getting to the bottom of Lucy Fabray very seriously. Or, at least, being a bottom for Lucy Fabray. (Same thing, right?) These girls don’t let a bloodless day go by without some hardcore sexual shenanigans. Now that Santana’s gone and it’s just the three of them, Spencer has to be even more present and included, lest she raise suspicion about her intentions here. It’s all still strictly business.

Yes, that.

Having four or more orgasms a day is taking a toll on her body, but she’s dealing. It’s a physical response to stimuli, nothing more. She’ll keep going through the motions until opportunities for more intel arise. She gets no emotional sustenance from having multiple mouths and hands on and in her at once for hours on end.

Really. Purely research and survival. Right.

Though, she wishes Round Three didn’t often coincide with Madonna Power Hour, because there’s just something about being fingerbanged to “Cherish” that doesn’t sit right with her.

On Thursday, Sue treats the prisoners to a movie night in the Mess Hall with a showing of Monster, wheeled out on a rickety TV cart like Spencer’s seen in old 80s high school movies. She didn’t even think people had VCRs anymore. Especially in space.

Sue gives a speech beforehand about how she hopes the lead character will inspire them to greatness in their murderous aspirations but also to make better choices and not get caught. Spencer can’t help but wonder if Sue’s giving a certain secret killer a pep talk, masked in a public activity. But then, the thought of the warden being in on this is too scary to entertain without proof. Spencer dealt with enough dirty cop bullshit in Rosewood and isn’t looking to relive that here. For now, she can call it a reprise of Sue’s boast in their first conversation and still sleep at night.

As the previews roll, Spencer settles into her spot next to Lucy and Faith just like at meals, but now she’s on Lucy’s right instead of across from them. It’s not lost on her how things have changed. She seems to have been completely adopted by these two, like she’s Santana’s official replacement in their power trio. It frightens her how similar the situation is to back home, though this arrangement is...a bit more hands-on.

Being a part of a power group has its perks, as Spencer knows quite well. They don’t have to wait in line at meals. They get priority shower times. They get first dibs on signing up for classes. Raven
even throws in an extra half-can of booze, based on the standard prison rates. Well, *Lucy* gets all of these privileges, and Faith and Spencer are riding her coattails into the sunset. Assuming there is a sun nearby.

Things could be worse.

Spencer still hasn’t talked to Quinn since the, uh, accidental fisting. She can’t get unsupervised time away from her new queen bee to see where things stand between them. Quinn is still in her heart, but Spencer’s not about to show it now that she’s Lucy Fabray’s minion. There’s too much bile between those two, though Spencer still doesn’t know why. And Lucy intentionally keeps a great distance between them and Quinn. So much distance, in fact, that Spencer almost forgets that Quinn’s even in the prison at all. Almost.

The following Sunday, Spencer notices Hermione back in the Mess Hall at breakfast for the first time in weeks. She’s gone by dinner’s end, with the same whip *crack* disappearing act and same boisterous applause. Spencer can’t see Aphasia from where she’s sitting but hopes they at least got to spend some time together today. Little things mean a lot in this place.

As Spencer’s waiting to dump the remaining contents of her tray into the waste bin, Vee slides into line behind her and leans in close.

“I hear you have access to Sylvester’s office,” Vee says. Her tone has the friendly nature of a question, but Spencer feels Vee already knows the answer.

She pushes her tray forward another foot. “Maybe.”

“It would be in your best interest to procure a particular item for me.”

Considering she’s never spoken to Vee before, Spencer’s not sure just how much of a threat this is. But she’s pretty tired of being pushed around and feeling more confident now with her power clique. She doesn’t have to deal with this crap. “I don’t know you,” she says, turning to look Vee squarely in the eye. “You’re not worth the risk.” For a touch of politeness, she adds a half-assed, “Sorry.”

Vee smiles at her. Their negotiation is just beginning. “I can offer you something in return. Something you desperately need.”

“You don’t know me, either,” Spencer says. Unless this woman is about to say “a conjugal visit with Quinn,” she’s not interested.

“Protection.”

It gives Spencer pause, but only for a second. “Not much use for condoms up here.” Her tray slides another foot forward. She wants this conversation to be over.

Vee doesn’t seem to mind the joke. “Oh, we both know the women in here are far more dangerous than any man you’ve ever met. I can help you.”

Spencer’s new social status is offering her all the protection she needs, at least for the time being. Killer spider notwithstanding. With a glance over to Faith and Santana, she says, “I think I’m doing just fine, thanks.”

Vee laughs good-naturedly, leaning in as if to share a secret. “That’s precisely who I’m offering you protection from, dear.”

For a moment, everything stops as the implications of this simple sentence crash all around her.
Spencer snaps back to reality and shuffles along the line, tipping the stale bread crusts into the plastic bin. She feels a hand on her shoulder and pauses, turning partway.

Vee leans in and presses firmly, holding Spencer in place as she whispers her final pitch. “Bring me Hermione Granger’s file, and I’ll tell you who your friends really are.”

****************

That night, Spencer finds Lucy in the middle of the floor talking through her “most exciting ideas” for tomorrow’s Play-Doh Funhouse. It seems as good a time as any to dig for information, what with Lucy in such a good, sharing mood. If Spencer can root out the truth herself, she won’t need to get involved with Aphasia’s arch-nemesis. She feels a certain loyalty there, even though she’s not sure she’d call them "friends." Still, Aphasia trusted Spencer with her secret, and that has to mean something, right?

“You really get into this teaching thing,” Spencer says, leaning over the edge of the bed.

Lucy smiles. “It’s fun. I like getting to do different things with my arts and crafts. It stretches me as an instructor.”

“I’m happy to help stretch you out,” Faith offers from her bunk with a sly grin.

In a flash, Lucy charges over and swings to slap Faith clear across the face. Even from the awkward angle of reaching up to the top bunk, the strike sounds clear as a whip. “YOU’LL SPEAK WHEN I SAY SO!” Lucy barks, hovering eye to eye with her subject for a moment. Then, without another word, she resumes her lesson plan with a pleasant smile like nothing happened.

Spencer’s frozen on the spot through this whole thing, because Lucy’s fucking scary when she wants to be. But Faith doesn’t react other than to stretch out her cheek when Lucy walks away. So, at least the situation isn’t escalating. It’s Sunday, which Spencer has renamed Slapday, as it’s Lucy and Faith’s weekly arrangement for silence, much like Quinn and Mack’s Wednesday spank-athons. These girls are really into their power play and hitting people.

Whatever passes the time.

This is a side of Lucy that Spencer suspected from the beginning, a villainous crime boss lurking just beneath the sugary surface of unicorns and pink icing. Spencer’s almost starting to hate being right about things. She gulps and tries to get the conversation back on track after the awkward interruption. Sitting on the edge of her bed, she surveys the spread of colored dough cans, pom pom balls, and glitter bottles in the middle of the room.

“When I was little,” Spencer offers, “we would make spiders out of Play-Doh and toothpicks. Have you all done that yet?”

Another A+ for subtlety. Bravo.

“What a lovely idea!” Lucy beams. “They don’t give us toothpicks anymore, since Vasquez used one to pull a girl’s eye out, but I bet we could find some pipe cleaners in the craft closet.”

“Terrific,” Spencer replies through gritted teeth as she tries really hard to erase that mental image. “I remember you saying you liked spiders.”

“I do, very much so,” Lucy smiles. “I had a pet spider on my old ship.”
Spencer’s heart starts pounding out of her chest. Her eyes must be popping out of her head, but she tries to play it cool and casual. “I thought you had a cat?” Miss Satanface Deathypoo the Twelfth or something. She saw a painting of it in Play-Doh Funhouse.

Faith knocks on the bed frame with her knuckles, drawing their attention. It seems she wishes to speak. Lucy isn’t amused by the disruption and considers the request, taking her sweet time. Faith’s eyes are pleading as she mumbles, mouth closed, through gritted teeth.

Lucy’s face softens. “Do you have something to contribute?”

Faith nods like she’s about to burst.

What the hell could she be so desperate to share? If it’s useful information, Spencer resents that this conversation is coming to light on Faith’s goddamn day of silence, of all things, but she doesn’t get a say in how this goes.

Another long pause. Lucy’s making her pay for interrupting. “Four sentences.” She sounds bored with the situation, and goes back to molding a clump of blue dough.

Faith releases the laugh she’s been holding back. “Yeah, that thing you saw in her painting...wasn’t a cat.”

Spencer’s eyebrows rise as blood rushes to Lucy’s face.

Face prefaces her point with, “You’re a nerd—you know those furry ball things on Star Wars or whatever?”

“...Tribbles?” Spencer asks. “From Star Trek?”

“Turns out they’re real, and that was her ‘cat’,” Faith says, using air quotes.

“She was beautiful and I loved her.” Lucy yells, pissed they’re making fun of her when she’s not in on the joke. She takes a deep breath and tells Spencer, “After that, I had a spider. I named her Beth.”

“Not ‘Lady Princess Spiderkins the Fourth’?” Faith asks, leaning forward with a playful, smug expression.

Lucy turns with hellfire in her eyes and storms over again, grabbing a fistful of Faith’s uniform and pulling her down a few inches to slap her again, much harder. “THAT WAS FIVE.” It’s like Lucy’s lips opened and a demon came out. It’s other worldly. “WATCH YOUR FILTHY MOUTH, WHORE.”

The color drains from Faith’s face but she doesn’t protest, nor does she even defend herself from the slap, Spencer realizes. But then as Lucy sits back down, Spencer sees the faintest smile creep across Faith’s face. Almost like she did it on purpose. And Spencer’s pretty sure that when Faith rolls back over to face the wall, a hand creeps into her jumpsuit.

The whole moment stuns Spencer so thoroughly that she doesn’t even remember what they were talking about. “You were saying?”

Lucy motions for Spencer to climb down and sit beside her on the floor, and Spencer begrudgingly complies. “My spider, Beth.” Lucy’s rolling a perfect green ball of dough now, happy as can be. It’s
truly stunning how she can alternate personas like this. “She was a loyal friend.”

“That’s sweet.” Spencer can’t shake the feeling that if she said the wrong thing here, she’d get bitch-slapped into the next cell, safeword or not.

Lucy sets down the green ball and reaches for the canister of orange dough, handing it to Spencer before taking the purple for herself. “You saw her in the bathroom that day.” A pause. “When you were trying to kill her.” Her eyes narrow dangerously but don’t look up.

Spencer’s heart stops.

Oh. My. God.

Beth.

ELIZABETH.

Holy shit, holy shit, holy shit.

I KNEW IT.

Holy shit, holy shit, holy shit.

I was right. I WAS RIGHT.

NOW, DON’T GET DEAD.

“Ok, whoa, hang on,” Spencer says, hands raised in surrender. “I had no idea she was your...pet.” A nervous twitch flickers in her right eye. “Why didn’t you say something?”

“You seemed a little preoccupied at the time to hear my childhood stories.” Lucy squeezes hard on the Play-Doh and then rolls it even again.

To say the least. Spencer feels her face growing hot. “Yeah, but…still…”

“Would knowing she was mine stop you from hurting her?” Lucy looks up, and in that moment the raw emotion in her eyes sends a dagger through Spencer, because all she sees is Quinn. “I didn’t think so.”

“Hey, I wouldn’t…” but Spencer doesn’t know what to say that’s not an outright lie. “You’re right. I’m sorry. I promise it won’t happen again.” The next time I see your spider, she thinks, I won’t just hurt her, I’ll kill her on the spot.

Lucy peers at her for a moment, like she’s taking stock of Spencer’s apology and weighing it accordingly. She seems satisfied enough and continues her tale. “She was like a daughter to me for a long time. I fed her, took care of her. We did everything together. I was lucky enough to bring her with me when I came here. ”

Time to play stupid. “Why is she in the bathroom and not here, then?” Spencer already knows the answer to that, or at least she thinks she does. But she's curious to hear what Lucy knows about her pet’s extra-curricular activities. Even if it’s a lie, it’s a starting place.

“A few years ago, I shared her with another inmate who needed her—a girl named Jenny. She didn’t have any friends here. But Beth could write to her, and I think Jenny liked that. They were both writers. Beth’s very smart, you know. And I believe they got quite close.”
Yeah, maybe TOO close.

Spencer can’t believe what she’s hearing. This was easier than she thought. Lucy Fabray has been holding the key to this mystery the whole time. Jenny’s Elizabeth is Lucy’s Beth, who is Spencer’s Charlotte. Because that’s not confusing. It has to be the same one, right? How many web-writing spiders can there be on a spaceship? And when Jenny died, why did Beth choose Spencer as her new friend? Was that on Lucy’s orders, too, or just happenstance? The sadness on Lucy’s face seems sincere, but it’s not like she hasn’t proved her ability to be duplicitous. Either way, the biggest question still remains: Did Beth kill Jenny or not?

She must have, right? She said she did, in the web. And was that on Lucy’s command? Spencer remembers the journal entries—Right now, Jenny’s hate for Lucy sounds pretty one-sided, but far be it from Spencer to take anything Lucy Fabray says at face value. Girl doesn’t know what a fucking bear is.

“I’ve heard of Jenny,” Spencer says, mindful not to show her cards. “She died, right?” Lucy just nods. It’s taking all of Spencer’s willpower not to ask “How?” but she doesn’t want this to turn from a chat between friends into an interrogation. Instead, Spencer says carefully, “I guess...Beth didn’t come back to you, then? After Jenny died? That must be hard for you.”

She feels guilty; Spencer knows exactly where the spider was after Jenny died. Writing messages on her bunk in cell 10. Not that she’s going to reveal that.

Lucy looks like she’s trying to put on a brave face. “I’m sure she’s making new friends. There are plenty of girls here who need someone to talk to. I still see her around from time to time.” Lucy looks back down at her Play-Doh, pulling a chunk apart, then stops altogether. “I just wish she’d want to come home. I’ve been in here for years; it’s not like she doesn’t know where to find me.”

Well. If Lucy knows that Beth is killing people, she’s not letting on. Spencer doesn’t want to push too hard, but if she’s going to continue down this rabbit hole, she has to keep Lucy talking. It would be too suspicious to bring it up again later.

“I didn’t have a pet growing up,” Spencer says. “I thought about getting a lizard once, but I didn’t know what I’d have to feed it.” She waits a few seconds, then adds, as naturally as she can, “Spiders eat insects, don’t they?” She winces at the sound of her own voice, because it’s hard to ask such an obvious question and not sound stupid. Spiders don’t eat their catch, they drink the blood. Anyone with a middle school education knows that. Spencer’s pulse is pounding in her ears. To cover the noise, she adds, “This place is pretty disgusting, but at least there aren’t any bugs.”

She tries to anticipate the explanation of an on-board supply, but even things like Aphasia’s jar or Idgie’s bees wouldn’t be enough to sustain a spider over a long period of time. There must be something else.

“Insects?” Lucy laughs. “Goodness, no. What a silly idea! She wouldn't hurt a fly. Beth always preferred human flesh t—”

Spencer chokes on air and drops her Play-Doh. “WHAT?! She eats people?!”

I OFFICIALLY HATE BEING RIGHT ABOUT AWFUL THINGS.

Lucy seems taken aback by Spencer’s judgment. “Only if they’re already dead. I told you, she would never hurt anyone, Spencer. She’s very gentle.”

Like a goddamn lamb, I'm sure. Spencer’s trying hard to roll with this revelation, but she just can’t.
Confirmed flesh-eating spider was living in her bed.

But, you know, she would never kill me herself, just scavenge my body, so that’s comforting, thank you.

And now it’s time for the million-dollar question. Spencer’s a dead woman walking anyway. What does she have to lose? “So, all these years, there have just been...dead people lying around for her to eat...” It’s such a loaded question, but Spencer can’t help herself. This madness has to stop.

“Unfortunately, no,” Lucy says, which does nothing to ease Spencer’s mind. “I haven’t been able to provide for her in a long time.” Provide for her. Lucy makes it sound so maternal. Yes, since the dawn of time, the best mothers have chainsawed innocent people in half to feed their young. “But one of the meat patties from the kitchen can last her months,” she says. “It’s not the best diet, of course, with all those preservatives, but she does fine.”

Big Sweaty Meat strikes again. Spencer remembers the food fight in the Mess Hall. “That’s for your girl. Tell her it’s from me.” Was Suzanne trying to help by throwing her food that day? Does she know Beth, too? Why hasn’t she said anything?

“I promise, you have nothing to worry about,” Lucy continues. “Even when she’s on a natural diet, spiders can go a very long time without eating.”

“That’s great,” Spencer manages. She can only imagine what her expression must look like. Even if Beth is supposedly living on BSM, Spencer’s not convinced she hasn’t reverted to her ‘natural diet’. Not with all these fresh, juicy prisoners lying around like fruit on the vine. And Sue’s just bringing in new shipments all the time. A never-ending food supply. The cell block is a goddamn all-you-can-eat buffet.

“Beth is a very loving creature. Misunderstood, like you and me. We all do what we have to do to survive, but we’re not born killers.” Lucy pauses for a moment, looking at Spencer with a more thoughtful expression. “When you first got here, you felt like your whole life had been turned upside down. I remember what it’s like. But we adjust and adapt. Beth did, too.”

By eating any and every corpse she could find? Spencer really hopes Santana didn’t “adapt” to space prison, too. “I bet she learned from watching you,” Spencer says, blinking away the frightening pictures in her mind. She bites back the addendum, “especially how to slaughter people,” and squeezes Lucy’s hand again instead.

Lucy smiles. “You’re sweet.” She reflects on Spencer’s words and says, “I like to think so.”

Spencer’s eyes widen momentarily before she remembers she didn’t say the slaughter bit out loud.

It’s a good thing Lucy doesn’t see Faith behind her, silently putting a finger down her throat and pretending to puke at the display of emotion. Lucy would probably shove the pink Play-Doh down there instead.

But Faith’s not wrong—Spencer knows how to kiss-ass with the best of them, and she’ll keep at it as long as Lucy’s spilling information. The pieces are starting to fall into place. Tonight, Spencer gets to sleep knowing for sure there is a meat-eating spider on board this ship. Somehow, that’s supposed to be reassuring.

But the mystery is far from solved, especially if Beth’s just helping dispose of the corpses and someone else is doing the actual murder. (Do spiders eat bones? Or internal organs? Do I really have to think about this?) For all of Lucy’s knowledge, she still seems incredibly naive, and
Spencer’s convinced that Beth is in fact killing these girls. *How*, she doesn’t know, but this gut check feels right.

Maybe staying close to her cellmates will keep Spencer safe after all, either out of loyalty to Lucy or because Beth’s keeping her distance. Doesn’t matter to Spencer. She’s finally been given a reason to be glad she transferred here, and *that* is why she will sleep soundly tonight.

“I do miss her,” Lucy says. “She’s a good listener, like you.”

*Fantastic. I was hoping we’d have a lot in common.*

Lucy smooshes her clay and thinks for a moment. “That day in the bathroom, Beth wasn’t going to hurt you, you know. There was only one person in there who would hurt you, Spencer.”

“Quinn is...not the kind of girl you want to get emotionally attached to,” Lucy says. “Trust me. Besides, you fit in much better here. I always knew you would.” Faith holds up a silent thumbs-up in agreement.

It’s a frustrating sentiment, not to mention an outright lie. Spencer’s nothing like them. She cares about learning and justice and friendship and hard work. She and Quinn had a connection. Sure, Mack and Aphasia are nothing short of batshit crazy, but at least they didn’t make Spencer feel like she was rushing Phi Kappa Kill Lots of People.

Lucy catches Faith’s gesture and smiles at her. “Good girl. You may join our conversation now, if you like. I suspect you have your opinions, too.”

Spencer isn’t sure she wants to hear what these girls really think about Quinn, but Lucy’s never mentioned her name before. Spencer isn’t about to waste this opportunity. She might get even more now that Faith’s been unmuted. “What is it with you two, anyway?”

“Safety tip,” Faith interjects, because she can, “Don’t get her started on Quinn Fabray.”

*Quinn FABRAY. I KNEW IT.*

Spencer tries to hide the fact that her pulse is racing. Half a second later, Faith adds, “Lucy’s just mad I banged her first.” That earns a stern glare from the power top, who’s probably regretting granting her permission to speak.

Spencer’s not thrilled by the revelation, either. Quinn did say she was hopelessly drawn to brunettes. That’s holding up, much to her fucking delight. Faith’s cocky attitude reminds her far too much of Mack. Spencer wants to punch her *so badly* right now, just knock that smug smirk right off her stupid face. But that’s probably against the Sunday rules.

She needs a drink, or nine. Or for her jealousy to spontaneously light her on fire. Where is Raven's Moonshine Express when you need it? Not that she has anything of value to trade. Spencer doesn’t even have a pair of goddamn panties to her name.

So instead, she has to swallow her rage and refocus on the bigger issue at hand, because Faith just confirmed Quinn and Lucy are in fact related. It’s been baffling that other people couldn’t see that they’re fucking identical. But still, this feels like very base-level information. Quinn should’ve been the one telling her this. Being the last person to know everything around here is infuriating.

Lucy turns back to Spencer. “Quinn and I have...a history.”

“Hot,” Faith jokes, cracking her knuckles.
“Not that kind of history!” Lucy hisses.

Spencer says, “Yeah, I picked up on the fact that you two aren’t exactly friends.”

“She’s tacky, and she hates me.”

*Oh, if they only knew how similar they are.*

Spencer’s almost afraid to ask but is dying to know. “What happened?”

Lucy pauses, like she’s torn on just how much she wants to reveal. She sighs. “Well, she’s my sister.” *Yes, I got that, thanks.* “Everyone thinks I’m the mature, older one and she’s the little rebellious punk,” Lucy says, eyebrows high, “but it’s a lot more complicated than that. We’re actually the same age, more or less. At least, I think so.”

“You’re twins,” Spencer says, happy to help move this along a bit.

“...Something like that.”

Then, suddenly she remembers. “Wait, is Quinn from that spaceship, too?”

Lucy considers the question. “Technically.”

*Holy SHIT. She said she was from Ohio! And why is this not breaking news to Faith? Is SHE from a spaceship?*

**IS EVERYONE HERE FROM A MOTHERFUCKING SPACESHIP?**

Spencer’s mind is *exploding.* She’s surrounded by goddamn aliens.

Lucy stares her down hard. “This is all private information. I don’t like to talk about this. Do you understand?”

Spencer’s throat closes and she gives a wide-eyed, subtle nod. “Yeah, no, I got it.”

With that, Lucy relaxes a bit and gives a closed smile. “I know I can trust you. You’re with me now.”

It isn’t a question. It’s very much a threat. Spencer nods again silently.

“The place where I grew up,” Lucy begins, “it was a scientific research ship for genetic engineering. We were grown there.”

Spencer’s going to pass out. “You’re exact genetic identicals? You’re *clones*?”

“We don’t use the c-word,” Lucy almost snarls.

Faith stifles a laugh. “Not that one.”

Lucy clears her throat and tosses her hair back a little, reasserting her authority. “Yes, we’re all identical.”

“All”?...How many are there?” Spencer asks. These two were already so different, just based on their life experiences. What would these others even be like?

“At least eight that I’m aware of.”
Lucy sighs and continues. “But I don’t know where they are, just that they were sent to Earth. I hadn’t met any of them until Quinn showed up here.”

Spencer can only imagine what a mindfuck of a day that was. “So, Quinn told you about all this?”

Lucy shakes her head. “Quinn doesn’t know the whole story. At least, I don’t think she does.” She shrugs, though Spencer’s pretty sure she sees Lucy tense up just a bit. “She’s not stupid. She has to know something.”

Faith chimes in. “She probably thought you were gay for her when you took her last name. That’s some Single White Female shit right there.”

Lucy shoots her another glare.

“You changed your name?” Spencer asks. This whole thing is so weird.

“I never had a last name,” Lucy says. “I was a science project, not a person.” There’s a hint of sadness about it, but she owns her truth. “When Quinn arrived a few years ago, I knew right away who she was and that we were related, so I adopted her last name as my own. I think I scared her.”

“You think?!” says Faith with a laugh, propping her feet up on the ceiling.

Spencer agrees but isn’t brave enough to voice it. Still, she’s rebuilding empathy for Lucy now that she’s learning the truth of her situation. Being regarded as an object, as property rather than a living person…that must have had a huge impact on her development and self-esteem.

“I just wanted to get to know her,” Lucy says. “To be close to someone. I wanted to have a sister for the first time. She already had a family with a different sister, but they were horrible to her. She said if I wanted her ‘stupid last name’, I could have it, that she didn’t want it anyway. It helped me feel closer to her, even though she hated me. I really liked her pink hair, so I asked Sue if I could get something pink, too. I think she wanted to do something to make me feel better. So, she ordered me this uniform.”

“I never realized that was because of Quinn,” Spencer says. She always assumed it was just a coincidence they both had pink accessories, like how Dark Willow’s hair matches the bruises on Mack’s ass Thursday mornings.

“I just wanted to show her I care. I needed to feel close to my sister. She’s the only one I know.”

Lucy takes a breath and pushes on. “It was unpleasant between us for a while, even hostile, but that faded. Now, she keeps her distance and we just live our own lives.”

This is more sincere and open than Spencer’s ever seen Lucy before, and it’s almost painfully sad to watch. If this girl was, in fact, raised on a spaceship without a peer group and then killed everyone on board, of course she would lack an understanding of basic social cues. She’s practically a feral beast in the jungle. It’s a wonder she’s gotten this far and done this well. But then, she seems to be a fast learner and someone that Spencer is constantly underestimating. Which is a problem.

At the very least, Lucy’s so-called hatred of Quinn is clearly just a front to hide how hurt she is, and Spencer can’t fault her for that. What the hell would she have done in Lucy’s position? Finding out she had a half-brother sent Spencer into a full-blown tailspin.
“Wow. I'm sorry,” she offers, because anything else feels too heavy. “And you never brought up the whole test-tube-baby thing? You never talked about it?”

Lucy shakes her head again. “Every time I'd try, she walked away. There’s obviously a connection between us, but she’s made it quite clear she doesn’t want to know.”

“Well, she must feel something,” Spencer says. “She could’ve let her hair go back to its natural color a long time ago, but she doesn't. Maybe she feels more connected to you than you think.”

“Maybe. Or she just doesn’t want to look like me,” Lucy says. “Quinn does her own thing. It’s fine.”

They both sit with that for a minute in quiet contemplation. All those conversations Spencer had with Quinn, there was never any inkling that she and Lucy had this complicated past. Quinn focused on her teen years and what her life was like before she came here. Spencer could relate to that easily enough. When things get scary, we go back to what we know.

Wait a minute...

“Is this whole...thing...common knowledge around the prison?”

“I don’t know,” Lucy shrugs. “It’s not some huge secret that we’re related, if that’s what you’re asking.”

“I mean the cl—” Spencer stumbles, “the test tube stuff.”

“I told you, I don’t like to talk about it.”

“Do you think Vee knows?”

Lucy’s brow furrows. “I doubt it.”

Spencer looks back and forth between them. “She said something to me the other day like she had dirt on you guys.”

Faith laughs and says, “I know what that is.” She crosses her legs and puts her arms behind her head, reclining comfortably. “Vee runs this gang. Her girls have these wacko names. Tastee, Pussy….”

“Tasty Pussy?” Spencer interjects. She really, really hates that word.

“Two people,” Faith clarifies, “not one.”

“It’s Poussey,” Lucy says.

Faith sits up and waves her hands as she talks. “So, Santana’s all, ‘How do they expect me to just let that go? Their names are literally delicious.’”

“She...didn’t…” Spencer doesn’t want to say the rest of it.

But Faith waves the suggestion away. “Nah. Vee’s just blowing smoke up your ass because she knows Santana wanted a taste.”

Maybe, Spencer thinks, but there has to be more to it than that. Maybe Vee’s got the same Underground Railroad theory as Umbridge and she wants something to leverage for a ticket out. Maybe this is all about Aphasia somehow, since there seems to be history and animosity between them. Or maybe Vee does know something about Lucy after all and could help Spencer take her down. There’s just too much uncertainty. Speaking of which…
“And she didn’t eat those missing girls – Paulie and Vause and the others,” Spencer clarifies. She really needs to hear Faith say it. “I mean, like, *eat eat*—”

“Yeah, I got it, Jenny Craig. Strict no-human diet, like I said. Chill.” Faith goes back to staring at the ceiling.

“I’m just trying to figure out what happened to them,” Spencer says.

Faith shrugs. ‘Girls come and go all the time in here.’

*Yes, that's the problem.*

If this disappearance conspiracy runs deeper than the ones Spencer knows about—Stacey, Aeryn, Jenny, Alex, and Paulie—then who knows how many girls it involves. Maybe that’s part of the point. With such high turnover, nobody knows who was there before, and girls don’t necessarily know when someone’s missing. Even people like Lucy who’ve been here for years wouldn’t be able to learn the names and whereabouts of all the other prisoners. Everyone’s got their own shit to think about and their own demons to face. They all have a past they can’t escape, even in space.

*Which...hang on...*

Spencer turns back to Lucy. “If Quinn doesn’t know about the cloning, how do *you* know?”

“There were some files on my ship. I had access to everything when there was no one left to stop me.” Lucy says it so simply, she makes it sound like killing every single person was a reasonable means to an end.

*Well, damn! Why didn’t I think of killing everyone in Rosewood when I needed access to some files?*

“I looked through them before I was captured,” Lucy continues. “I read the words, but I didn’t really understand it. I was too young. If they weren’t destroyed with the remains of the ship, Sue probably has them now. I don’t know.”

*Jackpot. Come in, Houston—We have found our leverage.*

Spencer’s lips curve into a smile. “So, if someone were to have access to these files, that would be of interest to you?”

And just like that, the light returns to Lucy Fabray’s eyes. She matches Spencer’s smile and looks her up and down like she doesn’t know where to put her mouth first.
It’s been a while since Spencer requested an office visit. Boomer, bored with life as always, escorts Spencer back to Sue’s office, where the boss is midway through a rigorous jazzercise routine. The light blue sweatband around her head is a nice addition to the standard red track suit.

“Ah, Tastings, good. Do that.” Sue motions to the opposite corner without looking.

“That” is a giant mess of assorted papers in all colors, piled like a mountain about a foot high and three feet wide. Spencer’s pretty sure there’s peanut butter on a few of the pages.

“Um. Do what, exactly?”

Sue scowls. “Do I look like someone who has time for your pointless, asinine questions, or do I look like someone four and a half hours into unbridled cardiovascular titillation?” She emphasizes her point with jazz hands as she squats and twists.

Spencer rolls her eyes and sits down in front of the administrative catastrophe. It seems this is where paper goes to die in space. It’s the same kind of thing she’s seen before: invoices for cafeteria food, water delivery confirmations, maintenance bills, communication logs, flight schedules and the like. Nothing related to personnel, at least not directly.

But this time, there are some new papers that catch Spencer’s eye immediately. These have names on them. She finds one of her cell transfer requests, along with intake forms for two new prisoners she hasn’t met yet (Chloe O’Brian and Rosa Diaz). And there seem to be at least a dozen different pink capture forms for one Hermione Granger. With a pile this large to go through, Spencer feels sure there’s got to be something relevant here. It’s like the universe has given her an amazing birthday present a few months early. Or maybe late. She doesn’t know anymore.

Once she’s sorted them into piles by color and type, it's time to decide how to proceed. Sue’s not paying her much attention, but Spencer doesn’t think she can just sit and read through these like library books. She doesn’t want to risk losing her privileges. But she’ll be damned if she just stuffs all this data in a drawer without devouring it first. No, this is too important. She’ll file them like she’s supposed to—just, slowly and reading as she goes.

She calls out to Sue over the obnoxious music, as innocently as she can, “Some of these look like they go in a prisoner file.”

Sue continues her circular arm extensions, this time in the direction of a file cabinet with the large ring of thirty keys hanging from the lock.

Spencer grabs Hermione’s pile, now sorted chronologically by date, and walks it over. She wades through the names until she finds Granger, Hermione, nestled right between Fabray, Quinn and Hastings, Spencer. She’s seen her own file before, of course, back when she first arrived, now nestled safely back in its place. How Aphasia did it, Spencer will never know. But even more
peculiar is the fact that most of the file folders are the standard beige color while hers is blue. And so is Lucy’s.

*What’s that all about?*

There must be over a hundred names here, and—wait—Graham’s is blue, too. As are Mills, Regina and Katraine, Louanne, whoever that is. *But why?*

It seems random, but Spencer doesn’t know any of them well enough to guess what they have in common, not even Lucy. But even then—why would Lucy’s be blue, but Quinn’s isn’t? There’s a box of empty manila folders in the cabinet at her feet, so it’s not like they ran out. What does it mean? She wants desperately to peek through her file, if only to learn whatever Aphasia must already know. But she still has this stack of transfers in her hand and Sue knows what they are, so she’ll have to investigate that later.

Every time Spencer gets close to an answer, two more questions arise. But that reminds her...

Flipping toward the back of the drawer, she finds Schecter, Jennifer and Sun, Aeryn, no one in between. No Martha Slewurt or Stewart or otherwise. Paulie was just fucking with her. Of course she was. There are regular prisoners working kitchen duty, hashing slices of pseudo meat onto trays like an assembly line. There isn’t any big conspiracy to hide a Forbes 400 celebrity in outer space. Once again, Spencer’s the joke of prison, the gullible rich girl too stupid to know better. She almost believed Paulie, too.

Taking a deep breath, Spencer refocuses on the task at hand. It’s taking all her will power not to swipe Jenny’s file. If she just had some time in here to read all this paperwork, she’d know more than all those assholes out there. She’d be the one in charge. Who’d be laughing then?

One thing at a time. Live to see another day of office work.

Hermione’s file is thick, one of the largest in the drawer, and Spencer sees what must be thirty forms identical to the stack in her hand, one for each attempted escape. It’s impressive. Vee’s words echo in her mind, but Spencer sticks to her own agenda. If that psychopath wants it, she can come in herself and get it.

Though...with this many pages, surely Sue wouldn’t notice if a few of them walked away. Right?

Spencer adds the new pink forms to the back and reluctantly closes the folder. The light is behind her and casting a shadow on the Prisoner Information sheet at the front, making it impossible to read from this angle. There’s so much she wants to know about this mysterious girl. The whole witch thing seems crazy (if it’s true), but Spencer can’t deny she’s seen Hermione vanish before her very eyes more than once. And what about Dark Willow’s fire throwing? According to Aphasia, there are different *kinds* of witchcraft? It’s humbling, but Spencer’s seen science she can’t understand. There may be answers here in this office, but there isn’t time. Sue’s still watching.

Spencer drops the file back into place, smiles with lips closed, and nods as if to say, *Okay, that’s done.* Sue approves and begins a new step, one that rotates her in a circle ninety degrees at a time with kicks and punches and a victorious crowing noise as she flexes her ass.

Why nobody signed up for this jazzercise class is a mystery to Spencer. It’s a wonder to behold. She stands watching, almost hypnotized by the insanity, before realizing the drawer’s still open and Sue’s facing the wall. It’s only for a few seconds, but it might be enough.

Reaching in, Spencer takes the last few papers right back out of Hermione’s file and then looks for
Lucy’s file again. It’s not nearly as thick as Hermione’s, but it’s got something in it, hopefully enough to provide the answers Lucy needs. Maybe, just maybe, that will lead to the answers Spencer needs, too. And, if she’s really lucky, it’ll also have whatever precious information Vee’s trying to hold over Spencer’s head.

So much is riding on this. Spencer has to pull it off.

As Sue bends and kicks, crowing triumphantly, Spencer goes for it. In one smooth motion, she pulls Lucy's file with her left hand and stuffs Hermione’s forms in the back. Unzipping her uniform, she turns away from Sue and shoves the file down her front, then bumps the drawer closed with her shoulder. The keys jangle in time with the music, right on a cymbal crash. Sue doesn’t even notice.

Mission accomplished. I’m such a badass.

Spencer walks back toward the giant pile as casually as she can, but after two steps she realizes the file is just loose in there. The papers are spilling out into the legs of her jumpsuit, giving her a puffed out, deformed look and probably papercutting her all over.

Shit.

Fortunately, Sue can’t hear it over the synthesizer and doesn’t seem to notice Spencer’s awkward movements as she tries to recover. Once seated on the floor again, she turns her back to Sue and quickly reaches in to stuff the forms back into the folder, only then remembering she doesn’t have panties to tuck the file into.

Double shit!

She risks a side-glance and sees Sue’s got her hands on the wall and seems to be doing some kind of old-people-twerking motion that Spencer wishes she’d never, ever seen. But it gives her the window she needs. In a flash, she pulls her arms into her sleeves, slips out of the bra straps, and slides the still-fastened elastic down to her stomach. She moves the folder underneath it, using the bra like a belt to pin it against her. Her arms are back through the sleeves before Sue turns around.

This had better be worth it.

“Becky!” Sue calls out, between twerks. A moment later, her assistant appears in the doorway and scowls at Spencer. Sue releases her hold on the wall and turns around to face Becky, thrusting her pelvis forward and back to the music. “Tell Robin I want a status report on the G, ASAP.”

“Who’s Robin?” Becky asks. Spencer was wondering the same thing.

“Robin! The bird girl!” Sue says, swerving her hips in a circle now. “The one who smells like a drunk Russian who can’t hold a job. Raymond?” She sounds uncertain.

“Raven?” Spencer asks, then immediately regrets drawing attention to herself.

Sue ignores her and extends a finger, pointing at Becky as her ass continues gyrating. “Tell Raisin the pipe to my bathtub is leaking like Nixon’s White House. If I miss my mid-morning sulfur soak, I’m going to rip out the pipe and strangle her puppy with it.”

Becky’s eyes go wide. “She has a puppy?”

Sue shrugs as she continues swiveling. “Not for long.”

“Aye aye, Warden!” Becky salutes and takes off running down the hall.
“Spirited, isn’t she?” Sue says. “You could learn a thing or two from her. Pick it up, Spanker.”

With a heavy sigh, Spencer reaches for a septic system invoice from Uranus Cleaners and wonders how this became her life.

**************************

It’s only when Boomer’s leading her to the shower again that Spencer realizes she can’t hide this file strapped to her torso once she’s expected to strip down. Even if she bathed in her uniform, the file would still be ruined.

“Actually,” she says, just around the corner from the bathroom, “can I take a rain check? Shower check?”

Boomer stops and looks at her, expressionless.

Spencer’s cover story is rapidly disintegrating. “Lucy has some rigorous activities planned, and I’d rather save the shower for after that.”

The guard doesn’t reply, just turns and heads back in the direction they came, tugging the chain on Spencer’s cuffs harder than she needs to.

The door to cell 1 slides shut with Spencer safely inside, but it’s clear they’ve interrupted something. Lucy’s standing in the middle of the cell behind Faith, who’s on her knees and facing away, jumpsuit half off, with small bruises scattered across her back and neck. Faith’s arms are pinned behind by her own sleeves tied in a knot, and Lucy’s pulling her head back by her hair. Spencer stands and stares, amazed that her “rigorous activities” line is super credible now. Boomer rolls her eyes and walks away.

Lucy doesn’t drop her hold on Faith's hair as she looks up. “Do you have something for me?” It's casual, like Spencer walked in while she was just washing dishes or weeding the garden. Lucy tightens her hold with a twist of her hand, and Faith lets out a soft whimper, squirming on the floor but clearly trying not to.

Spencer takes a few steps forward, too scared to get closer than necessary, and unzips her uniform to gain access to the blue folder. It’s been scratchy as hell, and she’s glad to be rid of it. She opens it to start reading, but Lucy grabs it out of her hand with a polite, “Thank you.” Several pink corners are sticking out of the top, and Spencer’s eyes flash with realization. “Wait, hang on.” Lucy raises an eyebrow. “Some of those are mine. The pink ones.” There’s an awkward pause as Lucy seems to decide if she believes Spencer or not. “I swear, they’re not about you.”

Releasing Faith's hair, Lucy tugs the three pages out one at a time, handing them to Spencer without reading them. Her expression remains cool and in control as she walks over to her bunk and sits against the wall. Faith doesn't move a muscle.

Ah, right. Silent Sundays, Motionless Mondays.

As Lucy opens the file, Spencer quickly stuffs Hermione’s forms under her pillow to read later. She crosses back over to sit beside Lucy, who holds up a hand and says, “Wait.” Her eyes are wide, scouring the pages, and Spencer is dying to know what secrets she just delivered. She just stands, silently, arms crossed as Lucy reads two pages, three, four. But then she’s flipping through them faster, emotion rising in her face. Something’s wrong.

It seems Faith can sense it, too, because she turns her body and starts to stand. Lucy’s head snaps up,
eyes blazing as she shouts, “DID I GIVE YOU PERMISSION TO MOVE?” Lucy’s voice is unsteady and laced with emotion.

Faith freezes again as the words echo throughout the cell and down the corridor, ringing in Spencer’s ears. She’s not used to hearing Lucy so scared. Something about it sets Spencer on edge. Otherwise gentle animals will lash out when frightened and backed into a corner. She hopes Lucy has enough space to breathe.

Lucy finally reaches the last page, then goes back through some in the middle and trails a finger down what appears to be a list until she reaches the bottom. “Fifty-six,” she says quietly, staring at the faded gray paper. Even in the shadow of the bed frame, her eyes are shining.

“Clones?” Spencer dares to ask, praying Lucy won’t strike her dead on the spot. Clones would be a terrible last word.

Lucy hands her the paper, blinking back the tears. “Where are these places?”

The heading says PRODUCT DISTRIBUTION SITES and has a numbered list of fifty-five cities all over the world. There doesn’t seem to be any specific order to them; they’re not alphabetical, or even grouped by continent. Some are major capital cities, others are towns she’s never heard of. Fewer than a dozen are in the United States. Including Lima, Ohio.

“All over,” Spencer says. “They sent them everywhere.”

“Can we find them?” Lucy's voice shakes.

Spencer takes a deep breath. Lucy's asking a tall order, and not just because they’re currently incarcerated. In space.

“Maybe a few? You’d never be able to track down all of them. Even if you knew where to start looking, people move, like you did. How would you know who to go after first? You could spend your whole life searching for one girl and never find her, and then you’ve missed your chance to meet all the others.”

The look on Lucy’s face, a mix of hope and sadness and broken promise, means Spencer has to state the obvious. “We’re in prison.” She holds up the paper. “This list is useless to you.”

Lucy’s expression hardens. It’s the same look Quinn had before she walked out on Spencer in the bathroom.

“I’m sorry,” Spencer adds, and she means it. She knows how important it is to have hope in a place like this.

Lucy holds her hand out for the paper, and Spencer obliges. Lucy places it neatly in the middle of the file and lies back on her bed. She flips to the beginning and starts reading through everything again, as if the contents are precious and important; as if Spencer hadn’t just shattered her biggest dream into a thousand pieces.
Things are tense in the cell for the next week. Lucy keeps the file under her mattress, guarding it protectively, and Spencer still doesn’t know why Lucy won’t let her see it. She’d been so forthcoming before, discussing her past and what happened with Quinn, but now she’s closed off and become a mystery again.

Maybe she’s holding the bad news against Spencer, shooting the messenger and all that. It’s hard getting the silent treatment, and it reminds her far too much of how Mack used to pretend she didn’t deserve to exist.

*Just as long as she doesn't chainsaw the messenger in half.*

Faith isn’t much help, either. Lucy left her there on her knees that day for seven hours, not permitted to speak or move. Maybe she did it on purpose, or maybe she got so engrossed in the file that she simply forgot about her previous engagement. Either way, Faith wasn’t thrilled about having to piss herself there on the floor, all of five feet from the toilet, and seems to be blaming Spencer for it. Yeah, she could’ve gotten up and used it if she wanted to. But Faith clearly doesn’t want to take a step out of line and upset the boss lady. Spencer has no reason to think Faith would go out of her way to help her.

*How long is this going to go on?* Once again, Spencer finds herself without allies and trapped. She’s running out of time. They’ve got two days at most before the next Shark Week, but that dam could break at any moment.

She hates not being able to do anything to stop the next disappearance. She hates not knowing who might be next. She hates not knowing where Beth/Charlotte is or what she’s really up to. She hates not knowing for sure if it _was_ Santana all along _and if so, how?_ There are just too many questions up in the air to know which direction to head. Spencer doesn’t like being reactive—she’s proactive. But she might just have to wait until the end of Shark Week to see if things are different now that her girl-chomping cellmate is gone. She was supposed to feel safer here, keeping her enemies closer and all that, but Spencer feels just as lost as ever.

She dreams that night of being cast out to sea, alone and starving, thrown to and fro in the waves of a storm. As the boat rocks, she hears the impending sound of a shark coming right for her, cutting through the night to rip her in two. There’s a loud voice booming in the distance, but she can’t quite make it out; the storm is too rough. Spencer’s body is tossed about, drowning in rain, and the shark must have bitten her, because now she feels the warmth of blood on her leg.

Suddenly, she’s flung out of her boat hard and slams into the rocky shore. Her head aches, swimming with concussion and noise, as she’s crushed on the rocks again and again and again.

The pain is so sharp, it jolts her awake, and Spencer tries to regain a grip on reality. But it’s hard. Her vision is blurry, and the pounding in her head feels even more real now that she’s conscious. It takes a moment, but she realizes that she _is_ in fact hitting her head. She’s floating two feet above her bed,
face down, bumping into the ceiling.

Wait, but that’s...but…

She’s not thinking clearly, like she’s drunk on cold medicine and knows she’s out of it but can’t keep herself awake. Spencer turns herself over and tries to push back down to her bed, and that’s when she sees the horror taking place in her cell.

Faith is hovering in the middle of the room a few feet off the ground. Or at least...parts of her are. Spencer can see her head, face up toward the ceiling, eyes still closed. But beyond her shoulders, it’s like she’s just not entirely there. Jagged lines, like someone took a Photoshop eraser tool to her and just went crazy but left her feet in tact at the end.

“Faith!” she cries, but it’s barely more than a whisper, and Spencer doesn’t even know if she said anything at all. Even though she knows this must be a dream, it still feels very stupid calling out to what appears to be severed body parts. But Faith's feet are staying the same distance from her body, so at least they’re not just chopped off.

Spencer blinks a few times, struggling to adjust to the darkness of the room and see what the fuck is going on. The corridor is dimmed at night, but not completely. If Spencer can focus on the light, maybe she’ll wake up from this horrible nightmare. She squints and fights to keep her eyes open and hold on to something real and solid, like the cell bars. Good old cell bars. Which…

The door is...wide open. And Faith’s about to sail right out of it. Or, the remaining parts of her are. If this is her escape plan, she probably wasn’t planning to be dead first.

No...no...it’s…

Spencer reaches out for Faith, short by several feet and too high, then pushes off her bed to get there. She grabs a handful of Faith’s free-floating hair and holds on.

YOU CAN’T TAKE MY FRIEND’S HEAD.

Spencer pulls her back up, but she’s met with some resistance and can’t see why. Everything is wrong and nothing makes sense and her mind’s telling her she’s still in the ocean, go back to sleep. But Spencer isn’t giving up yet. She yanks on Faith again, and that’s when she sees it.

Spiders. Plural. What must be dozens of them. All gathered at the cell door, blocking her exit.

Spencer screams, or tries to, and jerks hard on Faith again, but the fear is making her physical and mental state even worse. Her strength is severely inhibited, and her best yank comes out as more of a slow tug. It’s enough, though, and whatever seems to be holding Faith back pulls free, sending her floating fast in the opposite direction. Spencer grabs hard onto the bed frame at the last second and braces for the pendulous return. It feels better having something to hold on to, so she clings to her bed like a fortress. And she’s not about to let those fuckers take another girl, not if she has anything to say about it.

Her moment of bravery lasts a whole two seconds.

The swarm of spiders scatters all over the cell floor, like flooding water coming in. Several of them head right for the wall and Spencer’s bunk, fast and determined. They’re coming for her.

Killer spiders in outer space. They want her dead.

Spencer screams louder, and she thinks she can almost hear it this time. In a literal leap of faith, she
jumps on top of Faith’s sliced up body (that she can somehow see the floor through), and they float down to the ground (NO, NO, SPIDERS NO, NO). Then, they push back up to Faith’s opposite top bunk, rotating upside down and spining as they go. Spencer’s going to be sick.

“LUCY!” Spencer tries to shout as her cellmate blips in and out of her vision. But Lucy’s still sleeping somehow, completely oblivious to the hell that’s broken out in her home.

Spencer lets go of Faith to stop her momentum before she bashes her head on the metal frame, but bangs her leg instead. Faith tumbles into the back of the cell and hovers over the toilet, bouncing harmlessly between the walls. She’s up high and out of reach, and Spencer figures she’ll be safe enough there for now. The spiders don’t seem to be able to fly. At least, not yet.

This is, hands down, the worst nightmare she’s ever had, and, oh god, the spiders are coming.

Pushing against the wall, Spencer flies back over to her bunk to get away, then watches as they stop and change directions like a flock of birds. They’re out for her. And Spencer can see now that these are certainly different from Beth. They’re larger and black with neon blue designs on their backs. It’s nothing she’s ever seen before.

Spencer only has a few seconds to consider her options. She could keep going back and forth until they get bored or surround her, or she succumbs to motion sickness. She could go out into the hall and let the guards kill her while the spiders eat both Faith and Lucy. Or she can try to end this here and now, once and for all.

A few creep up the wall as others scurry up the metal frame and across the mattress. Spencer watches in shock as they gain on her, then steels herself and lets the terrified tears flow, erupting in a screaming ball of panicked rage. She holds one side of the bed for leverage and unleashes havoc on the hellspawn, kicking her feet against the wall and slamming her free fist against the mattress, stomping as many as she can, barely able to see but not slowing down. Again and again she attacks, never breaking her battle cry, and she doesn’t stop until her body finally gives out.

Spencer pants, out of breath and still hovering, and searches the scene for any other signs of movement. Any survivors have fled through the still-open door, and Spencer prays they know better than to come back. She looks around frantically, adrenaline pumping through her veins, but the coast does seem to be clear.

Something brushes against her cheek, and Spencer bats at her face with both hands over and over, releasing another frustrated scream. The small corpse of a spider gracefully soars through the air as she makes contact, and that’s when Spencer realizes all the ones she killed are still here, floating around the room.

This is seriously the worst day.

Using her pillow, she bats them toward the open door, determined to get every last one of these fuckers out. If she generates enough force, they'll carry down the hall where they'll hopefully stay. Someone else will surely find them, even just one, and her story will be corroborated. They aren't very big and they don't look scary on an individual basis, but the very fact that they do indeed exist will be enough to gain traction with the authorities.

Right? It has to be.

It takes several minutes, made harder by the fact that she's still floating, but she manages to bat nine dead, awful spiders out into the corridor. Spencer considers keeping one and putting it under her mattress just in case she needs proof, but there's just no way she's letting any of these assholes stay
within fifty feet of her. What if they regenerate? What if they're immortal vampires? Or zombie spiders? Maybe they're not even dead. God only knows what she's dealing with. She could be killed the moment she closes her eyes.

The light from the corridor is weak, but Spencer does her best to see that no more creepy crawlies are hiding in nooks and crannies around the bunkbeds. When the air seems clear, she double-checks her pillow and brushes off her uniform one last time. All gone.

Catching her breath, Spencer looks back to see Faith’s still safe and sound...and still just a head and feet with slices missing in between.

Spencer pushes off again, mindful of hitting her head on the ceiling, and manages to bring Faith back to her bunk by her hair. She checks for vital signs, and thankfully, Faith still has a pulse. Spencer keeps poking and can feel that Faith’s whole body is there even though she can’t see it. There’s some kind of tying force, like a string wrapped around her. Spencer is able to dig her fingers underneath it, but—**whoa**—when she does, she can’t see them anymore. Quickly retracting her hand to be sure she’s intact Spencer tries again, and the same thing happens.

This is some seriously fucked-up shit. Whether she’s still asleep or not, Bullshit Nightmare Time needs to be over now.

Spencer tugs at the invisible binding force, and it gradually starts to give. She manages to pull the bulk of it down Faith’s body until it falls loose just past her knees. It’s trippy watching Faith’s body appear as it goes, but whatever Spencer’s doing is working. Somehow, a pile of dark blue string has formed on the floor beneath her. She’ll deal with that in the morning. All that matters now is her friend.

When Faith seems free and clear and all in one piece, Spencer takes a quiet moment to look over her rescue. She’s knocked out cold but still alive, and Spencer knows she’s just saved Faith’s life. As terrible as this has been, that part is pretty cool. Spencer did it. She broke the cycle of death. And aside from the terror and nausea, this zero-gravity flying thing is pretty cool, too.

A moment later, Faith rotates into a gleam of light that reveals a mark on her neck Spencer hadn’t seen before. One that isn’t Lucy’s doing. It’s small, like a puncture wound.

**Uh oh.**

Spencer’s hands move to her own neck, and sure enough, there’s a similar puncture mark; she can feel it. *The fucking spiders bit and drugged us. At least they won’t ever be able to do it again.*

Pushing Faith gently through the air, Spencer puts her cellmate back in her bunk area. It's hard to know she'll stay in safe dropping range when the gravity eventually resets, but it’s enough for now. And it’s a hell of a lot better than fifteen minutes ago.

All this time...So many spiders.

Her head is pounding; the blunt force impact and terror and fatigue are catching up to her. Her body aches for sleep and everything is terrible, but she’s still far too scared to close her eyes. Part of her thinks she should go after them—see where those fuckers are and where they were trying to take her friend. The door is wide open. The guards are still nowhere in sight. *(Seriously, WHERE have they been?)*

Nothing is stopping Spencer but herself.

With a hesitant push, she floats over to the door. It’s strange seeing it sitting there wide open. But at
the moment, it feels a lot safer in here than out there. Now Spencer knows just what kind of horrors are in this place after all.

She floats down and holds on to the bars for leverage, sliding the door as quietly as she can until the automatic lock clicks. With another push, she sails back up to her bed and settles in to watch the dimly lit floor until morning. After all, prison bars can only keep out so much.
Spencer wakes up face-down and backwards on her bed. Her head instantly starts throbbing again, though she can tell she’s much more coherent now. It all comes flooding back—Faith, the spiders, the venom—and she sits up to survey the scene. Faith is sleeping soundly in her bed, and, beneath her, Lucy rustles the sheets as she turns over.

For a moment, Spencer wonders if she dreamed the entire thing. It was so vivid and would call into question so much else, but she doesn't want that version of reality. Her hand absently ghosts the side of her neck, and sure enough, the bite mark is still there. She takes a deep breath and pushes onward.

Her muscles ache with the remnants of the venom swimming in her veins, making everything hurt and feel fuzzy even these hours later. Much to her body's protest, she climbs down to make for the toilet. Two steps forward, as she rubs the sleep out of her eyes, Spencer walks right into something and immediately jumps back.

It's a spider web. The largest, most terrifying web she’s ever seen.

It sprawls across the entire back portion of the cell, floor to ceiling, side to side, like a whole new wall. A gigantic mess of lines and angles with no order to it whatsoever, made out of that yellow thread. It's just like the I KILD JENE SHEKTR web Spencer saw weeks ago, only larger and scarier, and she knows now that it's the work of several spiders. There’s no way just one could do this.

Amidst the chaos is more scrawled writing. Nothing as clear and neat as Beth’s work, but the message is unmistakable.

U KILD MY SEESTRS

Spencer screams and runs over to wake up Lucy and Faith. They’re groggy and moan at the interruption of their sleep, but Spencer doesn't care and just shakes their shoulders harder. “Wake up! WAKE UP, right now!”

Faith lashes a hand out at Spencer with a grunt. “Jesus. Calm your tits.” Faith sits up slowly as her eyes start to focus on the silken forest now occupying their bathroom area. “Whoa.” She pauses, blinking at the light. “Redecorating?”

Lucy sits up and smiles at her. “Very creative!” But the longer she looks at it, she starts to see the writing, and her face falls. Fear starts creeping in as she reads it over and over again.

“THIS WASN’T ME,” Spencer shouts, too tired and scared to control herself. “THEY DID THIS. THE SPIDERS. They killed Jenny Schecter and then they killed the other missing prisoners, and now they want to kill us, so we really—”

“Jenny was airlocked,” says Faith.
Spencer's going to lose her shit if she hears that line one more time. “That's what everyone wants us to believe!” She’s too overwhelmed with anxiety to begin explaining that she’s seen a web like this before.

She begins pacing back and forth, hands in her hair, watching the floor with every step she takes. After everything that happened last night, Spencer was stupid enough to fall back asleep. She messed up. And they crawled right back in and did this just to fuck with her. Who knows how long they were even in here.

*Oh my god…* That day she saw the first yellow web, the sick bastards must’ve come in as she was masturbating. They had to. She wasn’t asleep for *that* long after. Right? The whole thing happened in less than an hour because it was class time. Were they just waiting at the damn door for her to climax so they could creep in undetected? How did nobody see them?

What the *fuck* is going on here?

Lucy’s wide awake now and frantically looking under the bunk and all around the cell, sounding on the verge of tears. “Beth? Beth, honey? Are you here?! Can we talk? I’m so sorry!” She checks the web for any signs of her beloved long-lost pet but finds none.

“You’re sorry?” Spencer asks. “For what?”

Lucy stops moving and exhales heavily as she looks at the web once more. “Beth wasn’t the only spider on my ship, but she was the only one I brought with me when I was arrested. She was the one I really cared about, the only one who would read with me and learned how to write. That was very special to me. When they came to take me away, she hid in my hair so the guards wouldn’t see.”

Spencer shivers at the thought.

“But I told her I couldn’t save them all and we had to leave them behind. I’ve felt terrible for a long time. I know how it feels to be separated from all your sisters, and I didn’t mean to do that to her. Maybe that’s why she stopped spending time with me when we came here. She was hurting. But I didn’t know she was still so angry with me after all these years.” A few tears roll down Lucy’s cheeks as she blinks away the painful memories.

Spencer can’t believe what she’s hearing. She had no idea Lucy has been carrying around this guilt. “I’m so sorry,” she says. “How many sisters did she have?”

“I don’t really remember.” Lucy looks off to the side thinking. “Maybe ten?”

But Spencer saw more than that. She knows she did. The pieces aren’t fitting together yet. It doesn’t make sense that Beth would be making these yellow webs when she has her own thread and, from what Spencer’s seen, a solid grasp on spelling. Unless maybe she is trying to frame those other spiders for the murder of Jenny Schecter? But why the theatrics? And does that mean the spiders Spencer saw are Beth’s sisters? There are just too many questions.

It seems more likely that Beth’s sisters aren’t here at all and the yellow webs were made by the same spiders who came for Faith. Well, the survivors, anyway. This message isn’t for Lucy. It’s for Spencer.

Lucy looks devastated, taking this personal attack very hard. Spencer walks over and sits beside her, tucking a strand of Lucy’s hair behind her ear and then resting her hand on Lucy’s shoulder. “Hey. Please don’t beat yourself up for this. You don’t know that this is about you.”

“Who else would it be?” Lucy blinks and sniffs, wiping her nose. “She’s in so much pain. I had no
idea. I never asked her.” More tears flow with each confession.

“Listen to me,” Spencer says, “This wasn’t Beth. She didn’t do this. That’s not her handwriting. And she can spell.”

Lucy turns to face her now, and her expression instantly hardens. “How would you know?”

_Fuck. Well, that’s out of the bag._

Spencer’s breath catches for a moment as she realizes her mistake. Lucy must have thought the bathroom incident was the first time Spencer had encountered Beth, as she had never given indication otherwise. Spencer's remembering all too late that her cellmate has a raging jealous streak. “She was already living in 10 when I got here. I saw some of her webs. They were clear silk, not yellow string.”

Okay, Lucy's pissed. “REALLY.”

“Look, it’s not a big deal! And this is good news! Beth isn’t upset with you! She loves you!”

Lucy’s having none of that. “Why didn’t you say you knew her when we were talking the other night?”

“Gee, I don’t know, Lucy,” Spencer fires back. “Why did you not say there are ACTUALLY LOTS OF SPIDERS ON THIS SHIP?”

“Because there aren’t!” Lucy shouts.

“Yes, there are!” Spencer stands up to get some distance from the crazy in Lucy’s eyes. “I saw them! They were IN HERE.”

Faith steps in, pointing to the web, “So, uh.” She looks at the web again. “How’d that go, exactly?”

“I’m here and they’re not. That’s how it went.”

Lucy finally realizes this isn’t about her. “YOU killed them?!” She stands up, eyes filled with rage. This is gonna go well.

“THEY WERE TRYING TO KIDNAP HER,” Spencer shouts, pointing to Faith.

“Kidnap?” Faith's eyebrows couldn’t be any higher.

Lucy eyes are wide in shock. “My babies would never hurt anyone!”

“BZZ! WRONG ANSWER,” Spencer yells.

“YOU PROMISED you wouldn’t hurt them!”

“I LIED.”

Lucy’s right shoulder angles back like she’s about to strike.

“LANNISTER! LANNISTER!” Spencer shouts, cowering and stepping backward, holding her hands out to block the slap.

The ridiculousness of the moment deflates Lucy’s anger a bit. “That’s not how that works, Spencer.”
Faith steps in. “Okay, are you two done with Psycho Time? Will someone please tell me in plain English what the fuck is going on?” She might just punch them both.

Everything is escalating fast, and Spencer peeks out from behind her hands to see Lucy’s holding steady. She takes a breath and tries to bring everything down a notch. “Last night, a bunch of spiders came in here and somehow started hauling you right out the door.”

Faith looks around considering what Spencer’s just said, and laughs. “Sounds like Nicky sprinkled a little something special into your Corn Flakes.”

“IT’S TRUE,” Spencer says, throwing her arms out. “I woke up in the middle of it and stopped them—which, YOU’RE WELCOME. So then they came after ME, and I killed a bunch of them before the rest got away. They’ve been taking prisoners for months, I just didn’t know how. I thought it was only Beth.”

Lucy sounds completely betrayed. “You thought Beth was killing people?”

“It’s not like I was very far off!”

“Okay.” Faith says. “Suppose I believe there are killer spiders in outer space.” She waves a hand at the web like it’s Exhibit A. “You think a bunch of little bugs are gonna drag my hot ass out of here? Explain, Professor.” She crosses her arms and leans against the bed frame.

Spencer sighs. “I don’t know, okay? I woke up, and you were floating in mid-air.”

The word “floating” catches Lucy’s attention. She peeks down inside her jumpsuit and glances at her sheets. “Wait, it’s Shark Week? I didn’t hear the Code Red.”

Spencer pauses. “I think I did,” she says, “but it was a part of my dream, so I didn’t know.” Pausing to assess, she squirms uncomfortably, realizing her body’s cycle has caught up to everyone else’s. And she still isn’t wearing panties. Even better, she can’t get to the toilet with the web in the way. Crossing her legs, Spencer looks at the message again and says, “They sure don’t waste any time.”

Faith looks thoroughly disgusted. “So, what, they wanna ride us riding the wave?”

Spencer makes a face and shifts again. “I think they’re seizing the opportunity when the gravity goes out during Shark Week.” Then, a flashing image in her mind. “Of course they need the gravity to be out,” Spencer continues, talking it through. “If their target is weightless and floating, it’s much easier to move.” Suddenly her eyes go wide. “What if they make the gravity go out. They chew through the wiring or something, I don’t know.”

“They don’t eat wires,” Lucy says.

“Yes,” Spencer glares, “they eat people. We know.”

“But they’d be floating too, right?” Faith asks. “How the hell does that work?”

“No, their legs are built for hanging on to things. They weren’t floating until I—” but Spencer stops herself before reminding Lucy of the carnage. “They weren’t floating.”

“Well, lucky me, then,” Faith says, climbing back up to her bunk. “Next, you can explain how they’d get me through the bars.” She’s still not buying any of this.

Spencer thought it was obvious. “The door was open.”
Faith glances at it like Spencer’s a moron.

“Well, it was.” Spencer starts pacing.

“Then, I guess they can pick locks, too,” Faith laughs.

Lucy beams. “Spiders are very smart!”

“If the door was open, why are you still here?” Faith asks Spencer. “Me? I’d be halfway to the moon by now with a chance like that.” She leans back against the bedframe, propping one arm up on a bended knee.

“I hear it’s a bit cold outside, and I couldn’t seem to find my coat.”

“I’d figure it out.” Faith’s eyes are narrow, and it’s clear she still doesn’t buy Spencer’s story. “So nice of them to use their little spider arms to close the big, heavy door on their way out.”

“Spiders don’t have arms!” Spencer says condescendingly. “And they didn’t close it—I did.”

“You closed it?!” Now Faith’s the one who might murder her. “You didn’t think for a second that the rest of us might want to get out of this shithole?”

Spencer huffs. “If you wanna take on Satan’s eight-legged army, go right ahead. Be my guest.”

“I’ve slayed actual demons from Hell,” Faith says. “You wanna rattle me, you’re gonna have to try a little harder than that.”

Spencer isn’t going to take this crap, not after the horrific night she had. “It’s easy for you to say—you slept through the whole goddamn thing!”

“Then, Final Jeopardy,” Faith retorts, staring Spencer down. “If I became the latest float in the prison pride parade, why don’t I remember a goddamn thing about it?”

“Because they knocked us out! Look—I’ve got bite marks.” Spencer reaches for her neck. “And I bet you do, too.”

Faith and Lucy both feel around, and their expressions change the moment they locate the small puncture wounds.

“They roofied us?” Faith sounds more curious than anything.

“That’s highly unlikely,” Lucy says. “I don’t think the spiders could get us on the roof.”

Her cellmates’ ineptitude only makes Spencer’s headache worse. The nausea is kicking in now, and all her muscles are sore. As she winces against a spasm in her abdomen, Spencer realizes her body has felt like this before. “When Paulie disappeared, I felt really out of it the next morning, but I figured it was food poisoning or something. I think they wanted us to sleep through it while they took someone. They drugged us.”

“I don’t believe they would do that,” Lucy says, shaking her head. “I took such good care of them.”

“It wasn’t them,” Spencer insists. “I’m guessing your other spiders were gray, just like Beth.”

“They’re beautiful,” Lucy says.

“But that’s not what I saw last night!” Spencer says, eyes wider now. “They were huge”—she holds
up her hands together to make a circle almost the size of a soda can—“and black with blue marks on their backs. They didn't look like Beth at all.”

Lucy's brow furrows. “I’ve never seen any spiders like that.”

*This is a whole new batch,* Spencer thinks. There must be more of them still out there. After all, somebody made the new web this morning. And Spencer doesn't like that Lucy doesn't know a damn thing about them. “Well,” she says, “they came from somewhere. We'll figure it out.”

The three girls sit quietly for a minute as the conversation comes to an awkward lull. Twitchy and aching and foggy, Spencer could go for a few more hours of sleep now that someone else is awake to keep an eye on things. But she can’t help but notice that Lucy looks more emotional than usual. “You okay?”

Lucy purses her lips and meets Spencer’s eyes. “I thought maybe Beth was going to have a family again.” She pauses for a moment, looking at the web wistfully before continuing, “Do you think it’s possible these new spiders, whoever they are, would adopt Beth as one of their own? She needs a happy family who loves her.”

*Yes,* Spencer thinks, *“happy” and “love” are exactly the words that come to mind in this situation.*

“Sure.” She’s trying to be a good friend. This is what Lucy needs to hear. That her estranged daughter has been accepted by a murdering clan.

“So, what now?” Faith asks. She's still rubbing her neck and sounds awfully shaken up.

“We deal with this, I guess,” Spencer says, turning back to the web. It looks just as creepy as it did the first twelve times she looked at it. Just to cover her bases, lest she get a slap across the face, she says, “I’m gonna tear it down. I’m sorry, but I *really* have to pee.”

“It's yellow…” Lucy says, and Spencer frowns, wondering why the hell Lucy is talking about her bodily functions. But, no, Lucy is looking at the spider’s handiwork again and referring to the web itself. “How about that.”

The others stare at her, waiting.

“And?” Spencer prompts.

“We used to have yellow towels, before you arrived,” Lucy offers, piecing things together as she talks. “I wondered where they all went.” She smiles. “Clever girls.”

“Why would they need those?” Faith asks. “Don't they make their own...web...string or whatever?”

Spencer considers this. “Maybe they don't. Beth does.” She looks to Lucy for confirmation and gets a nod. “But these new spiders, I guess not.”

She chooses to keep the whole “invisible, erasing thread” part of her evening to herself. She’s walking on thin ice as it is and can’t risk sounding any crazier. Not until she has a theory about what that was. Maybe the spiders made it, but maybe not. They seem pretty resourceful, but Spencer can’t think what could’ve produced string like that in the first place. On the bright side, it seems Faith doesn’t know or care enough about physics to ask how the spiders were propelling her forward. One less thing Spencer has to try to explain right now.

“What the hell is the point of a spider that can't make a web?” Faith mutters, crawling back into bed. “Wait…I don’t care!” She pulls the sheet over her head.
Spencer can't blame her. She'd love to hit the reset button and erase the last twenty-four hours. It wouldn't be the first time she'd...

**Time...**

“Hang on,” Spencer says to Lucy. “Okay. I assume the spiders came in to kill her, probably to eat her, right?” Before Lucy can respond, she points and cuts her off, “You said Beth eats dead people, so I think we can extend that premise to these new assholes.”

Lucy opens her mouth but then closes it again. “Continue.”

“Well, they failed! They didn’t get her!” Spencer says, pointing back to Faith. “If that means they don’t have a food source, then maybe the ones that got away will starve before next month. Maybe we just broke the cycle!” She sounds elated, but Lucy couldn’t look more horrified.

“Poor things!” she gasps.

Spencer lets herself get excited at the possibility, then thinks through the ramifications of her theory and quickly realizes it won’t hold water. “But you said they can go a long time without food.”

Lucy nods, “Yes.”

“How long?”

Lucy looks offended at the question. “I never starved them long enough to find out.”

“But probably longer than a month, right?”

“Probably,” she concedes.

**Well, shit. What now?** Taking another steadying breath, Spencer closes her eyes. “On the plus side, at least they’re not having babies on their own. The web says ‘sisters,’ which implies they’re all female.”

“They are,” says Lucy.

“You look under their skirts?” Faith sneers, still face down on her pillow.

“They were made that way. Males are inferior.”

“**Made?**” Spencer glares, turning to face Lucy head on.

“Of course!” Lucy chastises. “Spencer. You don’t think spiders just live in space, do you?”

Her jaw tightens.

“I read about them in a book about Earth when I was a child,” Lucy says, “and they looked like such graceful creatures. And artists, like me. I was lonely, so my parents made some to keep me company. It was my best birthday.”

Spencer wonders what kind of people would choose spiders as pet option numero uno. **Could they not get her a book on kittens?** “Let’s hope this is standard space practice, then,” Spencer says. “Someone made these new spiders, I just don’t know who. Or how. This is a *prison.* I don’t think secret, killer animal projects are high on the list of priorities when we barely have enough to eat.”

Looking at Lucy, she adds, “And I’m not sure many space labs are engineering spiders in the first place.” She considers that for a moment. “Speaking of things that don’t make sense, how old is Beth,
anyway? She should’ve been dead years ago.”

Lucy is appalled and takes a step forward to get right in Spencer’s face. “How dare you! She is my FAMILY.”

“A family of, what, vampires?” Spencer fires back. “Most spiders don’t live more than a year.”

“Beth’s at least fifteen by now,” Lucy says.

Spencer’s eyes go wide. “Your spider. Is fifteen years old.” It would be a question, but the words are all wrong.

Lucy looks confused. “She’s still quite young.”

“On what planet—” Spencer starts, then stops herself and cracks her knuckles in frustration.

Lucy walks to her bed and pulls the file folder out from under her mattress. She starts shuffling through until she finds a particular page. “This says spiders live thirty to forty-five years.”

WHAT.

“Whoa!” Faith says, turning over with a scowl. “Please tell me that’s not right.”

“Think about how smart they can get in that much time! Beth and I only had a year or so to read and write together before we came here, and she learned so much! Look at how her adopted sisters have learned how to write, too!” Lucy gestures proudly to the psychotic, eight-foot message like it’s a math test on the refrigerator door.

“Yeah,” Faith says. “I wonder how long it takes to learn how to pick locks and kidnap prisoners in zero gravity without leaving any trace of the crime.”

“Except for this,” Spencer says, looking at the web one more time before yanking the first handful of thread down. It takes a minute or so to get all of it, since Lucy doesn’t offer to help. Spencer takes the pile of tangled string and shoves it through the bars, tossing it off to the side as far as she can. “At least now we know what we’re up against.” She reaches into her pillowcase for the last tampon before hurrying over to the toilet. “I think.” But the words don’t bring the peace she needs, not even close.

Because there are genetically modified, highly intelligent, carnivorous mega-spiders killing people in space prison. And they just declared war.
Spencer is a bit of a schizophrenic zombie for the rest of the day, lost in thoughts of spiders infesting the prison—crawling in the walls, scurrying under the tables in the Mess Hall, watching her in the shower, walking over her as she sleeps…

She picks at her meals, constantly looking around her for any sign of Beth or the spider Black Ops team, and doesn’t really hear any of Lucy and Faith’s conversations. They’re all just sitting, bleeding ducks, locked in here and waiting to be picked off. Spencer is the only one who's seen what’s going on. She’s the only one who’s survived a direct attack, at least that she knows of. Is it possible someone else knows the truth? How could she find out?

The silver lining to all this is that Spencer has, a) another month until the next attack, and b) two allies who believe her. The knowledge that it’s not one spider killing people—it’s been dozens—isn’t in the win column, but she’s glad Lucy hasn’t been sending Beth out on hit missions. Spencer has certainly learned a lot in her time in cell 1. It’s what she wanted. She just didn’t think things were going to get this terrifying.

Had the spiders succeeded in taking Faith, Spencer would’ve been left all alone with Lucy. Who knows what would’ve happened then. Spencer shakes off the idea that Lucy was trying to manufacture that very situation somehow, if only because the thought of someone being that manipulative, that powerful, and that dangerous from behind prison bars scares the ever-loving shit out of Spencer. Almost as much as the thought of being left alone and locked up with her.

No, Spencer’s convinced the spiders are the real enemy here. And if she’s going to go up against them, she’s going to need help. Real help. Fortunately, she’s got time to find it.

****************

She was wrong. That night, the gravity goes out again.

“What the hell!” Faith shouts, hovering in the dark.

“I don’t know!” Spencer holds on to the bed frame and blinks as her eyes adjust to the dim light. “It’s never gone out twice in the same week, right?”

“Not that I can remember,” says Lucy. She’s still under her sheet, floating about a foot off the bed and remaining calm. “Maybe Raven’s too busy covering Starbuck in my fingerpaint to do her job.”

“This is Raven’s fault?” Spencer asks. One of Lucy’s paintbrushes floats by and bounces silently off her pillow.

“It’s her job to fix it.”

Faith shouts into the corridor, “You want this hot ass, black widow bitches? Bring it—” Her head hits the ceiling with a loud thud. “Motherfucker!”
“Shut up,” Spencer says louder than she means to. “Stop attracting attention.”

“Like they’re not coming for us anyway. Try, try again.”

Lucy offers, “Given the recent massacre,”—Spencer rolls her eyes—“I think they’ll try something else. They’re clever and resourceful creatures.”

“You’re not scared,” Faith says, wondering how that’s possible.

“Spiders would never hurt me! They love me.”

“Well, lucky you,” says Spencer. The cell door’s still closed and the coast is clear, but she’s not taking her eyes off the floor.

When the argument about whose fault it is finishes, the trio hangs in the air quietly for another hour or so. Then, without warning, the gravity kicks back on. Spencer and Faith both fall to their beds at awkward angles, banging their hands and feet on the metal frame as they land, while Lucy drops to her mattress with a soft poof.

“What took you so long!” someone shouts in the distance, presumably at Raven.

Spencer winces as she rotates a now tender wrist. “Everyone okay?”

“Of course.”

“Five by five,” Faith grunts, rubbing her arm.

Spencer takes one last look around and then tries to settle into a comfortable sleeping position. Not that she’ll be able to drift off any time soon. “I’ll do some recon in the morning and see if anyone’s gone missing.”

“Shark Week, Harvard,” Faith retorts.

She’s right—it’s lockdown procedures. Spencer’s not going anywhere. “Fuck. Alright, then I’ll ask the guards.”

Lucy smiles. “You and Boomer do seem like the best of friends.”

“I’ll figure something out!” Spencer turns over in bed and huffs in frustration.

She saved Faith last night, and now somebody else might be gone. Or maybe the spiders are just screwed with her, trying to throw her off her game.

It’s working.

Every little sound she hears in the corridor sets her nerves on edge. Spencer can’t get any peace. The wheels in her mind won’t stop turning. The slightest twinge of an itch jolts her back into full consciousness, kicking at nothing and riling herself up again. All the stress is wearing her down; she can feel it. Maybe that’s what they want. To break her. Eventually Spencer won’t have enough energy to stay awake or fight back even if she wants to.

Finally, after another hour, she drifts into a dream of being hauled away by giant spiders, all of whom have Lucy’s face, and taken to Santana, who eats her alive, while Quinn watches on, smoking, stone-faced, and says nothing.
The next morning, Spencer wakes and immediately checks her bed for creepy crawlies. There’s no sign of anything, and she sighs in relief, then screams wide-eyed, “JESUS CHRIST!”

The giant web is back. Only, this time, it’s between the beds and the door.

There’s no way out.

“Holy fuck—again?” Faith yells, getting out of bed to look closer. She slaps her hand to her neck, but doesn’t seem to find a bite mark.

“ Their writing is getting better!” Lucy claps and smiles. “Look!”

But, no, it’s the same jumbled mess, like a crayon drawing from an insane asylum, web lines tangled so thick that the girls can barely see the bars behind them. The message is clear.

**NOW YOR SEESTR**

“Your sister?” Faith asks.

“My sister’s not—” Spencer says, confused. Then, she and Lucy lock eyes, realizing at the same time.

**Quinn.**

“GUARD!” Spencer tears through the web, ripping the damming message to shreds and flinging the sticky, yellow string off of her. It falls away into a pile on the floor, looking far less intimidating than it had just moments ago. And now Spencer’s banging on the cell bars as hard as she can.

“GUARD!”

Buffy struts over, taking her sweet time and dragging a wooden stake across the bars. She halts when she sees the pile of yellow string and steps over it. “I know it’s your heavy flow day, but you don’t have to make all of us suffer for it.”

Spencer doesn’t have time for this bullshit. “Is Quinn in her cell?”

“Everyone is in their cells,” Buffy says, like she’s talking to a moron. “It’s Shark Week.”

“Cut the crap!” She bangs on the door again right by Buffy’s face. “Just answer the question. Have you seen Quinn today?”

“I’ve seen a lot of smelly lesbians today, Spencer.” Buffy tilts her head. “Tell you what. How about I run go check and then come right back?”

“Thank y—”

“Did you want me to grab you a six-pack and a pizza while I'm out?” Buffy mocks. “Pepperoni? Cheese? Veggie?” She leans in and says, quieter, “…You don’t like Hawaiian, do you?”

Spencer slams the bar once more, as if she were punching Buffy in her smug, blonde face, and says, “Is it so much to ask that you guards give a SHIT about us? You don’t care that we’re getting killed one by one in our sleep while you’re god-knows-where!”

“Have you been huffing Lucy’s paints again?” Buffy asks with that patronizing faux cheerfulness Spencer hates. “Do we need to have an intervention? Remember, when it comes to peer pressure, just say no.” Before Spencer can respond, Buffy looks down at the thread. “Hey, was that a towel? I haven’t seen one of these in months!”
“Still enough of it left to strangle you with.”

“It’s really very cute that you think you could,” Buffy says. “Go bleed.” And she turns to stroll away.

“Go DO YOUR JOB. Jesus! SHE COULD BE DEAD, DO YOU SERIOUSLY...” But it’s no use. Buffy’s gone. “Fuck,” she hisses, turning away and slamming her back against the bars.

Faith gives a low whistle. “Can’t lie. I’d bang her like a screen door in a hurricane.”

“What are we going to do?” Spencer snaps. Faith needs to keep it in her pants and help her figure this out.

“Lucy’s little buddies could pick the lock,” she offers, and it only half sounds like a joke.

Spencer’s head is spinning. This is all her fault. Quinn’s gone, and it’s all her fault. She should’ve let them take Faith. Or she could’ve followed to see where they were taking her. The fucking door was open. Nothing was standing in her way. But no, she panicked. She just had to play the hero, had to save Faith, had to play exterminator but was too scared to see it through. And now Quinn is probably dead. Because of her. “We have to save her,” Spencer says, more to herself than anyone else.

“Yeah, I got that part,” says Faith. “Good luck getting out of here.”

Lucy, who’s been sitting quietly on her bunk this whole time, finally speaks up. “Spencer’s right.” They both turn to look at her. “She’s my family. We may never be close, but that doesn’t mean I want her dead. Quinn’s welfare is of great importance to me.” She pauses, then adds with a hint of fire in her eyes, “It’s generally not a good idea to take my sisters away.”

Faith raises her hands as if she were holding a chainsaw, mimics pulling the starter cord, and makes a slicing motion with a silent “Vroom vroom!” behind Lucy so Spencer understands her full meaning.

...Oh shit, that’s right. Lucy killed all thirty-seven people on her ship.

In that moment, she realizes Lucy’s motive. The scientists sent away her true family, so she murdered her entire ship as revenge. Good god.

On the other hand, I pick her for MY team!

She’s immediately pulled out of her train of thought by Faith yelling “SPIDER! SPIDER!” and pointing to her side of the room.

Spencer almost falls off the bed.

“Beth!” Lucy cries.

Beth?!

Spencer scurries backward, putting as much distance between herself and the monster as possible. Panting in fear, she tiptoes back toward Santana’s bed to get a closer look.

A solitary gray spider is working on a small new web at the foot of Lucy’s bed. (Thank god.) It’s just like she used to do in cell 10, only Beth seems particularly rushed this time.

“You’re sure that’s the good one?” Faith’s still up on her bunk with her pillow poised at the ready to pounce at the first sign of foul play.
“Yeah, that’s her,” Spencer says. “What’s she writing?”

Beth is working hard but not one whole letter at a time, so they can’t quite make out the message yet. Faith climbs down, bringing her pillow with her, and the three girls gather around the frantic spider.

“Give her some space,” Spencer says when Faith gets too close on the back side.

After a few more cross lines, Lucy begins to sound it out. “Oal...Olive? No, Beth is a much better speller than that.”

“That’s a Q, look,” Spencer says, pointing.

“What the hell’s ‘q-a-l-w-c’?” Faith asks.

“No, that’s an E at the end.” Spencer keeps watching, mesmerized by the message gradually revealing itself. “Wait, ‘alive’! Q alive! Oh my god.” She collapses into a pile of relief for a moment as the emotions wash over her.

“She’s okay?” Lucy is grinning from ear to ear. “Where is she?”

“I don’t know!” Spencer says. “Do you think Beth does?”

“Doesn’t matter,” Faith reminds them. “We still can’t get to her.”

“That’s not good enough,” Spencer says, but it doesn’t change anything. They’re just three girls in a prison cell.

Everything is still for a moment. Beth sits on the edge of the web, taking what appears to be a muchly needed break. It seems crazy to Spencer, the idea that spiders are communicating with them like this, but it’s become the norm. At least this web’s a hell of a lot better than the last one.

Faith steps in close to the web again and speaks far too loudly just a few inches from Beth. “WHERE IS QUINN? TELL US WHERE QUINN IS.” Each word is slow and deliberate, as if that would make a difference.

“Oh my god,” Spencer says, putting her hands to her face and rubbing between her eyes. “She’s not deficient! She’s probably smarter than you!”

“Then why doesn’t she just tell us!”

“Maybe she doesn’t like being talked to like a moron.”

“I guess you’d know,” Faith says, walking back to climb on her bunk.

Spencer wonders if maybe she’d have better luck with Beth, given their history, and actually debates conversing with an animal for a hot second. It’s not like she’d be the first one to try it. “Hang on.” She pulls Jenny’s journal out from under her mattress and starts flipping through, looking again for notes about Beth and her messages. She’s read everything in there, cover to cover, but maybe there was more to it than she realized. Maybe she didn’t know what to look for before. “There might be something in here.”

“What is that?” Lucy asks, sounding more than a little displeased that Spencer has a possession she doesn’t know about.

Flipping past the pages and pages of tirades about Lucy, Spencer now regrets bringing this into the light of day. “My diary,” she plays off as innocently as she can.
“What are you, twelve?” Faith asks. She jumps down off her bed and crosses the room, yanking the journal out of Spencer's hand before she can move it out of reach.

“Hey! Excuse me!”

“Holy shit, Luce,” Faith says with wide eyes as she feasts on a particularly juicy page near the middle. Walking over to the bottom bunk, Faith holds it out for Lucy to read, making eye contact with Spencer as she says—like it’s the best news she’s heard all day—“This bitch wants you dead.”

The look on Lucy’s face cuts Spencer to her core. “No, no!” she sputters with hands out, “It’s not mine. It’s Jenny Schecter’s, I swear.”

“You didn’t even know her,” Faith counters. “She was dead before you got here.”

“Her cellmates gave it to me. They thought it would help us figure out all this!” She points to Beth’s web.

“Bullshit,” Faith says.

“Look in the front! She talks about things that happened long before I got here. It’s not mine.”

Faith turns back to the inside cover, sizing up Spencer before examining the pages. If she believes her, she’s not saying so.

“And you didn’t think this was relevant for me to know?” Lucy asks, eyes still locked on her target. “You know how important communication is to me, Spencer.”

“I’m sorry! I knew it would upset you!” It wasn’t a lie, exactly—Spencer didn’t want to die. Doesn’t want to die. But she also didn’t care about protecting Lucy’s precious feelings. At least, not then.

“You weren’t wrong.”

Faith and Lucy sit in silence for a minute, scouring the pages as Spencer tries to predict just how they’re going to kill her once the text runs out. Faith’s more and more amused as she reads, but Lucy doesn’t find any of this remotely funny.

Pulling the book from Lucy’s hands, Faith stands and says, “Wait, wait”—then launches into a dramatic reading of the “Lucyfer” paragraph. When finished, she laughs again. “That is some fucked up shit.”

The subject in question doesn’t seem to share in her joy. “I had no idea Jenny felt this way.” It’s hard to tell whether Lucy is stinging more with embarrassment or betrayal. “I knew her for a very long time. She was in my class.” The facts that Lucy knows don’t add up to what she’s reading. “When nobody signed up for her writing exercises, I told Beth to go keep her company, because no one should be lonely up here.” Lucy is quiet for a moment before adding, “I thought she liked me.”

Spencer swallows. There’s major damage control to do here if she’s going to keep Lucy calm and live to see dinnertime.

“She’d be crazy not to.”

Lucy can't disagree with that. “Well, it’s clear she was mentally unstable.”

Says the mass murderer.

“Did she ever come after you?” Spencer asks, remembering she wanted to talk to a member of the
class about that final Monday Jenny was present. This will have to suffice for now. “In class, maybe? Or at lunch? Right before she left?”

Lucy frowns slightly and reflects on her memories. She tenses a bit, some anger rising within her now. “Not that I’m aware of.”

Spencer remembers whose side she’s supposed to be on and squeezes Lucy’s knee. “That’s good! Yeah, maybe she had some baseless, insane dislike of you, but she’s dead and you’re not. And Beth came back to you! You won.”

But it doesn’t feel like a victory, not right now. All three girls look over at Beth’s web, which remains unchanged.

Lucy closes the journal and hands it back to Spencer. Her tone even and cold, she says, “I don’t think this was very helpful.”

Yeah, no kidding.
Twenty minutes later, they’re still sitting in awkward, bored silence and Beth hasn’t moved. Spencer leans over the bunk for a fifth time to check, but Faith just says, “Give it a rest, already. Little Miss Muffet ain’t talking.”

Spencer rolls her eyes at the botched reference and flops back down on her bed, staring at the ceiling. “She’s just usually more forthcoming.” The restlessness of Shark Week always sets in fast, but Spencer’s feeling especially cooped up now. Every minute they waste here is another minute Quinn might not have to spare.

Faith rolls over in her bed to face the wall. “Yeah, she’s a real chatterbox.”

At the moment, however, it’s not Beth’s words (or lack thereof) that give Spencer pause—it’s the fact that Beth’s still here at all. She’s almost always made herself scarce, leaving behind her messages and going into hiding. It’s been months since Beth wrote in a web and then remained with it. There must be something more she wants to say, but if so, why isn’t she just saying it? Knowing now that Beth eats flesh makes her lingering presence very creepy, almost like she’s—

Oh god.

“And guys? What if—” Spencer stops herself just as Faith and Lucy look up at her from their bunks, uninterested. She hops down and goes to the far back corner, the furthest distance from the spider and motions for the others to join her.

After a moment, they shuffle over, if only because there’s nothing else to do. They huddle together under a particularly disturbing painting Lucy made. It looks like a demonic monster from a fantasy video game with blazing red eyes, broad horns bulging from its head, and a ripped, muscular torso. It’s labeled “MOOSE.”

“I think she’s watching us,” Spencer whispers. Both girls turn to look over at the web, but Spencer smacks their arms with the backs of her hands. “PSSST. BE COOL.” Lucy turns back with fire in her eyes, and Spencer can’t believe she just hit Lucy. “Sorry, sorry, Lannister!” she retracts with her hands up. “Just...what if she was sent to keep an eye on us?”

Faith crosses her arms. “In case we decide to walk out of here?”

“I don’t know.”

“Wait, ‘sent’? Who sent her?”

“The others,” Lucy answers for her. She catches Spencer’s eye, as they’re suddenly on the same page. “You think they’re working together! I’m so proud of her for making spider friends!”

“Oh, friends who tried to kill me?” Faith adds.
“Maybe?” Spencer says. “I mean, it wouldn’t be the craziest thing I’ve ever heard.” It certainly makes more sense than thinking Beth was taking orders from a human. But if she really is a spy-der (ha ha ha), there’s no telling what all has been a ruse thus far. Maybe Beth’s just been stringing Spencer along the whole time. (She almost wants to say these out loud. She could do this all night.) “But it leaves the question why.” They’re quiet for a moment before Spencer asks Lucy, “Did she ever give you any reason not to trust her?”

“No.”

“Me neither,” Spencer says. “Everything she said in the webs was true, at least from what I can tell.”

“Okay,” Faith says, “So, what? I can take her out right n—”

“NO!” Spencer and Lucy shout together, echoing much louder than they wanted.

Spencer buries her face in her hands. “I don’t think she’s working with them.” It’s not that she can’t believe it, it’s that she honestly doesn’t want to. It depresses her too much to think everything she’s built this case on has been a lie. “If Beth says Quinn is alive, then she must be.”

Lucy looks relieved the conversation is heading in this direction.

“Yeah,” Faith says, “because writing, ‘I’m going to help them kill you in your sleep’ doesn’t really fit on the web.”

“Look,” says Spencer, “right now, I don’t think we have any other choice but to trust her. If she’s working with the bad guys and she wanted us dead, I think we would be. Why take Quinn instead?”

“I still can’t believe they would want to hurt us,” Lucy says sadly. “They’re such peaceful creatures. They must have really needed a mother. I should’ve been there for them.”

“Okay,” Faith says, “so she’s not watching us, then?” She gestures her head back toward Beth. “Thanks for the pep talk, boss.” She turns and climbs back up to throw herself down on the bed.

Spencer sighs and walks back over toward the web, standing with crossed arms. There must be more to the situation than this. They still don’t even know for certain that Quinn is missing. Everything feels upside-down, like a bad dream.

On a whim—a combination of frustration and exhaustion—Spencer marches to the cell door and shouts, “Quinn?” But the only responses are some cat-calls and angry “Shut up!”’s—which is what she expected. As if it would be that easy.

A few moments later, Buffy makes her way to their end, drawn by the noise, and settles in right next to the cell door. She stares Spencer down, inviting her to make a scene, Pretty please.

Great.

This is going to make their group conversation much more difficult now that Big Sister is listening. They silently agree, ixnay on the word ider-spay. Faith sighs and pulls herself back down from the bed to stand with her cellmates as they contemplate their next move. Beth’s still just chilling on the bed frame, in no hurry to give them any more information. Quinn’s alive, so her job here is clearly done. What the fuck else could they need to know?

Spencer takes a deep breath and tries to regain control of the situation. “Okay, now what?”

“Who says it even matters?” Faith whispers. “Beth could write ‘Next door, dumbass’ and there still
isn’t shit we can do about it.” She motions to Buffy with her head. “She’s in no hurry to do me any favors. Sexual or otherwise.”

“Well, I’m out of ideas,” Spencer says with a sigh. “We have to do something.”

“ Heard you the first ten times.”

“There has to be something we’re missing. I swear, Beth is the key to all this.”

“No,” says Buffy, eavesdropping, “Dawn is the key.” She looks proud of her joke.

Spencer doesn’t get it.

“You bring little sis up here for a day,” Faith grins. “We’ll make her feel right at home.”

“Gonna wow her with your little puppet show?” Buffy tilts her head.

Without warning, Sue’s voice echoes through the corridor over the intercom, humming between the metal plated walls. No plinking, no repeated message, just two hurried words.

**CODE PINK**

Buffy takes off running up the cell block before Spencer can ask what’s going on. Bitch is fast.

Faith and Spencer turn to look at Lucy in her pink uniform, but she's just as confused. “I’ve never heard that one before.”

Spencer’s eyes go wide. If it were about Lucy, the guards wouldn’t have run away. And there’s only one other prisoner she associates with the color pink. “It’s Quinn! It has to be.”

“Shit,” Faith says, running a hand through her hair. ”She gets her own code?” Considering the question, she then asks herself, “Do I have a code?”

“So, do we wait for the guards to find her?” Lucy asks Spencer.

“It didn’t save the others,” Spencer points out. “They probably don’t even know where to begin looking.”

“Like we do?” Faith snaps. “Unless your magic spider is holding out on us, we’ve got nil.”

She’s right. “Okay.” Spencer turns to Lucy. “Do you want to ask her, or should I?”

The trio turns and looks at the little spider again. Spencer feels absolutely ridiculous.

“I’ll do it,” Lucy says, running her hands down the front of her pink jumpsuit. “I think it’s time we reconnected.” With a few tentative steps, Lucy sits down on her bunk about a foot from the web. She leans in to where Beth is resting and speaks softly to her. “Hello, Beth, my darling. It’s so very good to see you again.” She lets each sentence breathe for a moment before continuing. “You’re looking well. I’ve missed you oh so very much. How have you been?”

Faith’s getting impatient. “You gonna ask her about the weather, too?”

“Whether what?” Lucy asks, confused.

"Forget it," she sighs and turns away to pace back and forth in the cell.
Lucy shakes it off and refocuses. “It seems like you’re here to help us, and we...want to trust you. You and I were very close once, and now it seems your new sisters have taken mine. I know they had their reasons.” Lucy glares at Spencer. “But we don’t want any more spiders to get hurt.” Now Spencer’s the one glaring at Lucy. “We just want to save Quinn.”

Beth doesn’t move.

Lucy closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. “Please tell us where she is. It looks like you know, and that you want us to know. So, just, tell us. Please. Show us we can trust you.”

A quiet moment passes, and then, just like that, Beth starts moving again. She begins extending her web downward, creating a backdrop for more letters below her previous message. Then, she adds thread one segment at a time.

“She’s writing!” Lucy says, clapping. It’s the happiest she’s looked in days.

The other girls rush over and watch the magic unfold before them. Line by line, the first letter takes shape. Beth is still scurrying quickly back and forth when Spencer says, “‘G’! I think it’s a ‘G’!”

As Beth connects the final horizontal thread, a loud whooshing noise fills the corridor. The space just beyond the cell door, where a snarky Buffy stood not five minutes before, flashes in and out with a bluish haze.

“Whoa! The fuck?” Faith calls out over the whirr.

Spencer recognizes what’s happening and she holds her hands up to block out the incoming wind and light. The force pushes her back several steps, but then, as the TARDIS comes fully into view, she moves forward again for a closer look.

The same red-headed woman from before pokes her head out the door. It’s a bit cautious, but once she seems to realize she’s in the same place, she claps her hands with a, “Ha HA!” and steps out of the big blue box.

“The hell is that?!” Faith says behind her.

The woman catches Spencer’s eye and pauses, recognizing her. “You! I just saw you yesterday!”

Yesterday?

“You know her?” Faith asks Spencer.

“Not really.”

“Hey! What’s going on over there?” a voice carries from next door.

“Fuck off,” Faith calls back.

“Who is that?” Nichols continues. “She got any weed?”

“How ‘bout you bury that nose back in Johanna’s snatch and leave us the fuck alone?” Faith bangs her fist on the wall with two dull thuds.

“On Shark Week? I’m not an animal.”

The stranger butts in, “Look, d’you know anyone called Dolores?”
“You can call me Dolores, baby,” Big Boo’s voice chimes in.

“Please don’t,” Spencer says to the woman – Donna, was it?

Now it’s bugging her—the name Dolores sounds familiar, but she can’t place it. Maybe she heard it in one of the classes she visited with Mack? Or saw it on one of the office files, maybe. There are at least a hundred girls up here. It’s not a common name, but that’s status quo for this place. Maybe Donna is who put Dolores in here and she’s come to get her back out.

“Who are you, again?” Faith asks, just as Spencer was about to do so herself, but the woman doesn’t get a chance to reply.

“Spencer?” Lucy’s voice makes Spencer’s blood run cold. “Where’s Beth?”

“Who’s Beth?” the woman says.

Lucy and Spencer are both wide-eyed. Lucy steps forward, pointing. “She was right here on the web, but now I don’t see her.”

“Check the bed,” Spencer says, looking down, and she starts scouring the floor with careful steps like she dropped a contact lens. “She can’t have gone far.”

“Oi,” the redhead says, “Where’s Dolores! Is she under the bed, too?”

Spencer gets on her hands and knees to look under Lucy’s bed, then the other bottom bunk, and that’s when Lucy screams.

“What?!” Spencer turns, frantically. “Where?!”

Lucy’s pointing, horrified, to the bottom of Spencer’s shoe.

NO…

“Oh my god. Oh my god!” Spencer rips off her shoe and looks, but there’s no question—Beth is now a spider pancake. The chaos of the TARDIS’s entrance must’ve thrown Beth off the web and into Spencer’s path, crushing her like an oncoming train. “It was an accident! The wind, it pushed me back… I wasn’t looking… Fuck!”

Beth was their best chance at finding Quinn, the only one who knew where she is, and now she’s gone.

Spencer throws the shoe at the wall in rage, and Lucy screams again in horror. “It’s not like she can get any more dead!” Spencer screams back.

“Who’s dead!?” the woman asks. Now she sounds scared.

Lucy marches over and slaps Spencer clear across the face. Without hesitation, Spencer slaps her right the fuck back, just as hard.

“Shit,” Faith says, stepping safely out of range.

Lucy stares Spencer down but says nothing. Spencer’s starting to think no one has ever hit Lucy Fabray before. Or at least, no one has ever lived to talk about it. Lucy’s breathing fast, like she might snap at any moment. And there’s nowhere for Spencer to hide.

“Okay, so, what now? Plan B, anyone?” Faith asks in a thin but necessary attempt to get them back
on track.

“WILL SOMEONE PLEASE TELL ME WHAT THE BLOODY HELL IS GOING ON?” the redhead yells.

“FUCK OFF, LADY,” Faith snaps back at her.

The woman steps back, visibly put off by the comment, then flashes Faith a two-fingered gesture when she looks away.

Lucy and Spencer aren’t moving. The pain and horror and sadness of the situation is still sinking in. Spencer looks to the web, but there’s just an empty space after the letter G where more was clearly meant to follow. She looks at Lucy and says, as a peace offering, “We tried. She still trusted you. It wasn’t for nothing.”

“She trusted you, too.” Lucy’s words are dripping with anger. “And now what do we have? Nothing.”

Spencer turns away and tries to hold it together. Every time they get another step closer, something takes them two steps back. She can’t help but feel responsible for the mess they’re in and for whatever might happen to Quinn now. But she has to be the voice of strength and reason here. She has to be the one with the plan.

Spencer turns to the woman and says, “Yeah, so, hi again. Thanks to your grand entrance, I just squashed the only living thing that can tell me where her kidnapped sister is. Who, by the way, was taken by killer space spiders that are going to eat her alive, if they haven’t already.”

The redhead blinks. “...Who’s been squashed?”

“Beth,” says Lucy.

Faith shrugs. “Spider.”

“A killer spider,” the woman clarifies.

“A good one,” says Spencer.

“A good killer spider.”

Lucy asserts her authority with her tone. “She was my daughter.” A beat. “Kind of.”

“Your daughter’s a spider,” the woman says, restating it as if that’d help it make more sense.

“I loved her and now she’s dead.” The expression on Lucy’s face makes it quite clear that’s the end of the conversation.

But the redhead just returns her sass. “I thought we wanted to kill the evil space spiders!”

“No!” Lucy cries.

“Ohhh, yes we do!” Spencer retorts. Immediately, she realizes her mistake and says, “Not Beth!”

She runs her hands through her hair. This is getting way out of hand.

“Just, you know,” Faith says, “the rest of them.”

“Not the sister we’re rescuing,” the woman clarifies.
Spencer’s had it up to here with this. “Quinn’s not a spider.”

“Who’s Quinn?”

They yell simultaneously, “HER SISTER.”

“MY SISTER.”

The redhead holds her hands out with raised eyebrows. “I’M JUST ASKING.”

Spencer’s done. “We don’t have time for this! You need to find a way to let us out so we can save Quinn.”

The redhead stands her ground. “I do, do I? Well, sorry for you, I’m here to find Dolores. One crisis at a time.”

“Who is Dolores?” Spencer snaps. “While we’re at it, who are YOU?”

She huffs a bit and stands taller, as if quite put off to be questioned this way. “Donna Noble, kickass time-traveling space-doctor...woman. Who are you?”

“Spencer…” She freezes. “Wait, Dolores Umbridge?”

“Who?” asks Faith.

“The psychiatrist.”

“Bet she’s a busy woman,” Donna says under her breath.

Spencer turns back to Donna and steps forward. “Umbridge sent you a message? How? When?”

“A distress call, yesterday. Just before you saw me.”

“That was months ago,” Spencer says.

“Was it? Shit. Sorry. Still learning how to drive this thing.”

“What IS that thing?” Faith asks.

“Spaceship. Time travel,” Donna repeats, annoyed. “We got a message about killer monsters eating people, and I couldn’t just leave her there. But he was all, ‘Booo, space lesbians blah blah, prison scary boooo.'”

_Oh, right—there was a guy with her_, Spencer remembers. “Where’s your friend?”

“Lingering about some market on a planet somewhere.” Donna handwaves. “I’ll be back before he knows I’ve run off.”

“Well, this has to be about the spiders.” Spencer turns to look at her cellmates, shaken to her core. “That frog-faced bitch knew about it the whole time.” In their sessions together, Umbridge had the gall to blatantly lie to her face and make Spencer think she was crazy. _You’d think a prison psychiatrist would know better than to mess with killers and piss them off. Why is she hiding this? How much does she really know?_ Spencer turns to Lucy as she puts the pieces together. “Do you think she knew they were going after Quinn?”

But Lucy isn’t listening. She’s walking toward the bars slowly, staring down their guest. “You came
to help us, before. But instead, you left. You left us here to die.” She lets that sit for a beat. “You did nothing.”

“Hey, I wanted to stay,” Donna protests. “The Doctor, he said—”

“If you’d stayed,” Lucy continues, “we wouldn’t have been attacked in the night. My precious spider would still be alive. And my sister would be safe.” Each word is thick with implication, making the already crowded room even smaller.

“Well, she came back,” Spencer says, “so let’s work with that. We still have options here.” No need to get the mass-murderer any more riled up. They have to keep moving forward. Quinn might still be alive, and what’s done is done. “She’s here to help us.”

“To help Dolores,” Donna says for the millionth time.

Spencer isn’t giving up that easily. She’s the daughter of a lawyer and knows a thing or two about bargaining. “Well, I can take you to her.”

Donna squints at her suspiciously. “Tell me the way.”

“I can’t. This place is like a damn maze. But I promise I can get you there. I’ve been to her office more than once.”

“Because you’re such a mental case?” Donna looks around in both directions, clearly wanting someone else to talk to. “Aren’t there any guards in this prison?”

“Yep, fully armed and not friendly to strangers,” Spencer says. “And if they come back before you’ve freed us, her sister is spider food and you’ll be our next roommate. I’ve heard a lot of the other girls talking about how much they just love redheads.”

Donna’s considering her options. She doesn’t seem to like the thought of releasing indicted space criminals, but becoming one isn’t a superior alternative. “None of you’s ever killed anyone, right?”

“Uh…” Spencer doesn’t mean to say it out loud.

But then Lucy adds, “Other than my spider?” and Spencer cringes again. “Not today.”

Donna rolls her eyes and sighs dramatically. “Shit. Fine. Just…” She moves her hand up and down in front of her body, pointing in self-reference, and says, “NOT A KILLER SPIDER. Alright?” Reaching into her jacket pocket, Donna pulls out the same strange pen-size contraption her companion had with him last time. “Stand back.”

“What is that?” Lucy asks.

“Sonic screwdriver.”


“Is it dangerous?” Spencer says, moving clear out of the way.

“No idea,” Donna says, pointing it at the lock and giving the device a shake, like that would start it up. It doesn’t.

Spencer blinks. “…Uh, is it supposed to…”

“No idea,” Donna says again, and then she pushes a button on the side and a loud buzzing noise fills
Spencer covers her ears, waiting for it to end. After a moment, the latch on the cell door clicks. She tentatively reaches forward and gives it a yank, and the door slides open without a fight.

Donna jumps and cheers, clearly quite pleased with herself.

“Oh, hell yes.” Faith cracks her knuckles with a smile.

Spencer switches into action mode and starts toward the door, looking left down the corridor to see if Buffy’s in sight. She’s not. “Beth gave us a head start on where to look. Quinn’s alive somewhere that starts with a G.” She points to the web where the lone letter still remains.

“This is it?” Donna asks, a bit disappointed. “A literal G-string. No wonder you like it.” Nobody else seems to think it’s funny.

Faith ignores her and looks to Spencer. “One of the gyms, maybe? There’s four, right?”

“Mmhmm,” Lucy says. “It could be any of them.”

“Gyms?” Donna repeats. The plurality of that seems surprising, as it should. “OH, right. Lesbians, athletics. Go on.”

“When I was in Sue’s office the other day,” Spencer says, “she told Becky to have Raven give her a status update on something called the G. Do you think that could be this?”

“What’s it stand for?” Lucy asks.

“I don’t know. But it could be a connection between Sue and the spiders.”

“Somebody had to bankroll it,” Faith offers. “I wouldn’t put it past her.”

“It still doesn’t tell us where to find Quinn,” Lucy says.

“Can you think of anywhere else that starts with ‘G’?” Spencer asks the room.

Nobody responds.

“Gyms it is, then,” Faith shrugs.

“Maybe Umbridge—Dolores—knows which one the spiders are using. Let’s start there.” Spencer pushes past Donna and looks both ways one more time. Running into Buffy or Boomer is the last thing they need right now. It’s been suspiciously long since they’ve seen a guard, but that Code Pink seems to have bought them some time. They were due for a lucky break. She heads to the left, down the corridor, with Faith two steps behind.

“Spencer, wait,” Lucy calls, sitting back down on Santana’s old bunk. “I want to help Quinn,” she says carefully. “You know I do. She’s the only family I have.” Her eyes look sad. “But I can’t hurt them. I just can’t.”

“You’re not coming?” Faith is pissed.

“They’re not Beth and I know that, but it’s just too soon.” Lucy’s voice is shaky and sincere, another rare moment of vulnerability and relinquishing of control.

Spencer knows all too well that there’s fire behind the smoke, and she’s not going to let Lucy off the
hook, not when they need all the help they can get. Walking back toward Lucy, Spencer leans over and levels with her, eye to eye with a hardened glare. She doesn’t have time to coddle crazy people. “Fine. Don’t kill any spiders. Whatever. But Quinn needs you, and we need you, so get the fuck up. Let’s go.”

She turns and steps back out the door, trusting that Lucy is behind her this time. Spencer looks at Donna and says, “Her office is this way. But we need to make a stop first.”
“Hey! Whoa, guys!” Nicky calls as the group passes her cell. “Come on! Help a sister out!”

The newly minted rescue gang—Spencer, Donna, Faith, and a reluctant Lucy—blaze right past cells 2 and 3, gaining speed and trying to ignore the confusion they’re causing among the other inmates.

“Hastings!”

Spencer stops in her tracks without meaning to. There’s just something about Vee’s voice that scares the shit out of her. The woman in cell 4 steps up to the bars, and Spencer turns to face her as bravely as she can.

“I’m kind of in the middle of something right now,” Spencer starts, and she points to the other women around her. “So, this is gonna have to wait.”

“I can see that. And I’m not trying to slow you down or get you caught.”

“Great,” Spencer says brightly. “Bye!” She takes a step but Vee’s voice stops her in her tracks again.

“Nor am I even going to ask you to let me out or how you escaped, yourselves.” Vee makes it sound so kind, like she’s doing them a favor.

Spencer waits awkwardly, not knowing if she should just run on or if she needs permission first.

“Do you have something for me?”

_Crap. Hermione’s papers._

Spencer winces but recovers. Her friends are heading back this way, and this is not what she wants to be dealing with right now. “I don’t have time to go back and grab it, so I’m gonna have to get back to y—”

“So, you do have it.” Vee’s fingers curl a little tighter around the bars, tempering her voice, lest she show too much desperation.

“Oh, the Clap?” Faith cuts in. “She has it, but I don’t think you want it.”

Spencer scoffs at her so-called ally. “Yes, I have it,” she says, turning to Faith, “—NOT the Clap—” then looks back to Vee. “And it can wait.” _Geez, lady._ Spencer looks to the others and says, “Come on.”

“I’m not so sure,” Vee calls after her, laden with innuendo. “Suzanne and I were just discussing how we thought you’d be interested in more information on Quinn Fabray. I guess we were mistaken.”

_That_ certainly gets Spencer’s attention, and Lucy’s too. She’s approaching the situation now and
sizing it up for herself. At the sight of her, Vee lets go of the bars and turns away, walking back toward her crazy-eyed cellmate.

“What’s going on here?” Lucy says.

“Just a little harmless conversation,” Vee replies. She always seems to sound like she’s up to something. Maybe because she is.

“Leave her alone.” Lucy takes another step forward. “Or it might make me cranky.”

Looking at Spencer, Vee says, “Quid pro quo, Miss Hastings.” She sits down on the bottom bunk and reclines like she doesn’t have a care in the world, folding her arms behind her head. “Clock’s ticking.”

It takes a brave soul to ignore Lucy Fabray, but this woman does it with a smile on her face, and that scares the crap out of Spencer. She didn’t grab Hermione’s whole file, just three or four sheets, so what happens when Vee calls her bluff? And why the fuck is Spencer even standing here trying to decide what to do when Quinn could be a five-course meal right this very second? There’s a more than good chance Vee’s just fucking with her. But she’ll never know if she doesn’t pay up.

Her face tightens as she does a quick cost-benefit analysis, weighing the time it’ll take to finish this negotiation versus the imminent guard arrival. It’s already been fifteen minutes since Buffy took off. The longer they just stand here, the more certain their capture becomes.

“FINE.” She looks to the others and says, “Stay here.”

Breaking into a run, Spencer hoofs it back to cell 1, ignoring the revived jeers from Nichols in the background. She turns the corner into the cell and throws Lucy’s mattress up, grabbing the manila folder and dumping out the contents. Sure, it’ll look more convincing if the file is full, but, for Lucy’s sake, she doesn’t want to risk the information falling into the wrong hands if this goes south.

Jumping across to her own bunk, she retrieves the pink papers stashed away and puts them in the empty file. Unfortunately, it still says Fabray, Lucy on the tab. Spencer scours the cell for a pen, something that would look convincing, but doesn’t find anything sharp enough, just crayons and fingerpaint. Her only option is to fold it inside-out so the blank side is showing and pray that Vee doesn’t think it’s suspicious.

Tearing back out at full speed, Spencer makes it back as fast as she can, heaving breaths, and almost runs right into her impatient cellmates. Prison’s gotten her quite out of shape.

“Put that back,” Lucy threatens through gritted teeth, recognizing the item in question.

“I will. Let me handle this.” It’s hard to be authoritative when she’s this scared, but the fear gives Spencer the edge she needs. “Trust me. It’s okay.”

Vee stands up and approaches the group again. “Good girl.” Holding her open hand through the bars, she raises her eyebrows expectantly.

“Not so fast,” Spencer says. She reaches in and draws the first pink sheet out, making sure to ruffle them to show there’s more than one in the file before she sets it on the floor. Dangling a carrot, of sorts. She holds it up, close enough so Vee should be able to make out the name, if nothing else, but still out of arm’s reach. “Tell me about Quinn.”

“Spencer—” Lucy starts, more than a little angry.
But Spencer snaps back in a hushed voice, “This isn’t your file!” She still doesn’t know what Vee wants with Hermione, but it doesn’t matter right now. It’s the only leverage she has. Spencer looks back at Vee and repeats herself. “Talk. Now.”

Vee’s fingers curl to close her empty hand as she retracts it. “What else do you need to know other than she’s missing right now? You’re wasting your time, and hers. Give it to me.”

Spencer puts the paper back in the folder, lips pursed in disappointment. “Let’s go.”

“Yes, let’s,” Lucy agrees. The look on her face, though, says she and Vee aren’t done here, not by a long shot.

As the gang takes their first few steps away from the cell, Spencer hears Vee call out, “She used to be with that dominatrix woman, Rachel Berry. They were lovers. Maybe that’s who took her.”

Seriously? That’s all you’ve got?

Stopping again, Spencer takes the paper back out of the file, walks closer to Vee and holds it out. But instead of giving it to her, Spencer rips it in half at the last second, then tears the pieces again and again. Being outside the bars sure is giving her a power trip. She crumples the bits into a ball and stuffs it down her jumpsuit. It’s a gesture of dominance she immediately regrets, as it itches and tickles against her stomach. She draws a second form out of the folder and holds it up, still out of reach. “Try again. Something I don’t already know this time.”

Vee’s face is cold, yet she seems a little impressed by Spencer’s gumption. They’re playing hardball now. The woman must appreciate a worthy adversary. “She’s missing a toe. The handiwork of your former cellmate, in fact. Perhaps that’s who’s taken Quinn for dinner this evening.”

Behind her, Donna leans over to Faith to ask, “What’s she talk—” but Faith cuts her off.

“Just, don’t.”

Without missing a beat, Spencer tears the second form in half, then twice more, and stuffs it in her uniform. Vee’s face drops a bit, but only for a moment, not wanting to show any weakness. Spencer’s tactics seem to be getting to her, but they’re not any closer to finding Quinn. Spencer knows neither Mistress Berry nor Santana had anything to do with last night’s events.

“Don’t insult me,” she adds as she draws the third paper from the folder and dangles it like a prize. She’s having more fun playing bad cop than she imagined. The problem is, there were only four papers in the folder. She’s running out of bluffing chips.

Vee says, “I’m the one being insulted here. You think I believe those are papers from Hermione’s file and not some blanks from Sue’s desk?”

…That’s a good idea. I should’ve thought of that.

“Donna,” Spencer says, not breaking eye contact with Vee, “who just showed up here today and doesn’t know any of us or our last names—What name do you see at the top of this form?” She holds the paper up beside her.

Donna walks over and leans in, getting close enough to read it. “Hermione Granger.”

Spencer gives Vee a look that says, Your move, bitch.

Vee squints a bit as her expression hardens. “Fine. Perhaps your girlfriend was more forthcoming
than I remembered.”

Spencer can feel Lucy flare with anger behind her at the words “your girlfriend.” But the phrasing makes Spencer’s pulse race just a little faster. In a good way. It’s the first time she’s ever heard the expression used about her.

Vee tilts her head slightly and adds, “I wonder if she got around to telling you she’s a science project. A clone, to be more specific. Made from her.” The glare at Lucy is unmistakable. So is the icy stare in return.

“Wait, what?!” Donna says, but Faith’s just holding up a hand again to shut her up. It’s hard to hear Donna’s questioning over the sounds of ripping paper, anyway.

“Three strikes, you’re out,” Spencer says as she stuffs one more pink paper ball into her suit. She’s genuinely disappointed Vee wasted the last five minutes of her time. She’s glad she didn’t risk stealing the whole file for this dead end. “Thanks for playing.” She wants to stay and ask how the fuck Vee knows so much about Quinn in the first place, especially the last part, but it’s not the right moment. Whatever treasures of information lie in Sue’s office will have to keep until later, assuming there is a ‘later’. Right now, all that matters is—

“This isn’t a game, Spencer,” Vee says. “Though, I’m sure that’s what all the other girls thought. Right before Quinn killed them.”

Spencer’s heart stops.

A grin creeps across Vee’s smug fucking face. “Ahh, there it is. I knew you couldn’t have known everything. You wouldn’t want to be anywhere near her if you did.”

Lucy takes another step closer to the bars. “I said, leave her alone.”

Spencer’s heart is pounding in her ears, but she can’t hear it. She can’t hear anything except the words “before Quinn killed them” repeating endlessly in her mind. Everything else Vee said was true, so why wouldn’t this be? Of course Quinn’s not here for a harmless bank hacking job. Her cellmates said it, themselves—most everyone here has killed somebody. But Spencer didn’t want it to be true, not about Quinn. She didn’t want them to have this in common. Favorite bands, maybe. Tea preferences. Seasonal allergies. Anything else. Just not this.

Her limbs are heavy, but she manages to pull the last sheet from the folder on the ground, trembling as she holds it in front of her. “Last chance. Keep talking.”

“Spence,” Faith cuts in, “we need to go.”

“NO!” And just like that, her eyes are brimming with tears of frustration and betrayal, of lies and withholding and faked intimacy. Sure, Lucy’s killed thirty-seven people, but at least she was upfront about it before she put her hands all over Spencer. This somehow feels much, much dirtier. This feels unclean, a violation. “Talk,” she says, just barely holding herself together.

“Quinn’s killed more people than anyone else on this ship, Spencer. Well, almost.” Another pointed look at Lucy. “I’m sorry she didn’t feel you were close enough to be honest wi—”

“DON’T PATRONIZE ME,” Spencer shouts, tears streaming down her face. “DON’T YOU FUCKING DARE.” Her quivering hands tear the top of the page unintentionally, but it keeps Vee’s attention.

“Fair enough. I’m sorry,” Vee takes a breath before continuing. “Quinn Fabray is a serial killer.” The
six words hit Spencer like a hammer to the head. “Tried and convicted. They found at least twenty victims, so they had to try her as an adult even though she was only sixteen. Someone paid off the media to suppress the story. Millions of dollars. But folks in our world, we knew who she was.” There’s a quiet beat, then she adds with sincerity, “I’m sorry you didn’t.”

Spencer’s trying to breathe, but there isn’t enough air. She looks at Faith, then Lucy, unable to read either of their expressions. “Did you know?” she mumbles, blinking another tear away.

“It’s no big,” Faith says, breaking the silence. Her tone is that of a supportive friend, but Spencer can’t imagine considering anyone a friend who withheld this from her.

Another look back to Lucy. “You didn’t want to tell me?” Spencer starts. “I thought you’d take any opportunity to push me away from her.”

“I care about you, Spencer,” Lucy says simply. “Killers have feelings, too.” There’s a thinness to her voice that doesn’t quite match her words. Maybe Lucy’s battling some conflicting emotions of her own. “And you didn’t want to know. We’re leaving now.”

The moment hangs heavy around them until Vee finally breaks the silence by clearing her throat, her hand once again outstretched.

Spencer scoffs again and crumples up the final paper into a ball, throwing it at Vee’s face with a “Fuck you!” But instead, she misses, and the paper bounces off the bars and lands in the hall at her feet. With a final burst of rage, Spencer kicks it hard, and this time it makes it safely inside. She picks up the empty folder and storms off down the hall before she can make an even bigger fool of herself.

“Hey!” Vee calls. “What about the rest!”

“There is no rest!” Spencer shouts back, holding the tab and letting the folder fall open. She flips Vee a bird with her free hand. “Get it yourself.”

Faith and Lucy hurry to catch up to Spencer, leaving Donna standing alone awkwardly.

“Well, this was fun. Nice to meet you.” And with that, she takes off down the hall as the other prisoners leer and holler. “Brilliant stop,” she calls up ahead. “Absolutely worth it.”

Vee sighs into the paper ball curled tightly in her fist, then goes back to sit beside Suzanne and lick her proverbial wounds.

From the top bunk, Poussey grins and says, “That white girl played you like an Alabama banjo,” without looking up from her tattered copy of Sweet Honey Valley.
“D’you see that?”

“What the hell?”

“No fucking way…”

Spencer’s running now, and they’re drawing plenty of attention from the inmates who happen to
catch her zipping by full speed—or Donna, Lucy, and Faith trailing not far behind her. Kat bangs on
the bars of cell 8 to try to call them back, earning a firm elbow to the ribcage from Graham. Most of
the inmates seem to know the protocol of not drawing too much attention to anyone who’s escaped.
Hermione notwithstanding.

This isn’t a rescue mission. Well, it is—just not for them—but there’s no time to explain that right
now. Spencer doesn’t even know if she wants to rescue anyone anymore, anyway. She doesn’t want
to want to anymore. She really wants to go home. She wants to curl up into the arms of someone
who loves her. Someone who trusts her and cares about her and, fuck. She doesn’t want this to be
happening. Any of it.

Spencer’s head is pounding. Quinn’s a serial killer. The words repeat over and over, each time
cutting as deeply as the first. And here she’d been stupid enough to think she’d fallen for the one
not-too-bad criminal in this place. Other than herself, of course. She thought it was real between
them. Turns out she was just another notch on Quinn’s proverbial bedpost of death. Her deadpost.

What was it Paulie said about Quinn? That she “sees the beauty in death?” How many times did
Boomer tell Quinn to stay up on her bunk when she opened the door? Nobody else ever got singled
out. Only the most dangerous person in the room.

I’m so fucking stupid.

And the worst fucking part is that it doesn’t even change how Spencer feels about Quinn. Not in a
real way. She’s upset as hell, and if Quinn isn’t eaten alive by spiders, Spencer might kill her with
her own two hands. But she doesn’t want Quinn to die today, not like that. Maybe this was the gut
check she needed. Even after all of this, murderous psychotic or not, Spencer still has feelings for
her.

Fine. Quinn’s a serial killer, but she’s my serial killer. Put that on a fucking Hallmark card.

Spencer watches the numbers above the cells as she runs, and she comes to a halt in front of 10,
grabbing the bars with both hands.

Mack and Aphasia instantly sit up. Quinn’s not there.

Fuck.
“Whoa, what the hell?” Mack starts, looking around for any sign of Buffy. “What are you doing?!”

“This the same girl, right?” Aphasia asks Mack. “That skinny bitch who stole my tampon.”

_Seriously?_

“How’d you get out?” Mack asks with a very accusing tone.

“We don’t have much time,” Spencer says. “Where’s Quinn?”

Aphasia crosses her arms. “She ain’t here.”

Spencer looks to Mack as the voice of reason, which is frightening enough, but she’s busy making heart-eyes at someone else.

Mack’s entire demeanor softens, and she stands up with an awkward smile, like the hot girl from school just showed up at her house unannounced. “Hi Lucy.”

“Hello,” Lucy replies, cordial as always with her students. “I’m looking for my sister.”


Spencer’s brow furrows. Now she’s even more confused. “How many languages do you speak?”

“Four and a half. Didn’t you go to school?”

Spencer doesn’t want to have this conversation and refocuses on Mack instead. “What about Quinn?”

“Just English, I think.”

“Where is she?”

Mack shrugs. “Transferred, maybe. Boomer came and got her last night, right after lockdown.”

Spencer’s eyes widen at the good news. “What? Where?” They've just run past half the cells and there was no sign of Quinn. Well, probably. She wasn't exactly looking hard.

“She didn’t say.” Aphasia’s giving Spencer far more attitude than she wants to take right now. “Not even in EEN-GLISH.”

_What crawled up her ass?_

“Did we pass her?” Faith asks Spencer.

“I don’t know. Go check? Ask around,” Spencer says. “I still have a really bad feeling about this.” She thinks for a moment, then says to Mack and Aphasia, “Wait here, we’ll be right back,” as if there were anywhere else for them to go.

Turning to Lucy and Donna, Spencer says, “Come on,” and keeps heading in their original direction to check cells 11-20. She paces quickly, looking for a flash of pink hair in every bunk. There just isn't time to interrogate each cell, and she doesn't want to make too much noise and draw the guards from wherever the hell they are. So instead, she calls out, “Has anyone seen Quinn?” as loudly as she dares.
No one seems to be in a helpful mood, not without a trade for freedom. But Spencer's bullshit-detector is fully charged and turned up to ten, and she's not going to get dicked around around again. Still, whatever direction Quinn was taken, there are at least nine cells of women who could’ve seen her pass.

Is nobody going to help us?

Her heart sinks a little more with each cell they check. Finally, they reach Corky and Violet on the end without any sign of Quinn. Doubling back to be sure, they meet up with Faith at the halfway point and confirm the bad news.

“No go,” Faith reports.

“Shit,” Spencer sighs, leaning over with her hands on her knees. If Quinn simply was taken to another cell, then what was Beth's G message supposed to be? It's possible it was a C for “cell” but there was a pretty clear horizontal line. Everyone agreed.

“So, where the fuck is she?” Mack asks.

“I don't know.” Spencer's starting to lose her cool. “She has to be somewhere.” The possibility that Quinn is already in little spider bellies is too agonizing to consider. “Okay, if she was transferred to another cell last night, it's possible the spiders took her from there.”

Running through the timeline of events, Spencer curses silently. With the seat belts here, this cell is the safest one of all from a floating heist. In any other cell, she’s like a damn drive-thru meal. It can’t be a coincidence that she was moved right before she was taken, can it? Spencer envisions the legion of spiders crawling up the walls and onto the ceiling, then stepping right into the unsuspecting hair of a sleeping girl. Easy pickings.

She closes her eyes and rubs them hard with her hands, trying to press the images from her mind. She groans in frustration and clenches her fists. “I fucking hate these fucking spiders!”

Aphasia picks at a wedgie and lies back down on the bunk. “You still on this spider bullshit? Girl, you need a hobby.”

“BOY, WOULDN’T I REALLY LIKE TO HAVE ONE OTHER THAN SOLVING MURDERS.” Taking a deep breath, Spencer pulls her death glare away from Aphasia and tries to reason with Mack as calmly as she can, considering how much she still kind of hates her. “Look, it doesn’t make sense that Sue would call a Code Pink if she knows where Quinn is, right? So, that must mean that she's missing.” Spencer gives Mack’s inferior brain a moment to process that information before continuing. “We have a lead on where Quinn might be, if this transfer thing is bullshit.”

Another deep breath. This conspiracy theory is never well-received. “We think she’s been taken by killer spiders. The same ones who wrote that web about killing Jenny. They've been eating girls all over the prison for months. I can prove it. And they’re going to have Quinn for breakfast if we don’t hurry up.” She doesn’t have time to deal with any of Mack’s bullying crap. “You have five seconds to decide if you’re going to help us or not, and I swear to god if—”

“I’m in,” Mack says without hesitation.

That stops Spencer in her tracks. “Really?”

“I hate spiders.”
Lucy frowns, but Mack doesn’t notice.

Suddenly, movement behind Spencer catches Mack’s eye. “Who the fuck are you?”

“Nobody!” Donna’s voice is friendly and non-threatening. “Never mind me!” After Mack looks away, Donna mumbles to her traveling companions, “Fantastic waypoints, by the way. No rush to get to Dolores. Let’s keep doing this more.”

Spencer steels her expression and remains in control, staring Mack down. “She’s the one who’s gonna get the door open. If I tell her to.”

Aphasia tuts and shakes her head with a laugh. “Please. Anyone can do that.” Everyone stares, as if awaiting an explanation, but Aphasia rolls her eyes and offers none.

“Let’s go. Open the door,” Mack says, and Donna starts fumbling with the silver device again to find the right setting. After two tries, she still hasn’t gotten it.

“Amethyst,” mutters Aphasia.

Spencer sighs. “Amateur?” she corrects.

Now Aphasia’s the one confused, like she didn’t hear that right. “‘Am I a chair’?”

Oh my god. “PLEASE JUST OPEN THE DOOR,” Spencer shouts louder than she means to.

“Alright, alright! Keep your knickers on. Here, look out,” Donna says to Lucy, who’s closest to the door, then points the sonic screwdriver and fires.

Spencer grimaces at the sound waves, but they don’t last long. The door latch unlocks, and Spencer wastes no time letting herself in. She approaches Aphasia’s bunk with a renewed sense of purpose. “Tell me you have some weapons.”

Donna looks very confused. “Hang on. What?” She looks around, like there must be some giant, invisible arms closet on the back wall she’s missing. “This is a prison cell, yeah?” she whispers to no one in particular.

Faith crosses her arms and stares at Aphasia. “She has mine.”

“And mine,” Lucy adds, dryly.

Spencer looks just as confused as Donna. How the hell would Aphasia have all that? The arms dealer doesn’t budge.

“We’re going after Quinn,” Mack says. “So, move your fucking ass before I make you move.”

Aphasia huffs and climbs down until she’s standing on the side of what used to be Spencer’s bed. She grabs the end of the mattress and flips it over, pulling it off the bed frame completely. It hits the floor with a soft thud.

Spencer can’t believe what she’s seeing. There—where the mattress just was—is a dark, open space. It’s three-dimensional; there is depth to it, but it’s unclear just how deep it goes. Aphasia’s laid down some horizontal beams across the frame so her mattress won’t fall in. Spencer can only see a little bit without stepping any closer, but there’s definitely property in there. It seems completely removed from reality itself, as it’s somehow occupying the space where Spencer used to sit and sleep and read. She leans over to look underneath it, and she sees the solid, metal frame on the underside. She
goes back and forth a few times—black void on top, gray frame underneath—and it’s clear that this is some fucked up shit. It’s a gateway into another dimension. And it’s the trippiest thing Spencer’s ever seen in her life.

It’s a veritable black hole.

A floating, black hole full of stuff.

Spencer hasn’t taken enough physics classes for this.

She moves forward to get a better look, but Aphasia turns and points at her, screaming, “BACK THE FUCK UP. I SAID THIS AIN’T WAL-MART.”

Without taking an eye off Spencer, Aphasia reaches into the nothingness and digs around. It sounds like she’s rummaging through a junkyard or a bag of pots and pans. Spencer sees her pick up and toss aside the plastic orange pumpkin of candy, then reach deeper where it had been. Aphasia finds a small knife with a wooden handle, holds it up to the light, looks it over, and tosses it back inside. She then finds a second knife, examines and rejects it as well. The third knife exhumed—one with a fancy, curved blade with a slit in it—she turns and hands to Faith.

“Much obliged,” Faith responds with a grin that’s for the weapon, not its keeper.

“How is this even POSSIBLE?” Spencer shouts.

Is no one seeing this but me? This DEFIES REALITY. WHAT IS HAPPENING?

Aphasia stops and turns, then says to Spencer, “Would you shut the fuck up? She did a thing, okay? Awhile back, to thank me the first time.” Her tone makes it clear she doesn’t want to discuss it any further.

Hermione. Of course.

It’s a spell, cast after Aphasia got her the wand back.

“So...it creates extra space,” Spencer says, making sure she understands.

Aphasia keeps digging, not looking over. “Yeah, it can make anything bigger inside.”

Even an inset bedframe, Spencer muses. It’s genius.

“HA!” Donna says, making Spencer jump. “Bigger on the inside!” She’s the only person in on her own joke. “Phone box, prison bed—everything’s bigger on the inside these days. What next, a shopping basket?” she mutters to herself. Then, her tone changes. “Actually, that’d be quite helpful.”

Looking back at Aphasia, Donna adds, “By the way, I’m good, thanks. No knives for me. I’ll just be the door-opener...person.” She waves the screwdriver in the air and exhales a bit nervously. “All set!”

But Aphasia’s already moved on to something else. “Katniss left this,” she says, pulling the next item out. It’s a fully loaded crossbow with accompanying quiver of arrows.

“DIBS!” Mack trips over herself as she lunges to grab it from Aphasia.

Spencer’s terrified to think about the fifty different ways this could go wrong, but she’s more scared of what might come out of the hole next.
“Hey,” Mack says, “what about the blanket?”

Spencer tenses up. The last time someone talked to Aphasia about a blanket, the argument went on and on for no good reason. “Oh god, can we not do that again, please?”

“Maybe that’s why we can’t fucking find her!” Mack shouts.

Aphasia seems to be considering this point very seriously, so Spencer is forced to ask, “…You think we can’t find Quinn because she’s hiding under a blanket? We’re not playing Hide and Go Seek.”

A beat passes, then she asks, much lower, “Right?”

Aphasia gives a cautionary glance to her audience, then seems to decide there’s no harm in discussing something that’s long gone. “Hermione had this magic blanket that makes you invisible if you put it on. It’s how I got around without being caught. And now we can’t find it.”

Faith laughs openly, and all eyes turn to her. “What? They can’t find their invisible blanket. That’s funny.”

“IT’S NOT INVISIBLE,” Aphasia yells back. “It makes YOU invisible. It’s dark blue with a bunch of moons and shit on it.”

“Okay, when was the last time you saw it?” Spencer asks, feeling stupid to even entertain the existence of such an item. But, damn, if only she’d known…If it’s for real, it sounds incredibly powerful. The kind of thing you’d want on a rescue mission in a prison full of deadly guards, for example.

“I let Quinn borrow it a few weeks ago, but she brought it back. I keep it safe, right in this corner so I always know where it is.” Something in Aphasia's face changes, softening a bit. She looks at Spencer and says, “I need it to go do what I do. And I can’t tell her it's gone. ‘Cause that means once she leaves, she can't ever come back, because I can't get it back.”

Everyone else is glancing around looking quite confused, but not Spencer. Without the blanket, Aphasia can't get Hermione's wand for her. This is how she's been doing it. Spencer now remembers when Aphasia disappeared, then mysteriously reappeared—the same day Hermione made her quick entrance and exit again. Spencer vaguely recalls the sound of a cell door opening, or maybe closing, while she was face to face with Quinn in that intimate moment. It’s entirely possible that Aphasia had snuck back in while Spencer was mesmerized by her crush. If she’s being honest with herself, an elephant could’ve walked into the cell and Spencer wouldn’t have heard it.

“I can’t let her down like that,” Aphasia says.

There’s a humility in her voice that Spencer hasn’t heard before. The girl who prides herself on being a master thief is admitting that her prowess was, in fact, the result of some serious outside help. And now Aphasia is pulling back the proverbial curtain to show what lies behind the magic: a scared young woman with no options left. The thing that’s kept her going, saving the woman she loves over and over again, has been yanked away from her, leaving her without a purpose or hope.

“So...” Donna breaks the uncomfortable silence. “No more blanket. Can we leave now?”

Spencer starts to agree but then catches something Aphasia said. “If it’s so valuable to you, why'd you loan it to Quinn?” She remembers all too painfully the hell Aphasia gave Quinn when she borrowed it without permission.

Raising an eyebrow in a very Quinn-like fashion, Aphasia replies, “So she could go spy on you. Too bad you such a ho.”
Spencer grimaces at the accusation, but she considers her activities over the last few weeks, and it's not like she can disagree.

And then, she remembers. The day she heard someone bang on the cell door while she and Lucy had sex.

*Oh my god. We WERE being watched! I KNEW something seemed weird that day.*

...*Oh no.*

Quinn was standing there, watching. Right when Spencer had just said over and over how much she wanted Lucy.

All the blood drains out of Spencer’s face.

“I hope she learned something,” Lucy says with a vague air of superiority.

Mack’s staring daggers into her former cellmate, seething with jealousy. Spencer, however, wants to curl into a ball and die. She’s mortified and ashamed and violated, but not in the good ways that were happening at the time.

“Well,” Aphasia says, “*someone* needs to learn not to steal from me.” She’s looking at Lucy, but Spencer isn’t sure how she could be the one behind it, considering Lucy was behind Spencer at the time. Ahem.

Spencer swallows, feeling how dry her mouth suddenly is. “This blanket…it can cover an entire person? You can’t see them at all?”

“Nope,” Aphasia says. “That’s how Katniss hid under your bed for two weeks.”

Every inch of Spencer’s skin starts crawling as the feeling of violation skyrockets. This prison is just FULL of creepers who lie in wait to fuck with Spencer in their abundance of free time. The image of Katniss a foot underneath her, unknown, is skeeving her out beyond measure. And now, Quinn, watching her do those things for who knows how long.

*This fucking invisibility blanket, I swear…*

*But— wait.*

Invisibility.

“Holy shit. Faith,” Spencer turns with wide eyes. “The night the spiders tried to take you, it was all...weird. It looked like there were parts of you missing, like you were all sliced up. You must’ve been wrapped up in the thread from this blanket!”

“Who in the what now?” Aphasia asks angrily.

“You never said anything about this before.” Lucy steps forward with arms crossed. “I would remember if someone were sliced into pieces.”

*Yes, that's super comforting, thank you.*

“It was hard enough getting you to believe me as it was!” Spencer says. “It felt like a dream because it didn’t make any sense, but I knew it was real. It had to be this. It’s the only thing that explains what I saw.”
“WHO HAS MY BLANKET?” Aphasia shouts.

“THE SPIDERS! God, it all makes sense! The webs, everything. They can’t make their own thread, so they’ve been stealing it from other places. Everyone’s towels, the yarn for Santana’s knitting class, MY underwear...”

Donna blinks. “Spiders stole your underwear? Don’t suppose that’s a story I want to hear.”

Spencer turns back to Aphasia. “I know you had a towel, but didn’t you say you lost it?”

“Oh, don’t play stupid with me, white girl. We all saw your psycho crochet dream journal bullshit on the wall.” Aphasia starts flopping her hands back and forth with her tongue hanging out like a dog in one of the stranger imitations Spencer’s seen in her eighteen years. “I killed Jenny, ooh I’m so scary, my mommy’s a lawyer woo woo, hey Quinn don’t you wanna fuck me, blah blah Taylor Swift blah blah.”

“THAT WASN’T ME. Ask them—” Spencer points to Faith and Lucy “—there was a web JUST LIKE IT after they tried to take Faith. They must have come in and taken your blanket.” Spencer’s mind is racing as the pieces fall into place. “And...I was in the room the whole time. I was right here.” She remembers just what self-directed activities took place that day and adds, “…sleeping. I guess they crawled up the bunk, right past me, and pulled it out from under your mattress? But that doesn’t work.”

“How many spiders are we talking, approximately?” Donna chimes in from the back, sounding quite nervous now.

“Twenty or so at least. Maybe thirty.”

“And...nobody saw this?” Donna asks. “No one saw them thirty spiders coming down the hall into the cell? These guards really are top shelf,” she mutters, looking left and right again to check that the coast is still clear after thirty minutes. Which, it is.

Really, did everyone just leave?

But she’s right, Spencer realizes. There’s no way they could’ve just waltzed in unseen in the middle of the day. Which means they had to have been in here already.

“I can’t...” Spencer says, starting to pace. “They were under my bed. UNDER. MY. BED. I’d bet you anything! They were hiding under your goddamn invisible blanket thing. I bet Katniss left it there when she ran off with Mistress Berry. They were just WAITING.”

It'll take a hundred showers to wash away this feeling. Maybe two hundred.

“No,” Aphasia disagrees. “After Katniss left, I took it back. I’ve had it ever since. I had it that day you almost blew my cover.” Her disdain is quite clear. “And then I gave it to Quinn and she brought it back. After she saw how far you can get your head up Lucy’s ass.”

Yes, let's please talk more about when my serial killer non-girlfriend watched me beg to get banged by her equally murderous sister clone.

Spencer sighs heavily and holds the back of her neck, elbows forward, and closes her eyes. “Fine. Then I don't know how they came in.” She's growing quite tired of admitting defeat. Her mind's been turning faster than a hamster wheel since the moment they woke up, and she just wants all of this to be over already. None of this should be happening to them. To her. She's a nice person. “You wouldn't happen to have any Advil in there, would you?”
Maybe Aphasia's warming up to her, because she says, “Yeah, I gotchu,” and starts digging again.

The tension of the moment eases slightly with that, as light conversation builds over the background noise of Aphasia's rummaging. Lucy turns to Faith and compliments her knife, asking questions about its origin and specifications, and Mack joins in with some knowledge from Knives class. The subject then turns to the crossbow, which they collectively know much less about. Donna seems to want no part of the discussion, growing ever more antsy in the back of the group. If Spencer had energy to spare, she'd explain that Umbridge isn't someone worth hurrying for. Crazy frog-lady can wait. Especially if it means choosing between her safety and Qu—

Suddenly, something flies across the room and hits the back wall, and Aphasia jumps down to the floor screaming, “OH MY FUCK! OH MY FUCK!”

Everyone leaps back and shuts the hell up to see what's going on. It takes a moment to register what they're looking at.

“Oh MY FUCKING FUCK. FUCKING FUCK FUCK FUCK.” Aphasia’s hopping back and forth from one foot to the other with each word she screams.

Sitting harmlessly in the corner of the floor is a mess of dark string mixed with yellow. A small section of towel, maybe a few inches across with severely frayed ends, tangled up in a section of blue fabric with half a gold moon on it—also massively unraveled at the edges. There's barely anything left of either item. But there must be at least five or six spiders clinging to various strings in the jumble.

“FUCKING IN MY BED,” Aphasia's still yelling. “FUCKING SPIDERS IN MY BED. MOTHERFUCKING SPIDERS IN MY MOTHERFUCKING BED.”

As Spencer, Donna, Mack, and Faith each gasp or scream and curse in rapid succession, Lucy simply stands and watches them all freak out like idiots. Mack fires the crossbow right at the jumble without hesitation. The arrow hits the wall several feet above, bounces back, and falls harmlessly onto the floor beside the pile. The end of the arrow lands near enough to one of the spiders to trigger a reaction, but there is none.

Spencer's heart is pumping adrenaline through her body in total fight-or-flight mode. She's the first to say, “I think they're dead,” but nobody's brave—or stupid—enough to get anywhere close to check.

Nevermind.

“The poor dears!” Lucy cries, running forward, mindful not to step on any as she approaches. She squats down and picks up the nearest one with her finger and thumb, holding it up and examining it, turning it over from all angles. It's definitely the same breed Spencer saw two nights ago, the large black kind with the blue symbols, but it's clear Lucy's seeing it for the first time. “Such an exquisite animal. I wish I could've known them.”

Donna gapes, but Faith waves her off.

“They're beautiful,” Lucy says wistfully, looking back at the group. “So perfectly designed. Such expert—”

“Yes, BUT ARE THEY DEAD?” Spencer interrupts.

Lucy's expression hardens at the question, and she stands up to meet them eye to eye. “Yes.” She crosses the room to take her original spot without another word.
They all take a collective breath and keep staring at the pile. It’s a far cry from the full army that came after Faith—just a small battalion—and it may not be about to attack them, but it's still a scary sight. It’s bright enough in here that Spencer can make out the thick rows of hair on their back legs and the sharpness of the fangs protruding from their mouths. These are not things she ever wanted to see.

“Found your blanket,” Faith offers with a shrug, trying to lighten the mood.

“What's left of it,” Spencer adds. If it'd been large enough to cover a whole person before, there wasn't enough left now to cover a shoe.

The only solace is that the invisibility blanket is all but shredded, so the spiders can’t hide anymore. The downside, of course, is it means they can’t, either. Spencer has to assume the spiders got desperate enough for thread that they destroyed their best weapon. Everyone’s best weapon.

“So...?” Donna asks. “They just...died? Starved to death?”

“They got crushed by all that junk you have in there,” Mack says.

“Then, THANK GOD FOR MY JUNK!” Aphasia yells, getting in Mack’s face with arms out. She looks ready to fight, and she’s not the only one.

Spencer’s enraged. “Yes, let’s talk about how there was a group of spiders LIVING in YOUR BED.” She turns to look at Aphasia, now accusing her of some seriously high-level negligence. “THE WHOLE TIME.”

Aphasia’s having none of her shit today and steps right up with a finger in Spencer’s face. “OH, YOU BEST BACK OFF, BIG SLUT SKIPPER.”

“I was sleeping RIGHT HERE for a MONTH,” Spencer fires back, “and YOU, with your flea market of SHIT. You don’t even keep a fucking INVENTORY to know there were KILLER SPIDERS LIVING IN YOUR BLACK HOLE OF…” Spencer freezes, zoning out as her mind connects new dots.

“OHHHHH YOU WANNA TALK ABOUT MY HOLE NOW, IS THAT IT, YOU FUCKIN SKANK?” Aphasia’s spitting high-pitched venom, oblivious that she’s now alone in this conversation. “YOU WANNA GET IN MY BLACK HOLE, YOU BIGASS HO? YEAH I BET YOU DO. WELL, IT’S OFF LIMITS.”

But Spencer’s not hearing a word of this. Her mind is down the hall, flipping through pages in Jenny Schecter’s diary.

**BLACK HOLE**

The web message. Beth knew the entire time. She knew the enemy was right overhead, and she was trying to warn Jenny. They were right here all along, for god knows how long. Every hour of every day Spencer slept in this bed. They could’ve crawled out and eaten her while she slept. Maybe that’s why Beth left. She couldn’t save Spencer, but maybe she was saving herself.

Spencer crumples down into a ball, wrapping her hands around her legs, and presses her face into her knees.

“YEAH YOU BEST FEAR MY BLACK HOLE,” Aphasia screams, leaning over Spencer’s head. “SIT YOUR SORRY ASS ON THAT FLOOR, BITCH. Don’t you come at me like that again. I will FUCK YOU UP. Shiiiit.” She settles to a calm, pumping her body once more at Spencer to
assert her dominance, then leans against the bed frame to recenter herself.

Nothing Aphasia says registers. Spencer’s too stunned and numb with fear over the reality of her time in this room. The silence hangs for a moment between them, sitting awkwardly between the onlookers, and nobody knows what to say.

Then, out of nowhere, Aphasia jumps up on the frame of Spencer's old bed and leans over into the dark abyss. “QUINN?! ARE YOU IN THERE?!”

Spencer and the others look up at this. For a moment, the absurdity seems to have dissipated any anger or tension in the room. Spencer asks, “How deep is that thing?"

Aphasia climbs back down and shrugs. “Deep enough.”

Spencer rises now, fueled as ever to get her goddamn non-girlfriend back. Her skin is on fire, sweat mixing with paper cuts from the torn forms still in her jumpsuit. But even more than that, every inch of her is crawling just thinking about those eight-legged freaks. If they’ve been here the whole time, they must know everything Spencer knows. She realizes they would have overheard her discussing the dream about the “I Killed Jenny Schecter” web. They then had to travel all of five feet to replicate it. It seems absurd that spiders would go to such lengths just to mess with someone, but these are no ordinary spiders. She knows that now. But they’re going to have to work harder than that to break Spencer Hastings.

For months they laid in wait. Waiting to kill Jenny. Waiting to fuck with Spencer. Waiting to take Quinn away.

Well. Waiting time is over.

“I WANT TO KILL THESE FUCKING SPIDERS DEAD RIGHT NOW,” Spencer announces, standing back up.

“I GOT IT,” Mack shouts. In a panic, she starts to load up another arrow, quite clumsily, but Spencer holds her hand out.

“NO CROSSBOW. I mean the ones who took Quinn.” She’s using her simple words, like Mack’s a five-year-old. “The ones we're going after right now who are not already dead. We're going to kill them.”

Lucy huffs, eyes narrowing. “Haven’t you done enough already?”

“NO. I HAVEN’T.” Spencer storms over to the string pile and jumps, landing with both feet on one of the spider carcasses in a firm stomp. She then repeats the action some ten more times on the others, just for good measure, grunting angrily as she goes. “Fuck! You! Fuck! You!” Breathing hard as she comes to a stop, Spencer pushes the hair back out of her face and says, “See? Much better.”

“That was unnecessary,” Lucy sighs.

“What is that?” Mack asks, looking down at the floor near Spencer's feet. In all her jumping, one of the pink balls of paper scraps fell out of her pant leg.

Spencer sees it and says, “Nothing. Garbage,” then turns to face the back of the cell for privacy. Unzipping her uniform, she pulls all the pink bits out from around her legs, angrily throwing them into the pile of death. Her poor skin feels better already. “Ugh, there. Okay. Now we can go.”

But Mack's still confused, so Lucy takes it upon herself to answer the question. “Those papers are
from the office.” With a dramatic pause, she then adds, “It’s what Vee didn’t get from Spencer.”

Aphasia turns and steps forward with the devil in her eye. “Vee?”

“I said it's nothing,” Spencer says, trying to diffuse the situation, as she remembers all too late what’s on the paper and just who she’s talking to.

“Nothing?” Aphasia isn’t buying that at all. “Then what the hell did she get? Because those look like capture forms, and I know you wouldn’t be STUPID enough to give a hellraising slime sack like VEE anything related to someone who has been CAPTURED.” Her voice is rising with every word, temper blazing hot. The vein in her forehead might burst at any moment.

Spencer starts to wonder if she could toss Aphasia up into the black hole with a quick power lift move. Who knows what Aphasia might land on, or if she could ever get out. But it would surely be better than having the rest of this conversation.

“I GAVE HER NOTHING,” Spencer shouts back.

“Uh, you threw one of those papers right at her,” says Faith. “We all saw you.”

Spencer turns in disbelief and spits, “Whose side are you on?!”

Faith points back at Aphasia. “She had my knife.”

Spencer gawks. “I sat on your face!”

That gets a laugh out of Mack. “For real?”

“You know,” Donna says awkwardly, “I really should be going. It’s getting late...somewhere.”

But all eyes are on Aphasia, because right now Spencer is her entire world, and Aphasia wants to burn the world down. She reaches down into the hole and rummages around, not breaking eye contact with Spencer, then pulls out a silver contraption. It’s a staple gun.

_Oh my god._

Aphasia steps toward Spencer, weapon in hand, and starts slowly moving toward the back of the cell. “I told you not to trust her. I told you. And what do you do? You zit-faced, stupid-ass fuckbucket? You give the Devil information on MY girl.” Aphasia emphasizes each word with the tool, pressing it dangerously close to Spencer’s face. She’s going to rearrange Spencer like a Picasso. She’s going to make her pay.

“Lucy!” Spencer calls out. “Do something!”

Weren’t there promises that she was under Lucy’s protection now? After speaking up to Vee in her defense, how can Lucy just stand there and watch this happening?

“I’m right here,” Lucy says, like a parent watching their kid tackle the monkey bars. “Trust is very important, Spencer. You had a secret arrangement to share information with Vee. You’ve earned a consequence. Aphasia can handle it.”

_Are you kidding me?!

Spencer’s got her back against the wall now. She’s on the verge of crying for the second time in half an hour, and everything is horrible, and she’s going to die like this, right here in this cell, just like she predicted months ago. With no knight riding in to save her, Spencer has to get herself out of this
mess.

She locks eyes with Aphasia and pleads, “I didn’t tell her anything! It was just one piece of paper, I swear! There were A HUNDRED THINGS in that file, and I only gave her one, but it was some junk form with nothing important! I had to trade it for information on Quinn so I could get her back! She said she knew things!”

“Oh yeah?” Another wave of the device in her face. “You THINK it was nothing, but you don’t really know, do you? What glorious things did the devil woman tell you, huh? Did she lean over and reveal Quinn’s location with her mystical asshole? Because everything that woman says is SHIT.” Aphasia pulls the trigger, shooting a staple right past Spencer’s ear with a loud cah-ching! It bounces off the back wall onto the floor, and Spencer can see out of the corner of her eye, it’s one of the giant industrial staples, nearly an inch long.

Yep, she’s definitely going to die.

“She knew things, okay?! Everything she told me was stuff Quinn already said. It wasn’t bullshit!” This was also not entirely true, but Spencer really doesn’t want to hash out the whole serial killer thing again.

“And yet you gave her the paper anyway. For all of this old information. You must be a real fucking dumbass after all.” Aphasia holds the staple gun up against Spencer’s forehead, right between the eyes.

“You’re right,” Spencer concedes. “I’m very stupid. I’m very sorry. Please don’t hurt me. I swear I was just trying to help Quinn. I’m so sorry.”

Aphasia braces her left forearm across Spencer’s collarbone to pin her to the wall and tilts the staple gun so it’s pressed under her chin. It feels very much like a regular gun.

“Do you even know why she asked you for that shit? Do you?” Aphasia pushes the end hard into the dimple of Spencer’s chin with those last two words. “She doesn’t give a shit about Hermione. Not like I do. Not like I thought you did. She’s trying to get to me. But you don’t seem to fucking get that, so let me explain it to you. She wants alllll of my shit. Okay? She knows about my blanket, she knows about my gear, and she wants to run this place. Because that’s what she does. She runs over people. But at least I got the tits to say no to her, which is more than I can say for you.”

Spencer squirms uncomfortably under the force of Aphasia’s arm, not trying to get away, just trying to breathe. The fear and adrenaline has her chest heaving for air, but all she’s taking in is contempt and, soon, one-inch staples.

“See, you don’t get it because nobody loves you,” Aphasia continues. She makes it sound so matter-of-fact, and the words hit Spencer like a brick. “But me and Hermione, that’s real. I love her. I do. She’s my one fucking weakness. So Vee wants to turn her against me. Or maybe try to use her to bring shit in like she does for me, I don’t know. I don’t wanna know. Maybe she’s just trying to take her out so I won’t have nothing left to live for.” Aphasia stumbles over those last few words.

“Whatever she wants, it ain’t good. I know that. So, I’m not gonna let that happen.”

“I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry,” Spencer wheezes out her clenched teeth as trails of saliva leak onto the staple gun. She can’t move her jaw, and she can’t shake the feeling that whenever Aphasia’s done with her lecture, Spencer’s mouth is going to be shut more permanently. And it seems Lucy’s just going to let it happen.

“You’re fucking right, you’re sorry. And now,” Aphasia says, taking a deep breath, “you’re gonna
Spencer bites back the urge to correct her; it’s probably for the best she’s unable to speak. The cold metal jams harder into her skin, and Spencer is sure she can feel the pointed edges of the loaded staple waiting to break ground.

A little spray gets on Spencer’s face as Aphasia leans in closer and says, “And I’m going to stay here and piece this shit back together so I can figure out just how much trouble your fucknado has brought into my life.”

Spencer whimpers once more, tears mixing with the drool and snot and (probably) blood as she sniffs hard, nodding as best she can. When Aphasia pushes once more against her chest with a shove, releasing her, Spencer stays frozen in place for a moment, watching to see if it’s safe to move. She has never wanted to be out of this cell as badly as she does right now.

Aphasia drops to her hands and knees, picking up the pink paper bits and trying to assemble them like a jigsaw puzzle. When she finds two that fit, she tries stapling them together, not very successfully. Spencer finds it hard to believe that she doesn’t at least have some scotch tape in there. Or duct tape. Or superglue. Or even stud earrings from her DIY Piercings class. But she’s not about to say anything. Spencer’s fairly certain she just made an enemy for life.

As her pulse starts to settle along with her breathing, the full room comes flooding back—Lucy supervising with a watchful eye; Mack, Faith, and Donna still standing there, quietly processing the scene that unfolded before them. Spencer wipes at her face with her hands, grateful there aren’t mirrors in here. If she can’t see how disgusting she looks, she can pretend the others don’t see it, either.

“So, this has been great and all,” Faith says, “but we’re losing daylight here.”

“I really want to shoot someth—” Mack says, then accidentally fires an arrow into her mattress.

Aphasia’s got all twenty-four pieces assembled and laid out beside the toilet. As she reads through the three forms, her demeanor remains calm. “The other one was just like this?”

“Yeah.” Thankfully, it’s the truth.

“Alright. Nothing here Vee won’t already know. Guess you got real lucky this time.” She’s talking to Spencer but doesn’t look at her, just gathers the pieces and heads back to her bed. Placing them down in the storage hold, Aphasia picks the mattress up off the floor and hoists it back up to cover the stash. She starts to pull herself up, but Lucy interrupts in protest, holding out one hand.

“Excuse me, I’ve been waiting very patiently for my turn.”

“Seriously?” Aphasia turns to her, looking much more tired than she did just ten minutes ago. She reaches deep under the mattress and says, “This old thing?” then maneuvers a large, rusty chainsaw through the bars. It’s covered in dried blood and what looks to be...gems?

Spencer’s eyes go as wide as BSM patties. Oh my god, she Bedazzled her murder weapon.

“Hi, baby!” Lucy beams, gently taking the machine from Aphasia with two hands.

Spencer’s eyes are about to pop out of her head. “YOU HAD THAT? RIGHT ABOVE MY HEAD? THE WHOLE TIME I WAS HERE?” She knows she shouldn’t berate the girl who just tortured her, but she’s well fucking past her limit and just can’t take this anymore.
Aphasia glares at her and says, “She likes to garden and shit. Don’t hate.”

Spencer just watches in horror as Lucy Fabray looks her long-lost chainsaw up and down, smiling ear to ear, reunited at last with the source of all her evil powers. She’s downright glowing. Spencer backs away toward the door, eager to put some space between herself and the Texas massacre waiting to happen.

“I’ll also need—” Lucy starts, but Aphasia hands her a small gas can without even looking up.

“Thank you.”

Faith leans over to Spencer and says, “Can’t wait to see what she’s saving for herself.”

Aphasia overhears and looks over, “New York Times crossword puzzle, that’s what.”

Spencer gawks at her. “You’re not coming?”

Aphasia returns the expression and hums, “Nn nn, I ain’t going nowhere,” like they’re insane for not doing the same.

“Quinn’s missing, but you’re gonna do a goddamn crossword.”

“You bet I am. My ass is staying right here on this mattress.” Her volume rises with each word as she says, “Because that’s where I keep THE WEAPONS.” She exhales loudly and mutters to herself, “Everybody always tryin’ to steal my shit!” After a little more digging, she pulls out a carton of Marlboro Lights and reaches in to grab a single pack, then holds it out to Spencer.

With a look of confusion, she says, “Uh, I’m good, thanks.”

“They’re for Quinn,” Aphasia says, like she’s a fucking dumbass.

Faith leans over to Spencer and whispers, “Guess the Wizard doesn’t have anything for you, huh, Dorothy?”

Oh, right. Last but not least.

She hardly expects Aphasia to bestow a gift upon her after what she’s done. Still, there’s a remote possibility that a lowly traitor like Spencer might receive something at the bottom of the barrel. She can't believe Aphasia has all this shit in the first place, but she also won’t buy that all that’s left is Halloween candy and multicolored hygiene products. (“Not Wal-Mart,” my ass.) But what other dangerous items could possibly be in there? An ax? A baseball bat? Pepper spray? The absolute last thing she wants to see on a spaceship is a gun. One stray bullet and they’re all sucked out through the hole in seconds.

She shudders.

“At least give the girl a drink,” Faith says. “I heard you’ve got a gallon of Starbuck’s moonshine stashed for a rainy day.”

“Twenty-nine,” Aphasia corrects her, “and not a single drop for traitors.”

Spencer can’t help herself. “You have twenty-nine gallons of vodka?”

“IT’S IMPORTANT. Not that you need to know why.” Aphasia keeps rummaging around for something she might be willing to part with. “You’d just go run your mouth to Vee.”

She earned that one. But just the one. “Never again,” Spencer says. “I promise. You can trust me.”
“Mmhmm,” Aphasia hums as she pulls out a handful of tangled plastic coat hangers and tosses them aside.

“Too bad there’s no croquet mallet in there,” Mack says, peering through the crosshairs of her new toy again as she aims it at Spencer’s head.

“Whoa!” Spencer quickly darts out of Mack’s line of sight and scoffs.

Don’t I wish I had a mallet right now, you skank bitch.

“How the hell would I have a croquet mallet?” Aphasia snaps. “Here.” She pulls a long wooden handle out with both hands, clanging loudly as it goes, and almost falls off the bed with the weight as it’s freed from the clutter. “I still hate you,” she says to Spencer, withholding the item for a moment. “I’m doing this for Quinn.”

“Got it,” Spencer says. Things have most definitely turned around, and she holds out her hands nervously, hoping Aphasia will just give her the weapon, not use it on her skull. The gesture of good faith falls heavily into Spencer’s grasp, and she tries not to grin too much, as she’s still in the doghouse here.

But she kind of can’t help it—because it’s a sledgehammer.

This’ll do just fine.
The Doctors

Chapter Notes

Here’s the character photo index.

“This way.”

The entourage starts down the corridor, and now there’s no getting around the hollering and cheers of the other inmates. Who can blame them, really? Spencer, Lucy, Mack, and Faith look like they’re heading into a zombie apocalypse, armed to the nines, with Donna bringing up the rear, wielding sarcasm and attitude.

As they reach the end of the cell block, they silently take hold of the wheel on the vault door. It’s hard to turn but unlocked. God only knows what’s on the other side, but they can’t stay in here forever. Faith pulls it open in one smooth motion as the others stand with weapons at the ready, but there’s no one there, just an empty T-intersection. Taking a step forward, Spencer holds up her hand to stop the group. She hears footsteps coming from around the corner, most likely a guard. About time, she thinks. Spencer’s never heard a Code Pink before—or any code other than red, for that matter—but it’s still strange that they’ve been left unattended for so long. A little normalcy would not go amiss today.

She points in the direction of the noise to inform the others. It’s probably Buffy, so Spencer makes a staking motion with her hand.

“Stab her?” Faith whispers, reaching for her knife.

“I got this.” Lucy pulls the crank cord effortlessly, like she’s done it a hundred times. The chainsaw roars to life, and the group jumps, startled. It’s deafeningly loud, and the echo of the sound has nowhere else to go.

“TURN THAT OFF!” Spencer yells, but it’s no use. They’ll be attracting every guard and staff member on the ship now, and there’s no going back. Their secret’s out. This covert mission is over before it started.

I’m so sorry, Quinn…

Spencer ducks out of the way—one hand gripping the sledgehammer, the other over her ear—as Lucy steps forward. Right as she reaches the intersection, Boomer turns the corner, and before Spencer can even react, Lucy’s run the saw diagonally through Boomer’s body from shoulder to hip in one swift motion.

Donna and Spencer scream. The guard falls to the floor in two distinct halves, blood pouring everywhere and quickly nearing Spencer’s shoes. When she dares to look, Spencer sees Lucy’s face and front are covered in an even coat of red spray, yet she doesn’t seem to notice, or care.

Lucy turns the machine off again, and the chain slows to a stop with a dull sputter. Once it’s fallen silent, she looks to Spencer and smiles like she couldn’t be prouder of herself.

Spencer can only stare, frozen and stunned at what she’s just witnessed. She’ll never be able to unsee this. The pile of intestines on the floor is going to haunt her dreams. But right now there’s a more pressing point, and her body is trembling with anger. “SHE KNEW WHERE QUINN WAS. YOU JUST MURDERED OUR ONLY LEAD.”

Mack steps in between them and gets in Spencer’s face. “HEY. DON’T YELL AT HER!” They stare each other down for a moment, then look to see what the wrongdoer has to say.

“No, now, girls, play nice,” Lucy says. She blinks at a stray drop of blood in her eyelashes. “Remember you’re on the same team. And we all want the same thing.”

Spencer’s blood is boiling, but before she can say anything, Lucy explains. “You said the spiders took her. So, it doesn’t matter where Boomer put her. If the guards knew where Quinn was, they’d be walking her back to her cell. No alert code. All Boomer wanted to do was hurt us.”

She’s right, Spencer thinks, but it still seems like unnecessary, gratuitous violence. But then, what did she expect, going to Aphasia for help in the first place? This was all Spencer’s idea. She may have told herself the weapons were for self-defense or for killing the spiders, but it’s not like this was going to be easy, or bloodless. Spencer has no shortage of contempt for Boomer, but that was a horrible way to go out. She tries to focus on the upside, that it’s one less guard to bring them down. One less person between them and Quinn. Better them than us, I guess.

Spencer takes the first steps away from the horror movie scene. “Let’s keep moving.”

“Clean up in aisle five,” Faith says as she and Mack carefully step around the ever-growing puddle on the floor, then over Boomer’s cold, pale head.

Donna whispers to Spencer, “I’m gonna go out on a limb and guess why Captain Lumberjane’s in lock-up.”

Spencer pulls herself out of the daze. “What gave it away?” She tiptoes around and over Boomer’s leg and joins the others as Donna follows.

Faith looks both ways at the intersection. “Where to?”

“Left. Sue’s that way,” Spencer says, pointing to the right. She takes the lead again but instantly feels uneasy. “Up here,” she says, redirecting Mack to come walk beside her so Spencer no longer has a crossbow pointed at her back.

The two of them lead the other three down the long, curved hallway. It’s narrow and there aren’t any doors, so there’s nowhere to hide. While it’s not well lit, they are in plain sight, and any encounter will surely end in more bloodshed. Spencer can only hope everyone’s safely tucked away in their offices with nowhere else to be.

Or maybe they’re looking for Quinn, too.

Spencer wonders what code they’d signal if she, herself, went missing. Or if anyone would even care. Would Quinn have gone looking for her? After that illuminating display of ambivalence back in cell 10, Spencer’s sure her new cellmates wouldn’t blink an eye if she’d been the one taken away. It’s disheartening, but it’s hard to expect too much from people like this. They’re fighting here beside her—even if it’s for Quinn, not her—and that’s as much as she can ask for right now. And it's what she needs the most.
"Just up ahead, past the infirmary." The intake hall, as Spencer calls this, has the rooms where she was interrogated on her first day, given a uniform, and inspected by Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins. All the medical rooms are on the west side of the ship, while the administrative rooms are on the east.

Suddenly, Mack says, "Whoa!" and the group comes to a halt.

A foot is sticking out of the entryway to the wide-open infirmary door. The doctor’s dead. One of them, anyway—the last one she met. Spencer’s certain the woman had full arms and legs at one point, though she is certainly without all four of them now.

"Spiders did that?" Faith asks, shocked to see what damage the tiny monsters they’re hunting are capable of.

Lucy nods with a hum, looking at solid evidence of how her once precious pets have evolved into gruesome murderers.

Like mother, like...

They stand there for a quiet moment, taking in the horror of what was done to this woman. "I liked that one," Spencer says sadly. She wonders if she’s the only one picturing this happening to Quinn.

Mack turns to Lucy. "Should we do anything with the body?"

But Spencer makes the decision. "Not yet. We need to keep going."

Another hundred feet down, they finally reach the wooden door on the right with the brass plate promising one Dr. Dolores Umbridge inside.

"About bloody time," Donna mutters and readies her silver screwdriver thingy.

Mack doesn’t bother to knock, just pushes the cracked door open and then jumps back.

Dr. Umbridge is in her purple throne. Or, at least, what almost surely used to be Dr. Umbridge, before half of her face was eaten. What’s left is on the desk in a pool of blood, hunched over. Her body is half-wrapped in yellow thread, but it looks like they couldn’t complete the job.

"Oh, nasty!" Mack says, holding a hand over her nose.

"Please tell me that’s not..." Donna starts, glancing at Spencer.

"Yeah. That’s Dolores. Or what’s left of her."

"Shit!" Donna says, turning away.

"So, what now?" Mack says.

"I don’t know!" Spencer shouts. "I need to think."

As the body count keeps piling up, she’s feeling more and more hopeless, more and more trapped. It’s getting claustrophobic, knowing there’s no way out of this spaceship, and the spiders are going after anyone with authority in this place.

What a great time for Spencer to be in charge.

The office smells absolutely horrible. The heat from the fire adds a thickness to the pungent odor wafting around them. Light dances off the shimmering threads pinned to the wall above Umbridge’s
mutilated body, covering her collection of floral kitten plates with another message.

**YOUR NEXT**

Spencer wonders, for a millisecond, if it would’ve killed their creators to do a quick grammar lesson before sending them off to threaten people.

“So’s next?” asks Faith, turning to Spencer. “Us? Was this for Quinn?”

“I don’t think so,” says Spencer, looking at the web curiously. “She wasn’t one of her patients.”

“Everyone check the floor,” Mack says, pointing the crossbow down like she’s going to harpoon one of the wild beasts at close range. “They might still be in here.”

“Okay,” Faith starts, looking around the room like it’s some unfamiliar alien universe. “What the hell was this woman smoking?”

Spencer’s become somewhat accustomed to the lace and ornamentation of the room by now. But the first time for anyone is bizarre and disorienting. The pink walls, alone, were enough to make her feel like she’d stepped outside reality.

“I’ve always loved this room,” Lucy says, looking around with a wistful gleam in her eye.

“How long do you think she’s been like this?” Spencer asks the group. The blood seems dry in places, and the corpse has already begun rotting.

Mack shrugs. “Hell if I know.”

“Days,” Lucy says. Her confidence is unnerving.

“Then we have no idea who that message is for. It’s been there long enough, anyone could’ve seen it,” Spencer says. And then, it all makes sense. “You guys, what if *this* was the Code Pink? What if someone came in here, found her like this, and went to Sue? And now the guards are running all over trying to figure out what’s going on.”

“Seems legit,” Faith says, still looking around with one arched eyebrow. “This place definitely sets off some alarms to me.”

Spencer’s heart sinks. She feels deep down the alert wasn’t about Quinn at all. What if the guards don’t even know she’s missing? What if nobody else is looking for her? Spencer’s fine with not being the hero, she just wants Quinn safe. “This is clearly some kind of message, but why Umbridge? It looks like they tried to haul her away, but I guess they couldn't manage it even with the gravity out? So, they leave her here and just eat what they can? It doesn’t fit the pattern.”

“Well, she was in the know, right?” Faith says. “She called Martina McFly for help”—a gesture to Donna—“so maybe they offed her before she could spill the beans.”

“Oh, so it’s my fault,” Donna snaps. “Cheers.”

“This place is rank. I’m out.” Mack takes a step toward the door.

“No,” Spencer says with authority. “There has to be a reason they came after her. We take five minutes now and look. Quinn’s life might depend on it.”

“In five minutes, Quinn could be dead,” Lucy says.
“Then do you have any better ideas?” Spencer snaps. “Because right now, it looks like shit is getting pretty fucking serious.” She points to the web, then drops her arm with a heavy sigh. “We don’t even know how long they’ve had her.”

“You said G’s gotta be a gym, right?” Faith says. “So, we search one by one til we find her. We split up, cover twice the ground.”

But Spencer shakes her head. “No way, it’s too dangerous. We have to stick together. We don’t have any way to communicate with each other. If one of the groups gets attacked, are we sure the others would be able to handle these fuckers on their own?”

“I’m not hurting a hair on their precious little heads,” Lucy reminds them, still gripping the bloody chainsaw with both hands.

“So, you, me, and blondie hit the gyms,” Mack says to Faith, “while these two”—Spencer and Donna—“stay here playing detective.” She looks to Lucy, “Take out the guards, we’ll do the rest.”

“NO,” Spencer shouts. “Give me a goddamn minute!”

“ONE. Then we’re outta here.”

Spencer starts digging through the desk before Mack can object further. Umbridge was very tidy, so there isn’t much to see. No giant piles or large filing cabinets like in Sue’s office. The desk drawers are empty other than basic supplies like pens, stamps, and ink pads. It doesn’t look like Dr. Umbridge did much doctoring.

The only papers on the desk, buried under a long outdated British newspaper, are four file folders—Kara Thrace *(whoever that is)*, Santana Lopez, Spencer herself, and Ellen Ripley.

She immediately grabs her own file—the lone blue one—and examines the cover. She’s seen it before, back when Aphasia waved it in front of her face like a piece of candy. It’s covered in the giant *CONFIDENTIAL* stamps, but now she finally has a chance to see what’s so damn special about it. Spencer opens it and is surprised to see it only contains three sheets of paper: one that seems to be a standard two-sided intake form and one for each of her cell transfers.

“Who’s that?” Lucy asks, recognizing it’s a prisoner folder.

“Me,” Spencer says softly. Her eyes scan through the intake form, desperate for some answers.

“We know you didn’t do it,” Mack snaps. She looks to Faith and says, “Let’s go.”

“HANG ON,” Spencer yells again. “This could be important.” It’s all there—her name, address, date of birth, convicted crimes, locations of crimes, length of sentence.

And there, under DATE OF INTAKE is a checkbox for Standard or Full Service (with the latter checked), with a line for INCARCERATION REQUEST SUBMITTED BY. And clear as day, typed neatly, is the name “Hastings, Veronica.”

In an instant, Spencer’s world collapses around her. The rest of the page becomes a blur through her tears.

*She sent me here. It’s all her fault.*

“Has anyone seen Miss Lady Meowsers?” Lucy asks, a million miles away from Spencer, and checks a chair and all around the floor.
No one answers. The room is silent for a moment as all eyes drift toward their leader. But she’s still staring at the paper in her hand.

*How could you do this to me? To your own daughter?*

“How?!?” Mack says, pounding her hand on the door three times. “Are we leaving?”

Spencer looks up, wiping at her eye with the back of her hand. She grabs the stack of files and heads for the door. “Yeah. We’re done here.”

If this is really what it means to be a Hastings, Spencer doesn’t want to be one anymore.
Spencer’s vision is blurred as they head back down the corridor. Thank god her companions know the way back, because all she can think right now is, *My own mother sent me to space prison.* She can’t understand why. She can’t understand how. Nothing makes sense anymore, not even remotely.

She’s in the middle of the pack—Mack and Lucy in the front, Donna and Faith bringing up the rear. The hum of Lucy’s chainsaw drowns out the sound of their footsteps and spoken directions, and it provides a backdrop of noise for the thoughts clamoring in Spencer’s mind. She doesn’t care enough to tell her to turn it off. Besides, drawing the guards out doesn’t seem like such a bad idea anymore.

The buzzing suddenly revs up to a higher pitch as Lucy slices through another guard, horizontally this time, with no warning at all. The group stops and looks down at the bisected body and guts spilled all over the floor, and Mack vocalizes what Spencer’s thinking. “Uh...that’s Boomer.”

They all stare at the cold face, and there’s no mistaking it.

“But that’s impossible,” Spencer says. “She didn’t just put herself together and come back to life.” A horrible thought crosses her mind. “DID SHE?!” The only thing worse than space prison would be zombies in space prison.

“There’s no sign of the previous wound,” says Lucy.

*Uh, “wound” is one word for what you did to her, sure.*

“Twins, then?” Donna says. “And they both just happen to be space prison guards? Bit of a sad family business.”

Spencer agrees. “Doesn’t seem likely.”

“Well, she’s definitely dead,” Mack says, “Come on.”

“Next time could we try interrogating one first?” Spencer says to Lucy, who ignores her and restarts the chainsaw. She leads them back down toward the T-intersection where they began. They meet another Boomer who loses her head before Spencer even sees her coming.

“Jesus!” Spencer shouts, as she almost steps on it. “How many of them are there?”

“Yeah, it’s like Attack of the Killer Clones” Faith offers. She looks at Lucy with a raised eyebrow.

Spencer wonders if this whole mess just got a lot scarier.

When they reach the cell block, they see the sliced remains of the first guard, and Spencer checks what’s left of the nametag. Sure enough, it's still Boomer. That’s three confirmed multiples. Spencer doesn’t know if it makes her feel better or worse. On the plus side, they’re not battling something immortal. On the other hand, there could be a goddamn *army* of Boomers, for all she knows. It
certainly explains why Boomer always seems to be the one on duty. I guess they all just hate me, then. Spencer thinks. They would probably love to see her dead, and now they have their chance. Without knowing an exact head count, there could always be at least one more warm body coming after her.

Spencer looks at her friends. Even with their weapons and violent histories, this band of volunteers is still just a group of trapped, scared women with no idea what they’re doing. How is Spencer supposed to get them out of this alive?

There’s at least one life she can save, even if it’s not her own. Spencer turns to Donna and says, “Your ship’s straight down that way,” pointing into the cell block. “Thanks for all the help.”

Donna glances down the corridor, then meets Spencer’s eyes. “I’m not leaving.”

“Dolores is dead. We’re probably all going to die. You didn’t ask for any of this. You should go.”

“Look, I’m not going anywhere, Missy. So, we can stand here bickering or we can get on with saving your friend.”

Donna wants to fight for her. Spencer’s own mother wouldn’t fight for her, but this complete stranger will.

Spencer steadies her emotions and takes a deep breath, then nods once. “Keep going, straight ahead, stay to the left. Sue’s office is past the processing room,” she says, taking them into the opposite narrow hallway beyond the classrooms. It’s a mirror image of the hall to Umbridge’s office, and Spencer’s starting to picture the layout of this place in her mind now, letting it coalesce as they travel over this familiar territory.

“I thought we were going to the gym,” Mack says. It’s clear she’s longing to shoot something.

“We are,” Spencer says. “Just follow me for a minute.” She knows it’s unlikely the spiders have Quinn in a room that’s used by inmates every day. She can’t shake the feeling they need more information. Luckily, Spencer knows where to find some.

The line of armed women files around the curve of the hallway, checking behind them as they go.

“It’s that door on the left,” Spencer says, pointing. The other four run on ahead, but the door is locked. Faith kicks it twice, and the lock gives as the door frame splinters. They barge in, weapons raised, while Spencer stands in the hall. The lights are flickering, and with all their noise, there could be a dozen spiders—or Boomers—approaching at any moment, and Spencer’d be dead before she knew it.

Maybe this is what her mother wanted. For her to suffer and die trapped and alone in space, stabbed or gutted or eaten by something horrible, something without remorse. Right now, she’s almost feeling scared enough to let it happen. At least then she’d be free from this never-ending terror.

“It’s empty.” Faith peeks back around to notify Spencer. “Your move.”

Spencer steps inside cautiously. There’s no sign of Sue. No body, no web, nothing out of place. In fact, the office is the cleanest she’s seen it. The mountain of papers on the floor is gone, the wall of trophies is intact and orderly, and the desk is free of clutter.

“Search it,” she says. “There has to be something useful.”

“Look, I know where Gym 2 is,” says Mack. “Let’s just GO.”
“I know Gym 4,” says Lucy.

Spencer remembers that’s where Fisting class is and rolls her eyes.

“Gym 1’s next door to my Knives class,” Faith says. “3’s on that hall, too.”

“But what if she’s not even *in* a gym?” Spencer counters. She turns to address the group. “I mean, yeah, I hope she is, but what if it’s something else? We have to be open to the possibility that we’re wrong.” She rifles through some random papers but finds nothing of value.

“Yeah,” Mack says, “we should just stay here and hope Quinn strolls on by. Great plan.” She knocks Sue’s name plate off the desk with the end of her crossbow.

“This ship is huge. And it’s not like we got the nickel tour when we arrived.” Spencer looks around but doesn’t know where to search next. “We need a schematic or a blueprint or *something* that shows us the layout. We can’t just wander around aimlessly.”

Faith throws her arms out. “If we were out looking, we could’ve found her by now.”

“We have some time!” Spencer says. “They just ate a huge meal and couldn’t even finish the job, so they’re probably full, which means they don’t need to eat Quinn. Not yet.”

Mack laughs. “If that’s what you want to tell yourself, then fine. Be my guest. It’s only her life at stake. No big.”

“So noted,” Spencer says dryly. “*Now look.*”

They stare at each other, neither wanting to back down, until Mack mutters, “Whatever,” and starts sifting absently through a drawer in Sue’s desk.

Everyone gets to work. Faith uses her knife to pry open the cabinet of prisoner files. Donna looks behind and under the furniture for anything hidden. Lucy stands guard at the door, armed and ready. Mack digs through the rest of Sue’s desk and reports out that one of the drawers is locked. Nobody has a key or any way to open it, so they keep going. The rest checks out clean.

Spencer sits in a chair by the wall and places the stack of four files from Umbridge’s office on her lap. She shuffles them until hers is on the bottom, then starts rummaging through Kara Thrace’s file (Starbuck, it turns out). When there’s nothing of note, she moves on to the familiar face. “Okay, I really don’t want to think about it, but are we *sure* that Santana isn’t behind this somehow?”

Lucy turns around. “She’s not even here.”

“I know. I mean, when she was.”

“No way,” Faith shakes her head as she fingers through the S-Z drawer. “She was all bark and no bite.”

Spencer flinches at the phrase. *Tell that to Quinn’s foot.* “So, it’s just a coincidence that the spiders eat people and *she* eats people.”

“She what?” Donna turns with a start. “You know what? Nevermind. Didn’t hear a thing!”

Faith looks up now, meeting Spencer’s eyes with sincerity. “Santannibal had nothing to do with this, okay? Find someone else to blame.” She flips past the last folder and slams the door shut, reporting out, “Nothing.”
And Spencer realizes—that’s part of what makes this situation so unbelievably frustrating. She doesn’t know who’s to blame. Whatever scientists created these hell beasts? Lucy, for taking their side over hers? Her mother, for sending her here? Sue and Umbridge, for not believing her when she was right all along? Or maybe she should just blame herself, for letting Quinn get taken.

Everyone is guilty, and everyone is responsible. Nobody is getting out of this mess clean. It’ll be enough if they can get out of it alive.

There’s one more file left in her stack—Ellen Ripley. The giant DANGEROUS stamps on the cover make Spencer wonder what the hell this woman could’ve done. Santana’s file doesn’t even have that on it.

She opens the folder nervously and sees the standard intake form, but it looks like an older version. Much older, in fact. The date on this is almost twenty years old.

“I think I found something,” Spencer says. “Look at this. Ellen Ripley, prisoner number 001.”

Spencer looks up. “She’s been here forever.”

There’s a form for transfer to the solitary ward, dated two years after the intake form. Behind that is a stack of at least a dozen reports of violent behavior. Upon further inspection, each one of them reports assault on a fellow prisoner that resulted in death. Faith and Santana mentioned this weeks ago, but Spencer had hoped they were kidding. Clearly, they weren’t.

All the reports are dated December 25th and signed by Sue. They describe the routine release of Ellen Ripley for her “shower, meal, and participation in traditional holiday events.” Every time, it ends in bloodshed. Spencer doesn’t recognize any of the names until the most recent forms for women named Kennedy, Carmilla, and Xena—just like her cellmates said. But even they were spooked just bringing up the subject. It’s as if Ripley’s victims are ghosts never spoken of again, probably out of fear of retaliation.

This woman sounds terrifying.

But how does this help them? There’s no connection to the spiders, or to Quinn. It’s currently sometime in May, by Spencer’s count, not anywhere near Christmas. Her cellmates talked about it once, but otherwise, the only time she’s even heard the word was when—

…when she read Jenny Schecter’s journal.

MARY CHRISTMAS

Right before the message STOP HER.

“You guys…” Spencer begins, wide-eyed. “What if Ripley’s working with the spiders?”

Mack ignores her and throws another handful of Sue’s stuff from the drawers onto the floor in a loud crash. She has absolutely destroyed this office in a matter of minutes.

“From Solitary?” asks Faith, prying open the next drawer of prisoner files. “No comprende.”

“I’ve been here a long time,” Lucy says, still facing out into the hallway. “Ripley was in Solitary even before I arrived.”

Meaning she was already locked up when the spiders first arrived, too. Damn.

“Alright.” Spencer drops the file back on the desk in surrender. “Let’s keep looking.”
“Maybe it’s just me,” Donna says, “but if someone killed people on Christmas, I wouldn’t let them out to do it again the next year.”

Spencer’s thought this, herself. “Yeah, well, Sue’s not known for rational decision-making.”

There’s more clanging as Mack’s now throwing trophies out of the case onto the floor in a heap. Spencer swivels in the chair and props her feet up to think. Just then, Mack accidentally tosses a trophy right into the hideous Olivia Newton-John framed picture, breaking it and sending it crashing to the floor.

Spencer jumps to her feet. Right at eye-level, where the picture just was, she sees a square on the wall that’s a darker gray than the rest, like it’s been hidden from the light for years. She rushes over and sees it’s a rectangular indentation in the wall, about a quarter-inch deep and the size of an index card. Leaning in, she can read the faint letters stenciled in black paint.

“PLACE MAP HERE AND COVER

“Oh my god,” Spencer says. “Look.” The others crowd around her. “Well, now we know Sue’s alive and didn’t want anyone else to find her.”

“Motherfucker,” Mack curses, and picks up a trophy from the floor just to throw it hard against the file cabinets. The sound echoes loudly in the hallway. Anyone else alive on this half of the ship is bound to hear it and come running.

Lucy turns around at the noise and says, “Thank you. I’m bored, and I’d like to kill something.”

Mack sighs, relieved that she didn’t mess up, and smiles proudly.

“Ok, field trip’s over,” Faith says to Spencer. “I’m gonna check the gyms. You with me or not?”

Spencer’s out of time-outs. They need to get moving.

She takes a deep breath and says, “Lead the way.” She leaves the file folders on Sue’s desk and grabs the sledgehammer, stepping carefully over the pile of Mack’s carnage to follow Lucy out the door.
“Oh shit.”

Two Boomers charge around the corner at full speed, heading right for them.

“Run!” Donna shouts, taking off in the opposite direction to go further down the hall. Spencer’s right behind her, but she doesn’t know if anyone else is. She’s never been past Sue’s office and doesn’t know where this leads, but it’s away from the guards, so it’s the only option. In the distance, she hears the now familiar sound of the chainsaw revving and ripping bodies in half, and she knows Lucy stood her ground. Spencer and Donna slow to a stop to catch their breath, realizing they’ve reached a cul de sac dead end.

Right in front of two doors marked Gyms 7 and 8.

_Eight?!_

“YOU GUYS!” Spencer shouts. She regrets it instantly—if Quinn is in there, Spencer just alerted the entire spider army of their presence. “Shit, hang on,” she says to Donna and starts running back.

“DON’T JUST LEAVE ME HERE!” Donna yells. “We found the gyms!”

“STOP YELLING!” Spencer’s voice echoes, and she curses herself again, running faster. She catches up to the others and the fresh pile of body parts and says, “Two more gyms. This way.” Spencer can hear her heartbeat pounding in her ears as they round the curved hallway to the home of Gyms 7 and 8.

“Nice of you to join me. Still alive, thank you,” Donna quips. “Now what?”

“Enie meenie?” asks Faith.

“Lucky seven,” Mack says, aiming her crossbow at the door.

“You mind covering us?” Spencer says to Lucy. She doesn’t want any more guards ambushing them from behind.

Lucy turns and faces the hallway corridor, poised and ready, but doesn’t respond otherwise.

“I’ll just wait here, then.” Donna starts walking backward slowly. “Keep good old Lucy company.” She doesn’t seem very keen on the idea of being left alone with a chainsaw-wielding murderer, but Spencer agrees Donna will be safer out here than in there.

Faith and Mack are standing in front of the door, weapons at the ready.


Here’s the [character photo index](#).
The boom of the door resonates down the corridor as well as throughout the gym itself. It’s pitch black inside. Spencer hadn’t considered how they’re going to turn the lights on in a spider-infested hell den.

Mack steps aside. “Ladies first.”

_How chivalrous._

“Quinn?” Spencer calls, holding the sledgehammer up. Hearing only the echo of her own voice, she takes a few careful steps into the darkness. Suddenly, the memory of a dozen spiders crawling into her bed on that long, horrible night takes over. Her feet start moving, like she’s doing some kind of tap dance, and she waves the sledgehammer around to tear down any webs.

“QUINN!” she yells again, stomping and flailing as hard as she can, screaming like a maniac. But then the lights come on and she stops, standing in an otherwise empty gym that looks like it hasn’t been used in years. No webs, no spiders, no anything except some dusty exercise mats on the floor in rows and an old cassette boombox on a bench by the wall. Plus one very, very embarrassed Spencer Hastings.

Faith’s hand drops from the light switch just inside the doorway as she stares awkwardly at Spencer. “Yeah, I don’t think she’s here…”

“Just being thorough.” Spencer tucks her proverbial tail between her legs and files out behind Faith and Mack. “All clear,” she says to Lucy and Donna in a poor attempt to save face.

They reposition themselves in front of Gym 8’s door, and it booms just as loudly when Faith kicks it down. This time Spencer calls to Quinn again, then sneaks a hand inside the door as fast as she can and flips the lights on.

This one’s set up with basketball hoops, much like a high school gym. What must be twenty foam and rubber balls of various sizes and colors are strewn all over the place. It’s much cleaner than Gym 7 and safe to assume it’s been used recently—by people, not spiders.

Spencer sighs. She feels bad that a small part of her is relieved. She’s not yet emotionally prepared for a battle to the death, even after everything she’s already been through today.

“Two down,” Mack says, disappointed she still hasn’t gotten to shoot anything yet.

“Seems like.” Spencer tries to visualize the situation. “We know where 1 through 4 are. My guess is 5 and 6 are on the other side of the ship, if we are where I think we are. Come on—I have an idea.”

Lucy revs up the chainsaw and resumes the point position as they retrace their steps. Spencer takes some comfort in knowing they’ve just secured a part of the ship. The more unknown that becomes known, the more in control she’ll feel.

They round the corner, passing the hallway to the other four gyms, and Spencer slows down to cast a glance that way, just to see. It’s empty and quiet. Her gut’s telling her that Quinn’s over on the far side, that they’re not running right past her here _again_, but she’ll feel horrible if she’s wrong about that. It’s not like she hasn’t been wrong here before.

With a shiver, she turns to continue back down the main hall, but something catches her eye. The metal door with the **PROCESSING** sign is open, and from this angle, she can see the familiar, giant window. The red velvet curtain is pulled back, revealing the beauty and horror of uncharted space. It looks different now somehow. More beautiful, perhaps, in contrast to the horrors she’s witnessed today. Or just less scary.
And that chair…it’s where Sue grilled her on the first day in this hellhole. It’s where Spencer first realized where she is, back when she still thought her parents gave a shit about her. When she still thought there would be a way out.

It’s where she was the moment everything changed.

“This what you wanted to show us? A bunch of stupid stars?” Mack’s voice pulls Spencer out of her thoughts. “We movin’ or what?”

“Yeah. One sec,” Spencer says and walks into the room.

Everything beyond the thick glass is still. The stars are barely sparkling, but Spencer is mesmerized. It’s a breathtaking sight, so calm and peaceful. A few small asteroids sail by silently, one after another. Spencer steps past the table, setting her sledgehammer down, and takes a deep breath. As she walks toward the window, the vastness fills more and more of her vision. Spencer longs for it to take her over. Not just to escape, but to float away. To escape the chaos in these walls and become one with the tranquility of space.

She places a hand on the glass. It’s cold but not painfully so. She wonders how much material stands between her and the universe. It seems so thin, this precious line between life and death. She can see right through it.

“I wouldn’t do that,” Faith says from the doorway.

Spencer knocks on the glass a few times and says, “Scared?” without turning around. But Faith’s irrelevant right now. They all are. Everything seems so small, so trivial. Spencer looks for the biggest celestial body she can find, a distant red star, or maybe a planet. Would it be Mars? Are we even in the—

“AHRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR!!!” She’s screaming before she can process what she sees. It’s gigantic and right in front of her face, just out of nowhere. Instinctively, Spencer drops to the floor, hiding under the window, and covers her head with her arms. But she can still see the image burned into her memory. There’s gray and white and teeth—so many teeth—and fins—FINS—and SO MANY TEETH.

“Told you,” Faith mutters.

The others crowd the doorway to see what the commotion’s about. Faith moves forward to give them room to join her. The enormous beast floats away, almost out of sight, but they can see its tail swooping back and forth.

Spencer’s eyes are bulging out of her head. “THAT,” she pants, heaving breaths and pointing an arm up, “….THAT WAS A SHARK.”

Donna heads back into the hallway. “NO BLOODY THANK YOU.”

“They’re such beautiful, majestic creatures,” Lucy says, leaning forward to peer out the window. “Don’t you think?”

The room falls quiet for a moment as no one really seems to know what to do next. Spencer’s frozen in fear and unable to think. Her brain has never felt more broken.

“Did you wanna come back over…” Faith gestures to the open space behind her.

It looks like a safe enough distance away, should that exist. Spencer considers making a run for it.
She slowly shifts to a squat and lifts herself up enough to peek over the edge of the glass. But then the shark is back, having circled fully around the ship, and Spencer ducks down again with a pained gasp.

“It can’t see you,” Faith says, amused. “It’s one-way glass.”

Spencer doesn’t know why the others aren’t freaking out. Her whole body is shaking. “You’re sure?”

Faith runs a finger down the section of window in front of her face as she examines it. “All those cozy nights with the Sunnydale PD, almost feels like home. Nice to be on this side of it for once.” Seeing Spencer start to relax a bit, Faith turns around, leans back with arms crossed, and adds, “But it can still smell you.”

Lucy rolls her eyes. “There’s nothing to be afraid of.”

Spencer gawks, flails her arms toward the window, and makes a few high-pitched, incoherent noises. “I can explain. Sharks are large, carnivorous animals that—”

“I KNOW WHAT SHARKS ARE,” Spencer sputters, arms still wrapped around her knees. Why is she getting a nature lesson from the girl who’d never heard of bears? “BUT...IT’S...IN SPACE.”

Lucy’s brow furrows. “Where else would it be?”

“UM, IN THE OCEAN?”

“What’s ‘the ocean’?”

Spencer closes her eyes and tries to avoid a complete mental breakdown.

“Picture space but made of water,” Faith says. “Like, everywhere.”

Lucy gasps in horror. “But they’d drown!”

Spencer stands and looks at Faith, more Done With Everything than ever. “Can we go now? I’d really like to go now.”

“Come on,” Faith says with a nod and nudges Lucy out of the room so Spencer can exit.

Spencer grabs her sledgehammer and pauses, then quickly crosses the room and pulls the chain to close the velvet curtains. As they move in a few inches at a time, the shark emerges once more from the darkness and heads right for her. The curtains close just as it passes her by, and Spencer knows that image is never going to go away.

She rejoins the team in the hallway and closes the door behind her. “It’s just circling the ship,” she informs them. This development is deeply, deeply upsetting. Spencer’s feeling a lot more claustrophobic now that she knows they’re surrounded by actual space monsters.

“Yep,” Mack says. “Hopefully just the one.” She checks her crossbow and all seems to be in working order.

“With all the fresh guards’ blood,” says Lucy, “I’d be surprised if there weren’t a dozen soon.”

“A DOZEN?” Spencer shouts, but nobody seems to care. “Where do they COME from?!”
Mack ignores the question and resumes their search for gyms 5 and 6. “That way now?” she gestures down the hall.

Spencer lets her twenty-pound sledgehammer hit the floor. “Why is no one else the least bit alarmed that THERE ARE SHARKS IN SPACE?”

“I think I was better off not knowing that, yeah,” Donna agrees.

“THANK YOU.”

Mack looks at Spencer with a laugh, shaking her head. “Classic Shit Girl. Dumbass.” She starts walking with Lucy and Donna following closely behind.

Spencer stands in shock and watches them go.

A finger drags down her spine, and Faith leans in to breathe against her ear, “It’s called ‘Shark Week,’ Harvard,” with a grin. She takes off after the others, then turns around with a skip in her step to add, “You don’t know the Jaws music?”

“I THOUGHT THAT WAS A EUPHEMISM!” Spencer shouts. Then, with a quick glance behind to be sure they’re not being followed, she runs to catch up. She can’t get away from the latest terror in Bizarro World quickly enough.

********************

They approach the next T-intersection with the all-too-familiar first Boomer corpse and keep moving. Spencer looks at the pool of blood and can’t stop thinking about the swarms of sharks hovering outside. But she’s jerked back to reality when she hears Mack yell, “Shit!” behind her and the whizzing sound of a firing arrow.

Spencer turns, and there’s not one but two Boomers there, one a bit angrier with an arrow sticking out of her thigh. In a flash, Lucy crosses past Spencer and slices the un-arrowed Boomer straight up from the crotch through her skull. The symmetrical halves fall to the ground with a wet schlopppp.

“JESUS!” Spencer shouts, but it’s lost over the sounds of the chainsaw and Faith repeatedly punching the other Boomer. Faith then draws her knife and guts the guard—twice for good measure, it seems—then slits her throat. The guard collapses into the pool of blood created by her twin.

Spencer can’t believe just how gruesome this mission has become. She’s a nice girl from a nice family in a nice town. Okay, well. A once violent girl from a fucked-up family in a murder-ridden town. But this is going way over the line. Is this who she is now? Is this what they do?

Mack steps forward and takes aim with her crossbow, shooting the half-Boomer in the chest with a primal cry.

Spencer just stares. “She was DEAD.”

“She is now,” Mack huffs and walks off down the hall.

Lord.

They reach the tomb of the doctor again, and Spencer stops in front of the mutilated corpse.

“What’s up?” Faith asks.

“Look at this. Come on.” Spencer steps over the body and enters the small examination room.
There on the wall is the familiar yet still creepy emblem of the ship—the *Uterius*, in all its glory—now providing an outline for their reference.

“Is that…um…” Donna starts, pointing vaguely with her finger to the picture, then to her abdomen.

“Yeah,” Spencer says. She starts placing her mental schema of the layout atop this framework, and it all lines up. “I think the cell block is this big middle part. The classrooms, too.” She tries to ignore that she’s pointing to a giant vagina. “And we were just here,” she says, indicating the round circle on the far-right side. The ovary, if you will.

“So, it’s symmetrical,” Faith says, getting it now. "Two more gyms on the other side."

“Just down the hall. I think we’re about here.” Spencer moves her finger halfway along the tube on the left. “I can’t imagine why anyone would have any business past Umbridge’s office. Probably the best place to hide someone away. If we didn’t even know these gyms existed, chances are no one else does.”

“It’s where I’d set up camp,” Faith agrees.

“It also explains why all the people on this side of the ship are dead,” Lucy adds. “No witnesses.”

“Let’s go,” Mack says. She’s first to step back over the dead doctor and keep heading to the right.

They pass Umbridge’s office, and it’s quiet and unchanged. A little too quiet, Spencer thinks. Where is everyone? Everyone Lucy hasn’t already killed, anyway. Sue and the other two doctors, that Becky girl who works for Sue, even Umbridge’s cat…They have to be somewhere, right?

“Up here,” Lucy says as they reach the end of the hall.

“So, what’s behind door number three?” Faith says, approaching Gym 5. She silently gestures to the gang to assume their positions, then kicks it down. “Quinn?” she calls, and Spencer’s right behind.

“Quinn?” Spencer flips the lights on, and yet again, nothing. This one seems to have old gymnastics equipment—a beam, a vault, a marked-off section of floor, but there’s a thick layer of dust that makes them nearly unrecognizable. Along with the wispy remains of spider webs.

“I think we’re getting close,” Spencer says.

Mack nods to the last door on the end, Gym 6. “Let’s do it.”

“You ready?” Spencer says to Donna and Lucy, who are standing guard where the hall narrows, watching for more Boomers. They both nod.

She turns to Mack and Faith as they share a silent exchange. This is it.

Spencer raises the sledgehammer and flanks Faith’s right as Mack takes the left, crossbow at the ready. She counts down from three, and with the familiar echoing *boom*, the door flies open.

“QUINN!” Spencer cries, running in and stomping on the ground again, flinging the hammer around. “QUINN! WE’RE HERE!”

“I can’t see her!” Faith calls.

“Get the light!” Spencer yells.

“The switch is out!”
“I’M COMING, QUINN!” Mack yells, running into the room. She screams a battle cry and starts firing arrows into the darkness, barely missing Spencer’s arm by inches.

That brings Spencer’s flailing antics to a halt. “WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?”

Mack freezes and considers what she might’ve just done. “Shit. QUINN!”

“Quinn!” Spencer shouts again. She doesn’t hear anything, doesn’t feel any webs. Her eyes are adjusting from the faint light in the hall, and she can’t see Quinn anywhere. She takes two steps forward and trips over something, stumbling and cursing as she drops the sledgehammer. It strikes something before it hits the ground, making a hollow sound, and Spencer flails until she hears Faith shouting at her.

“Hey, hey! Whoa! It’s just a pylon.”

“SNAKES?!” Mack shouts, frantically aiming the crossbow at the ground again.

"NO!" Spencer cries out. She can now make out what seems to be lines marked off about ten yards apart. A football field. “It’s a cone, you moron,” she says, brushing past Mack as she exits the room.

Donna and Lucy turn around with hope in their eyes, but Spencer just shakes her head. Mack and Faith file out and close the door, joining the circle and looking just as disheartened. Nobody seems to want to say what they’re all thinking. Quinn was supposed to be here. It was their best shot.

Where ARE you?

Lucy breaks away from the silent group and starts up her chainsaw without a word, heading back down the hall toward Umbridge’s office.

Spencer stops to talk to the others and regroup. “Okay, we keep looking. There are still four more gyms.” She’s trying not to sound hopeless. She’s trying to remember that each dead end is another item crossed off the list, another step closer to finding Quinn.

She’s trying not to think about how absolutely terrified she is.

“Hey. Buck up, kiddo,” Faith says. “We cleared the north end. At least now we know the ship isn’t any bigger than this. Not many holes left to hide in.”

Spencer gives her a pursed smile. She’s grateful for a steady hand of encouragement right now. Who knew it’d be from Faith, of all people?

As they reach Umbridge’s door, Spencer thinks about their position on the diagram in the doctor’s office and the symmetry of this place. “Hang on, you guys,” Spencer calls to the rest, up on ahead of her. “I have an idea.”

Mack comes to a halt and turns around. “You’re going back in there?! It’s a dead end. Literally.”

“Just give me a minute,” Spencer says and opens the door.

Immediately, the stench of decay comes rushing back, but she pushes through, trying very hard to ignore the half-eaten dead woman and the impending threat written above her. Spencer marches over to the left wall where the framed picture of Umbridge and that minister guy hangs by the bathroom door. It’s in the exact same spot as the picture in Sue’s office.

Spencer grabs the frame and rips it off the wall. A folded piece of paper falls to the floor. The now-
empty space on the wall says, *PLACE MAP HERE AND COVER.*

“Yes!” Spencer cries. “You guys! Come in here!” She grabs the paper and unfolds it, whispering, “About time we catch a break,” to herself. The others enter one by one and comment on the overall nastiness of the room again. Spencer tells Faith to shut the door behind them so they can examine the map uninterrupted.

As expected, it’s a diagram of a uterus, only it’s labeled with things like “Mess Hall” and “Gym 7” where “Vagina” and “Ovary” should be.

“So, what—We’re here?” Faith asks, pointing to the spot on the pink curve marked “Administrative.”

“Yeah, I think so,” Spencer says. “It really does look like a uterus.”

“That is the fucking weirdest thing I’ve ever seen in my life,” says Mack. “I mean, I know I have those parts or whatever, but I don’t have a fuckin’ library in my gut.”

“It’s not meant to be anatomically correct,” Spencer says. “Last I checked, I don’t have a kitchen in my vagina.”
“And yet people still eat there all the time,” Faith says, amused with herself.

Mack looks at Spencer. “Yeah, no shit.” She points to the right of the engine room and says, “Nobody has both large arms and small arms.” She taps the map hard with her finger to provide finality to her statement.

Spencer opens her mouth to say something, but it’s just not worth the energy.

They take turns pointing out various points on the map, starting with the ones they know and then finding new, unfamiliar places. The engine room sounds promising, as do the barracks, at least as a place where someone might keep a hostage. Faith’s notion that the ship wasn’t getting any bigger has been shot to hell. Somehow there’s a second level to this place that they didn’t know about. They haven’t even covered half the prison. The good news, Faith points out, is there are in fact eight gyms, as they thought. But Donna counters with the bad news—no new ‘G’ words to explore if they’re wrong.

But Spencer’s only hearing bits and pieces of this conversation. Her mind is racing, trying to assimilate new data and make sense of everything she’s learned so far. Because there’s something on the map that scares her more than a whole new level of prison.

“Um,” she finally says. “What’s that?”

The others fall quiet as they see where Spencer’s pointing. Handwritten in pen at the bottom of the ship is one word: LAB?

“All kinds of ships have labs,” Lucy says.

“Wait, there’s a dog?” Mack asks. Everyone stares at her. “What, you’ve never heard of dogs before?”

“Tell us about your dating life later,” Faith retorts and looks back at Spencer. “You said Umbridge was a doctor or whatever, right? Makes sense she’d know about sciencey stuff—viruses or whatever.”

“She wasn’t that kind of doctor. It’s not even written within the borders of the ship. And there’s a question mark. Maybe she doesn’t know where it is.”

*That makes two of us.*


“Maybe it’s a secret laboratory.”

Mack just starts laughing.

“It’s written on the map!” Spencer points.

“I could write ‘Closet to Narnia’ on the map,” Mack says. “Doesn’t make it true.”

Spencer’s eyebrows rise. “I’m amazed you even know that reference.”

Mack flips her the bird and makes a face. “Not surprised you know it, Closet Case.”

“Who’s ‘Narnia’?” Lucy asks, but the others ignore her.

“Seems a bit off, though, yeah?” Donna says. “What’s a prison need a lab for?”
“Making endless clones of evil guards, for one thing, Spencer thinks. And flesh-eating spiders.”

The five women look at each other like this just got a whole lot more complicated.

“Don’t know, don’t care,” says Faith. “All I see’s four more gyms down that hall, calling my name.”

“Right behind you,” says Mack, grabbing her crossbow off the desk. “Sounds like we just need to keep going south til we find the spot, right?” She licks her lips and leers at Donna suggestively, eyes roaming down to her mid-section. “I’m good at that.”

Donna makes a sound in disgust and puts a hand up. “Not in a million years.”

“Your loss, Sugar Tits,” Mack says, strutting out the door and back down the hall.

Donna scoffs and looks to Spencer and Faith for back-up, but Faith just laughs.

“Do you have a pocket?” Spencer asks Donna, handing her the map. Securing it safely, they hurry to catch up with Mack, Faith, and Lucy, closing the door behind them. Spencer hopes they’ll never have to set sights on anything so horrific ever again.

They’re moving fast and more confidently, but they need to get into new territory, now. Spencer’s no longer concerned with stealth. The chainsaw sounds like a freight train, and they’re tracking bloody footprints as they pass through the wake of Lucy’s rampage. A toddler could find them at this point.

As they pass the cell block and head toward the classes hallway, Spencer does a double take and stops in her tracks. The door to the engine room is between the two hallways. They’ve passed it at least twice today. It’s no wonder, though—it blends right in with the wall and the stenciled paint labeling it is half scratched off.


Approaching the rust-covered wall, Spencer can’t see a lock or even a door handle, for that matter. Then she notices a small box beside the door frame that looks like a reader for a keycard. Something they most definitely don’t have.

“Think you can break it down?” she asks Faith. They’ve already busted six doors today. What's one more?

“My pleasure.” Faith extends a hand toward the sledgehammer and Spencer complies. With a few steps for a running start, Faith charges the door and slams the hammer dead-center at eye level. It’s louder than Spencer expects, and she winces. The door dents but doesn’t budge. Faith repeats the action, managing to strike nearly the same spot. But before she can finish the job, the door opens a few inches and a sweaty, angry face appears.

“What the fuck do you want?”

Spencer steps forward to get a better look. “Raven?”

It’s hard to recognize her without the typical navy-blue uniform. Instead, her body is wrapped in a thin white polyblend prison-issue bedsheet. It’s disturbingly thin and not hiding anything. Spencer hasn’t seen the inside of the engine room before—and still can’t from this angle—but she expected more noise and less…sex smell. (The alcohol smell, she was prepared for.)

“If you want booze, you have to wait until I make rounds tomorrow.” There’s a clanking noise and the sound of soft footsteps out of sight, and Raven winces.
“Who’s in there with you?” Spencer asks.

“None of your business.” Raven starts to shut the door. “Tomorrow.”

“Wait! Wait!” Spencer runs forward and puts a hand out, pushing it open with an inch to spare. “Can you just tell us if Quinn’s in there?”

“Haven’t seen her.” Raven looks sincere. Glancing around at the ragtag crew, she starts piecing together the situation. “Sorry I can’t help you.”

“She’s missing. We think she’s been taken. You’re sure she’s not in there?”

“I’d invite you in to check it yourself, but there’s this nudity situation I need to get back to.”

“Right, tell Starbuck we say hi.” It’s an awkward moment, made worse when Raven’s face drops. That’s not who she’s hiding. “Or, um,” Spencer stumbles, trying to recover but failing. “How about we pretend we never came by at all?”

“Yeah, good plan.”

Spencer pauses for a moment, afraid to ask what just entered her mind, but she can’t let this opportunity pass. “It’s not… Sue, is it?”

Raven scowls, and it’s answer enough.

But then a different voice comes from inside the room, “Hey, what’s going on?” Footsteps get nearer to the door until Raven’s face is pushed out of view and the first Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins appears. Along with the rest of her. Very much not wrapped in a sheet. “Oh, hi, Spencer. What can we do for you?”

Spencer suddenly looks very confused. It seems odd that a doctor would be drawn to a mechanic, but sure, whatever.

“Goodbye, Spencer,” Raven says and start pushing her lover back out of sight.

“Wait, one more question.” Spencer looks down the hall to make sure no more guards are coming while they’re sitting ducks in the middle of this open atrium. “This might sound weird, but have you seen any spiders?”

The door’s already closing as Raven says, “Not in here.”

Spencer jumps back as it shuts loudly in her face, then leans forward and says, “Sorry to bother you.” Glancing once more at the large dent, she adds, “And sorry about your door.” Her mind then drifts to the infirmary nearby. “…And your wife.” The last one is only a whisper.

This was just another dead end. Time to move on.

“Gym time? Finally?” Faith asks.

“Yeah.” Spencer’s not sure what other options they have at this point. If she had thought to use her last question on asking Raven about more things that start with ‘G’, they could have new leads. For now, they’ll just have to work with what they have and discuss circling back to bother her again later. Once they’ve finished the sex, perhaps.

The hall with the other gyms is ahead on the right. Lucy quickly dismembers another Boomer charging out of the Large Arms Room. Spencer is growing accustomed to the violent act now, or at
least a bit desensitized, as the shock value has worn off. Lucy, on the other hand, seems to get more invigorated each time. The layer of blood spray on her face is evening and thickening with each kill. She looks like Carrie on prom night.

As they reach Gym 1, they assume the same positions as before—Mack ready to fire, Spencer ready to hit the lights, Faith kicking the door down, and Donna and Lucy standing guard. But it’s just as vacant as the others. It does, however, have the weight machines Spencer has wondered about since she arrived. There’s a lateral press, an elliptical, a pull-up bar, and a bench press with the bar sliding vertically on a track. She doesn’t see any weight rings around. The bench press has a digital display, so she figures the sliding track can be set to provide varying resistance. It’s a clever way to avoid loose objects that the prisoners could pummel each other with. Provided it doesn’t become a guillotine.

Shaking off that image, she goes to investigate the one other set-up in the gym. On the far end is a rickety billiards table with purple felt and, Spencer discovers, no equipment whatsoever. There do seem to be some faded stain splotches in the center of the table, but they’re not blood, so Spencer quickly diverts her thoughts elsewhere and checks the table’s pockets for creepy-crawlies. Nothing. Looking around the abandoned room, she heads for the door and mumbles to herself, “Sorry, Mario, but your princess is in another castle.”

Gyms 2 and 3 are strike-outs as well. There’s no more joy of crossing things off a list now, just ever-increasing panic and fear. They’re running out of options. They’re getting close. There’s only one gym left. Spencer starts back down the hall past the next utility rooms and toward Gym 4.

This has to be it. Murphy’s Law and all that.

But then, a closet door down the hall opens and Buffy steps into view. She looks as surprised to see them as they are to see her. Taking stock of all the weapons, Buffy’s face drops, like she’s disappointed. “Why wasn’t I invited to the apocalypse?”

Lucy charges at her, chainsaw reared back, and Faith screams loudly, more scared than Spencer’s ever heard her.

“NOOO!” Lunging to stop her, Faith grabs at the collar of Lucy’s jumpsuit but misses. Fortunately, Buffy steps quickly out of the way as Lucy’s momentum carries her right on past, and Faith comes in between them and holds a hand up to Lucy. “STOP! Just, stop. I got this one.”

Lucy doesn’t lower the chainsaw but does power it down and take a step back.

“You ‘got this one’?” Buffy leans against the wall, not the least bit threatened, and Spencer realizes their badass gang must look like a joke. “What, exactly, do you think you have, Captain America?”

Faith grins, then turns to face Buffy. In one quick, smooth motion, Faith drops the knife and pins Buffy to the wall, her hands on Buffy’s wrists and one knee between her legs. “You,” Faith says, looking her dead in the eye. Then, Faith kisses Buffy hard and deeply without hesitation, biting at her lip, grunting, hands and body pressing into her like making out is an extreme, full-body contact sport. From the look of it, she could’ve made the Olympic team.

Spencer, Mack, Donna, and Lucy can only stand quietly and watch the intense action happening right in front of them. It’s quite mesmerizing, and, Spencer can’t lie—more than a little hot.

Faith pulls Buffy’s arms down to her side, and, just as swiftly, holds her shoulders and spins the girl around so she’s facing the wall. Buffy slams hard against it, cheek pressed flat, and smiles as Faith pins her wrists behind her back. It’s almost a laugh.
“Tell me what I need to know,” Faith hisses in her ear.

“Make me.”

Faith smiles wider and takes both of Buffy’s wrists into one hand, reaching the other around the girl’s waist and diving inside her pants without warning.

Well, okay then.

Buffy’s panting and moaning, whispering things like, “You’ll never be as strong as I am” and “You’ve never known love a day in your life” and “You don’t know how to make anyone happy, not even yourself,” and it just makes Faith pump her arm harder as she presses their bodies together.

Spencer waits for the interrogation to move along a little faster, but the only thing picking up the pace is Faith’s hand. Is she not going to ask Buffy where Quinn is?

“Tell me,” Faith starts, and Spencer takes a hopeful breath, “how many fingers you use when you fuck yourself thinking of me.”

Spencer’s arms fall to her sides, exasperated. “Terrific.”

Buffy whimpers through the grinding, her face smashed against the cold metal. “I’ve been…dead twice…and I still felt…more alive…than when…you’re inside me…”

Faith yanks hard on Buffy’s hair, eliciting a loud moan as her hand moves in a fast blur.

“We’ll just…” Spencer says awkwardly, pointing in the direction they were heading. Spencer’s used to these kinds of prison hijinks, but poor Donna looks like a deer in headlights. A very straight and virgin deer.

Without another word, Spencer, Lucy, Mack and Donna shuffle away from the sounds of impact and Faith’s grunting. In the distance, Buffy cries, “You’re nothing! You’ll ALWAYS BE NOTHING!...Oh, GOD!...”

As they reach Gym 4, their better-fucking-be-final destination, Spencer realizes their brute force is now otherwise occupied. She’ll have to handle this herself. “This is it, you guys.” Spencer says, staring at the door. “Quinn’s in there.” They have a quiet moment, gathering their strength, and Spencer isn’t quite sure how they’re going to pull this off.

“Stand back,” Lucy says, revving up again. She takes out the lock easily, and Mack is eager to kick the door away this time.

The light’s already on, and it’s instantly clear that Quinn’s not there. Spencer’s heart shatters into a million pieces.

She’s gone.

Gym 4 is small and doesn’t look much like a gym at all. It has rows of beds with white sheets, and next to each one is a small table with an unmarked bottle of clear gel. It’s the cleanest of all the rooms they’ve checked so far, at least by prison standards. But it’s certainly as empty as the last.

“So, where is she?” Mack asks, frustrated.

Spencer’s pulse is pounding as she fights back tears. She doesn’t know what to do. She hates not knowing what to do. “I don’t know.”
“What sort of gym is this?” Donna asks, cautiously walking inside. “More like a prison spa.” She picks up one of the bottles and looks at it, smells it, then squirts some of the thick, clear liquid into her hands and rubs it on like lotion.

Lucy’s eyes find Spencer’s. “I really thought we might find her here.” Her disappointment is sincere. “We all know Quinn enjoys a good fisting.”

Donna drops the bottle of lube and holds her slippery hands up. “I hate prison,” she mumbles, walking quickly back to the door.

But Spencer’s had it up to here with Lucy’s power trip. She’s pissed and sad and scared out of her mind, and she’s not going to take any more of Lucy’s shit. Not today. Not when their chances of finding Quinn alive just dropped dramatically. If Lucy wants to play Petty Jealous Lover, then fine. Spencer’s good at that game, too.

She heads for the door, passing closely by Lucy to whisper, “She’s still the best thing I’ve ever had inside me,” letting each word ring in Lucy’s ear. Spencer struts on with fire in each step, feeling quite smug. But then she hears the chainsaw rev up again and runs fast to get back into the hallway.

Okay, didn’t think that one through. I see that now.

Their feud isn’t going to get Quinn back any faster, and the sledgehammer’s getting heavier by the minute. Spencer needs a moment to stop and breathe and think, or she’s going to break down in full-on panic.

The bathrooms are up ahead, just beyond the library, and Spencer hollers for Donna and Mack to follow and wait for her there. She can hear the echoes of Buffy and Faith still going at it back down the hall. It sounds like Faith’s the one screaming now, but they’re too far away to tell.

Spencer hurries into the bathroom, drops the sledgehammer on the floor, and rushes into a door-less stall. She sits down and buries her face in her hands, letting her emotions catch up to her in this brief moment of privacy.

She let Quinn down. She failed. And now Quinn’s probably dead and half-eaten, god knows where. Just the mental image of Quinn’s face chewed apart like Umbridge’s makes Spencer curl up into a ball on the toilet and press her hands down hard on the back of her head. She squeezes her eyes shut tight, trying to push the picture away, but that only burns it in deeper.

The bathroom door opens without warning and Spencer jumps to pull herself together, sniffling and wiping her tears away. She should at least take care of her business while she’s here. Fortunately, there’s a random smattering of prison-supplied tampons on the counter, free for the taking.

“Oh, thank god,” Mack says, entering the room and grabbing the nearest peach package. She sets the crossbow down on the sink, lines it up so it’s pointed directly at Spencer, and heads to a toilet.

“Very funny.” Spencer bangs a fist on the stall wall between them twice. She’s upset, and hitting something feels good.

From her current position, Spencer has a clear view of the counter space where Quinn fucked her. It feels like a lifetime ago.

If that meteor hadn’t hit, if Quinn hadn’t gotten stuck, they would’ve been free to kill the spider on the wall. And if Beth had died that day, they’d have no idea at all on where Quinn is now. Not that it’s been any fucking help.
But she can’t give up. There must be something else, something she’s missed. They’ve already broken out of their cells. The guards are trying to kill them on sight. Spencer has no hopes of ever returning to her family. All she has left is saving Quinn. The only direction to move is forward.

The flush of the toilet next door pulls Spencer out of her daydream. She washes up quickly, sure to throw the wrapper in the trash can on her way out.

Donna, Lucy, and Mack are waiting for her outside. Spencer’s sure Mack didn’t wash her hands but tries to let it go. Lucy, meanwhile, still looks like she did a swan dive into a pool of red paint.

“Did you wanna go wash up?” Spencer says, tentatively.

Lucy just smiles. “No, I’m fine.”

*You are the furthest thing from “fine.”*

“Now what?” Donna asks. The same question is written across the other girls’ faces.

“I don’t know.” Had they thought she’d come up with some brilliant plan while taking a dump? “Back to square one.”

“What else could ‘G’ stand for?” Lucy asks.

“Guard!” Donna shouts.

“Maybe?” Spencer says with a glimmer of hope at a new lead. “I guess if—”

“No, GUARD!” she shouts louder, and they all turn to see yet another charging Boomer.

Before Lucy can start up her chainsaw, Mack aims and fires an arrow right into the woman’s face. She falls to the ground instantly and doesn’t move to get up. Mack turns back to Spencer and throws the crossbow across her shoulder. “You were saying?”

Spencer’s not sure what’s more surprising, that Mack defended her or that she landed a shot on target. “Thanks?” She shakes off the brutality of the moment and does a quick 360-degree visual sweep to ensure they’re alone. “I can’t think of anything else here that begins with a ‘G’. It’s not a very common letter to start a word.” Fifteen years of kicking her sister’s ass at Scrabble taught her that.

Mack starts throwing out random G-words in an attempt to help. “G-string… gerbil… gin… gun… grenade… grandma… groping… gogurt… gonorrhea…”

Spencer glares at her.

“Not the typical girl, are you?” Donna says, eyeing Mack suspiciously.

“Girl!” Spencer says, holding up a hand as she adds the word to her mental list. This could be a lead. She looks off to the side so her train of thought won’t be interrupted, but there are still too many possibilities. “Goddamnit,” she mutters in frustration.

“Ooh! ‘God’!” Mack says. “That’s another one!”

Spencer blinks. “You think God took her?”

“God’s not a spider,” Mack says. “God’s a god.”

“Can we get back on track, here?” Spencer’s beyond frustrated. “G! For girl!”

“God’s a girl?” Mack asks.

“Oh, this is fun,” Donna says to no one in particular.

Lucy turns to Spencer. “You think Beth was writing ‘girl’? How does that help? This place has nothing but girls.”

“Girl Been Ate,” Mack mutters. They all glare.

“Maybe not,” Spencer thinks out loud, “but what if Beth was writing a name? Telling us who to go talk to.”

The group is quiet for a moment, taking that in and running through their mental rosters. Spencer is the first to look up, smiling.
Spencer leads the team around the corner and up the cell block hall, rapidly checking faces in each one. She’s passed her destination a million times—it’s close to Quinn’s cell.

The prisoners are yelling at them again, wanting to know why they aren’t letting them out, and Spencer almost stops to consider it. These women are pretty tough, and they could be helpful in a fight. It’d sure give the gang a much better chance of outnumbering the Boomers, however many more there are.

But with this latest development—the idea that one, if not more, of the prisoners is in on Quinn’s capture—Spencer’s not taking any chances. She’s never trusted these women before, and she doesn’t feel like starting now. Besides, Spencer’s already left them to rot twice now, who’s to say they won’t just shank her right there on the spot? Or sell her out to the next guard they see for a ticket off this death trap? No, it’s better to remain in control, and that means fewer variables.

“Sorry,” she says in turn to each cell as she runs, but she doesn’t really mean it. She sees a new face sitting on a bunk in 8, and Spencer halts. Donna, Mack, and Lucy catch up and stop behind her.

“Who are you?”

The tall woman just stares at her, blank-faced. Her black, curly hair and dead eyes match the jumpsuit disturbingly well.

“Oh!” Lucy says, setting down the blood-soaked chainsaw and stepping forward. “Hola nueva prisionera! Me llamo Lucy!”

The woman looks at Lucy, who is dripping blood where she stands, then at Spencer, and says dryly, “Rough night?”

“You could say that,” Spencer replies, relaxing a bit. “I’m Spencer. This is Lucy.”

“Rosa Diaz. You’re here to kill me?” The woman’s voice has the emotional range of a rock, so it comes off as more of a statement. She looks back at Lucy and says, slowly, “¿VAS A MATARME?”

“What?” Lucy replies. “No. We don’t even know you.”

“Oh. Cool.”

Rosa starts asking what they’re doing there, but Spencer isn’t listening. Her eyes are on the other top bunk where Rosa’s cellmates have just ended a frisky and rigorous makeout session. Kat peers over as the other girl rolls off of her.

Spencer steps forward, resting the twenty-pound sledgehammer on her shoulder. It hurts, but she recovers quickly. “Hello, Graham.”
Graham looks at Lucy, red-splattered chainsaw back in hand, and then to Mack, who’s got the crossbow aimed right at her head. “What’s going on?”

“That’s what we want to know. Where’s Quinn?” Spencer is in full Hastings mode now, and she isn’t fucking around.

“In her cell? It’s lockdown. For some of us, anyway.” Graham’s trademark sarcasm is there, but it seems tempered by the barrage of deadly weapons aimed at her face.

“Funny enough, she’s not. And I know you know where she is, so don’t bullshit me.” Spencer nods to her companion and adds, “Lucy’s been cutting through bullshit all night.”

Graham’s eyes widen. “Look, I seriously don’t know, okay? I barely know her.”

“Someone we trust sold you out,” Spencer says. “Didn’t even hesitate.” She’s bending the truth now, but that’s what lawyers do, and she’s not about to show this traitor how weak her hand really is.

Graham’s not buying it. “What are you talking about? That’s bullshit. Your ‘friend’ is full of crap.”

“She would never lie to me,” Lucy says, starting up the chainsaw.

“We’re gonna open this door,” Spencer yells over the noise, “and you’re gonna take us to Quinn. Right now.”

“I DON’T KNOW WHERE SHE IS,” Graham shouts, desperate and scared. Her cellmates don’t seem to know what to do, caught between wanting to help and wanting to stay the hell out of the way. “I SWEAR!”

“Look, just stay back!” Kat cries out, but no one hears her.

Spencer nods to Donna, who pulls out the sonic screwdriver and opens the door. All three girls inside jump back, looking far more scared now that there’s nothing between them and certain death. Spencer motions to Graham to get down and come out, but Graham furiously shakes her head.

Oh, fuck this.

Spencer heads right for her, grabbing Graham’s leg and attempting to pull her off the bed, but Graham’s kicking and screaming and not giving up without a fight. Kat swoops down and punches Spencer in the eye, then immediately retreats as Lucy storms in, chainsaw buzzing even louder now that the sound’s trapped in this tiny room. Spencer recovers and grabs on to both of Graham’s feet to keep them from kicking her in the face as they’re yelling at each other.

“STAY BACK,” Spencer yells to Lucy, but it’s lost in the roar of noise. Before she realizes what’s happening, Lucy steps up and saws off both of Graham’s still-kicking legs at the knee in quick succession, leaving Spencer holding two very bloody and very detached ankles.

The screams of horror from Graham, Kat, and Spencer ring out over the hum of the machine. With a foot on the bed frame, Lucy drives the end of her weapon into Graham’s chest. It catches on her ribcage, jerking and sputtering, as the rotating chain sprays blood all over the wall, bed, Lucy herself, Spencer, and even Rosa and Kat on the far side. She manages to pull it free and power it down, and it whines against the threads of guts now caught in its gears.

Only when it fully stops can Spencer’s panicked voice be heard. “WHY! WHY DID YOU DO THAT! SHE WAS OUR ONLY LEAD.”
Spencer freezes in horror as she realizes she’s still holding the severed limbs and shaking them for emphasis as she speaks. She tosses them aside with a shudder, and one flies across the cell to where Kat is cowering by the toilet. It hits her right in the face, and Kat screams again.

“You said that last time,” Lucy replies, pushing flesh chunks off the chains with the sleeve of her jumpsuit. “It still isn’t true.” She blinks and wipes at her eyes with her knuckles. It doesn’t remove any blood, just smears it around. “She didn’t know anything,” she says to Spencer.

“WE DON’’T KNOW THAT.”

Lucy is unfazed. She shrugs and says, “I did.”

“So, we turn and walk away. We don’t just kill people for fun. What the hell is wrong with you?”

Lucy stares Spencer down but doesn’t reply. Instead, she turns to address Graham’s cellmates with her trademark saccharine tone. “Does anyone else know where Quinn might be?”

Kat shakes her head, pissing herself in fear and crying softly.

“No,” Rosa says, “but that was the coolest thing I’ve ever seen."

“Thank you,” Lucy politely replies and turns to leave, trailing fresh bloody footprints as she passes through the open door.

“Will you be my new best friend?” Rosa calls after her. “Amiga?”

Spencer shudders again as she exits the cell and slams the door behind her.

****************

She’s going to be sick.

Once Spencer’s out of cell 8, she’s running down the corridor, back toward the bathrooms. There was a toilet in the cell, but there was a leg next to it, and she needed to get the hell out of there. Fast. And now she’s unarmed and running off alone, but she doesn’t care.

This whole thing has gotten way out of hand. It was supposed to be easy. The gyms were the clear answer. Why wasn’t she there? And Graham was a good lead. It made sense, right? The spiders must be getting help from someone. It’s possible Graham still knew something. It’s possible Lucy was wrong. They didn’t just dismember and eviscerate an innocent girl in cold blood for nothing. Right?

Spencer doesn’t quite make it in time and vomits all over the bathroom counter. The same counter where...

This place ruins everything. Everyone.

She opens her eyes and watches her reflection in the mirror. It’s a little blurred through the plexiglass, but Spencer can see clearly enough what a monster she’s become. Her face is red with spray, and bits of flesh and tissue hang from her hair. She retches again, coughing painfully, and presses her forehead against the hard counter to cry.

I’m so sorry. I’m so fucking sorry.
She doesn’t even know who she’s apologizing to. Graham. Quinn. Herself.

She’s shaking, clutching the knobs of the faucet just to have something to hold on to. There’s not much in the sink; her stomach hasn’t been full for months. Spencer turns on the cold and rinses the contents down the open drain without looking, then splashes a handful of water on her face. Wiping away the first layer of blood, she opens her eyes just enough to watch the red swirls dance in the basin before they slip away. There seems to be a little soap left in the dispenser, but it won’t be enough.

She’s seen death before. She’s killed before. But this all feels out of her control. She’s no longer behind bars, but she’s never felt so trapped. There are literally *space monsters circling her*, drawn by the blood soaked into her uniform, and a swarm of silent killers lurking somewhere in these walls. She’s surrounded by certain death. She can’t fight back against an enemy she can’t see.

Spencer scrubs harder, clawing at her skin and rubbing hard against her cheekbones. She holds her whole head under the faucet and tears at her hair, pulling over and over and over as she sobs. It’ll never feel clean. She’ll never be clean of this.

She screams into the sink, feeling the waves bounce back against her face. It’s deafening, and it’s the last ounce of energy Spencer has to give. She’s dehydrated, exhausted, and completely empty inside. There’s nothing left. This place has taken everything.

She wants to go home.

She wants to go back to her old life and her old friends, before she knew any of these terrible people in this terrible place. She wishes she never met any of them. How in the world did she delude herself into thinking she might actually find *love* here? Surrounded by killers and monsters? She fell for a goddamn serial killer, for christ’s sake. Looking for something undefinable with someone unredeemable. That’s ambitious even for Hastings’ standards. And look where it’s gotten her.

Spencer opens her eyes and takes in her ragged, worn reflection. Eyes red and sunken, hair oily and limp, skin pale and deprived of vitamins for months now. It’s getting harder to remember what she used to look like. Clean, healthy, makeup and a new outfit—it all feels so foreign now, like a good dream she used to have. Her life is never going to get any better. This is it for her.

Horrible as this day has been, she’s come too far now to go back. She can’t bring back the lives they’ve taken. She can’t run forever from the hell Sue’s going to rain down on them when they’re caught. And she sure as hell can’t go home ever again.

But if she’s going to die today—and it seems pretty likely—she’s going to die for something.

She’s a Hastings, goddamnit.

“Okay.” Spencer’s pulled herself together as much as she can and reconvened with the group in the hall. They need to keep moving. Her little breakdown just set them back another ten minutes at least. She brushes her hair out of her face and looks around, trying to plan their next move. “I think we’ve been thinking too inside-the-box. If the spiders don’t want Quinn to be found, they must have her somewhere off the grid.”

“It’s a spaceship,” Donna says. “Only so many places to hide.”

“They’ve been doing a pretty good job so far.”
“So, what now?” Mack asks, “You think we should bang down every single door?”

“No,” Spencer says, “if we’d passed Quinn, we would’ve found a clue or something. We need to keep moving forward. There’s still a section of the ship we haven’t covered.”

Mack looks where Spencer’s gesturing and scoffs. “The caf?”

“Wouldn’t someone have found her there by now?” Donna asks.

Mack turns to Spencer. “If you’re craving some fish taco, just say so.”

Donna frowns.

“I’m not—” Spencer starts.

“It does seem a bit obvious as a location,” Lucy agrees, “if you’re going to be eating someone.”

Donna makes a worse face.

Wistfully, Lucy adds, “I miss Santana.”

“I’M NOT TALKING ABOUT THE CAFETERIA,” Spencer snaps, and the others jump back. She points to the entrance to a hallway running alongside the Mess Hall. There’s one on the opposite side, too. Spencer’s never really thought about them before today, but thanks to the map, now she knows where they lead. “That.”

Mack makes a face at Spencer and starts walking toward the hall on the left, if only because it’s closer.

“Should we split up?” Lucy asks, but Spencer shakes her head.

“We have no idea how many guards could be back there. Something tells me it’s a lot.”

They run to catch up with Mack, and a few feet down the hall, Spencer sees a sign posted on the wall to her left.

← MESS HALL

← CELL BLOCK

← CLASSROOMS

FOOD STORAGE →

SOLITARY WARD →

WASTE REMOVAL →

Bingo.

“Come on,” Spencer says, motioning for the group to continue down the hall to the right. “This way.”

“You can’t be serious,” Mack says, staring at the end of the list. “You think they’ve got Quinn in the shit tank?”
Donna considers it. “Last place I’d want to look.”

“Yeah, you kids have fun,” Mack waves and turns to go back the way they came.

“No, you ass,” Spencer says. “If there’s a secret part of this ship or a passageway we don’t know about, we need to ask someone who’s been here a long time.”

“If I knew, I’d tell you,” Lucy says. “I don’t.”

Spencer shakes her head. “Longer.” The others stare, confused. Spencer points to the SOLITARY sign. “Ellen Ripley.”

There’s an awkward silence.

“Bullshit.” Mack certainly hopes she's bluffing. “Even you’re not that stupid.”

“Is this the woman from that file you saw?” Donna asks. She doesn't sound thrilled by the prospect. “The one who killed people for Christmas?”

“She’s been here longer than anyone. Longer than Sue, longer than you,” Spencer looks at Lucy. “We should at least talk to her. She’s locked up. It’s not like she can hurt us.”

“Not for six more months, anyway.”

Spencer asks, “Anyone have any better ideas?” but the others just sigh and shrug.

As they begin walking again, Spencer says, “I don’t want to waste any more time. There are still parts of the ship we haven’t seen. We didn’t even know this thing had two levels until an hour ago. If she’s not up here, then she’s down there. There has to be a way.”

“I’ve never seen any signs for stairs,” Mack says.

“What are stairs?” Lucy asks. “Are they like stars?”

Spencer just sighs. “I’ll let you know if I see any.”

As they make their way around the outside of the cafeteria, they pass the door for waste removal, but it’s sealed and bolted shut. Not even Lucy’s chainsaw can cut through it, which means spiders probably can’t either.

Spencer leads the group onward. “Keep your eyes peeled for anywhere they could be keeping her. Something you usually wouldn’t notice. Something subtle. Or anything that looks like a way down.”

“What about a way up?” Donna says. The question brings the group to a halt. She’s standing still and looking up toward the ceiling where there’s an open panel leading into darkness. It seems like it’s supposed to be there, but Spencer’s quite curious all the same. It’s about ten feet over their heads and very much out of reach. The other women gather around and peer up at it.

“What do you think is up there?” Spencer asks.

“QUINN?!” Mack yells, but Spencer quickly shushes her. They’ve been lucky not to see any guards for a while. But for all she knows, this could be one giant trap.

On the other hand, maybe the spiders are floating people up into the ceiling where no one can get them down. It’s quite brilliant, she realizes, and not outside the realm of possibilities. And it makes Spencer even more anxious to see what’s hiding up there. “Here, hoist me up.”
“Yeah, that’s hilarious,” Mack says.

“I’m serious. The three of you can hold me. I think I can grab the edge and pull myself up.” When they all continue to stare at her, she snaps, “Quinn could be up there!”

It takes a minute of awkward adjustments, but eventually they position Donna as the base. She lunges so Spencer can stand on her thigh, then Lucy and Mack each push upward on Spencer’s feet to lift her as high as they can.

“Where’s…Faith…when you…need her,” Mack grits, trembling as she hoists Spencer up.

Spencer stretches hard to reach and is just barely able to curl her fingers around the ceiling ledge. “Got it!”

Mack immediately falls away, leaving Lucy supporting Spencer’s full weight without warning.

“Keep pushing!” Spencer cries, kicking her free leg as if that would help.

Donna reaches out to take the flailing foot and heave Spencer upward. “Pull! Go, go, go!”

Grimacing against the sharp edges of metal under her fingers, Spencer grunts and pulls hard, barely managing to get most of her weight over the threshold. She swings her left leg up and rolls over, panting for a moment and staring up into the darkness as her comrades cheer down below.

“Is she up there?” Mack calls.

Then, Lucy’s voice. “What do you see?”

But all Spencer sees is a tiny metal room, not even big enough to stand in. It's more like a crawl space. Its purpose, it seems, is to house a small electrical panel that has been ripped out of the wall. The wires are an absolute mess. It’s clear they’ve been cut and frayed and spliced back together, but it seems to still be connected and powered on. Spencer's never touching that.

“It’s some kind of electrical unit,” she calls down. “I can’t tell what for.”

“Does it matter?” Mack retorts. “If Quinn’s not there, just come back down already.”

“Hang on a second.” Spencer squints as her eyes adjust to the shadows and the green and red LED lights on the panel. There aren’t many words printed on it, but even just a clue would let her know if this is a lead worth pursuing. Stretching to look around the mess, making sure she doesn't touch anything, she peers behind a coil of green wires and sees a circular dial with the reading 9.807.

Any straight-A student knows that number. 9.807 meters per second squared. Earth’s gravitational constant.

Peeking her head over the edge, she calls down, “You guys, I think I just found the machine that creates the gravity.”


“The what?” Spencer balks. Donna’s face seems to ask the same question.

“The Gravitational System Permitting Outerspace Travel,” Lucy says. “I wondered where it was. Every ship has one. Typically up high, hard to find.”

Mack looks at Lucy and says smoothly, “You ever need help finding your G-spot, just holler.” Lucy
glares and holds her chainsaw a little tighter.

Spencer’s mouth falls open and closed again. Maybe this was the ‘G’ that Beth was talking about, or maybe…“This must be the ‘G’ that Sue was talking about. She said she wanted a status report from Raven.”

Donna calls up, “So, you don’t think it’s just this Raven girl who’s been turning the gravity off, then?”

“Not last night. These wires are all chewed up.” Spencer can’t think of any reason why Raven would destroy something she then has to repair when she could just turn it off instead. “Someone messed with it who didn’t want it to be fixed.” She imagines them crawling along the walls in the night, up here undetected, knowing right where to go and what to do. The whole thing makes her shiver.

These are some pretty fucking smart little spiders.

Knowing they were here recently also makes her want to get the hell down.

“Here, help me,” Spencer says. She flattens herself face-down against the floor and slowly lowers her legs until she finds footholds on Mack and Lucy’s hands. Dropping to the ground with a huff, she brushes the dust off her uniform and shakes out her hair. “Well, at least that’s one mystery solved.”

“Yeah, good work, Sherlock Homo,” Mack says. “Can we go now? I wanna swing by the kitchen and swipe some bread for my new batch. Oh, and I also don’t want my friend to be dead.”

Spencer stares at her, grabs the sledgehammer off the floor, and continues onward down the hall. “This way.”
“Should we circle back for Faith?” Lucy asks as they get further and further from the classes corridor. It has been quite a long time.

Spencer looks down the hall behind them, but Faith’s not coming. At least, not that kind of coming. “We’ll catch up to her later.”

They take off at a brisk pace, but then Spencer slows as they seem to be getting close to Solitary. She is only just now thinking about what kind of safeguards might be in place. If this is the high-security section, are they even going to be able to get to Ripley? How many other prisoners will be back here? And, most importantly, how many guards?

The four women reach a clearing as the hallway widens, and Spencer realizes they’re at the very back of the kitchen. Even without the map, the smells of rotten food and general cafeteria ickiness are unmistakable. There’s an open space now that connects them to the parallel hallway along the other side of the Mess Hall, their road-not-traveled. Spencer makes a mental note to go back that way when they return. If the grav control (she refuses to call it the G-SPOT) was on this side, there could be something important over there, too.

Ahead of her is a giant wall with the hallways continuing on either side. A large sign on it reads:

^ SOLITARY WARD ^

Spencer gulps. Here goes nothing. “You guys ready?” she turns to ask.

The others nod and ready their weapons. Mack scowls and waves at the foul air saying, “Anywhere but here.” But before Spencer can raise her sledgehammer, something catches her eye. On the rear wall of the kitchen, next to a door into the facility, is a handle on a panel in the wall with clear, large red letters above it.

GARBAGE

A mess of jumbled yellow thread is wrapped around the handle, reaching all the way down to the floor. The chute is open—just enough space for something small to slip through.

“Oh my god,” Spencer says, dropping her hammer to the ground and running over. The other three see what she’s found and follow.

Spencer pulls the handle and is immediately overwhelmed with the stench rising from the depths of the ship. The chute's entrance is about two feet wide and eighteen inches deep, certainly wide enough for a large bag of trash to fit. Or a person.

“What the hell is wrong with me?” Spencer berates herself as she starts to pace in the hallway. “How did I not think of ‘garbage’? Why would spiders live in a gymnasium?”
“Hey!” Donna says, taking hold of Spencer’s shoulders. “It’s alright, yeah? You figured it out.”

Her voice is comforting, this kind stranger. Spencer’s glad someone’s here who wants to take care of her, even though she can take care of herself. She’s so tired. So very, very tired.

“I know you don’t want to look down there,” Donna says, and Spencer is grateful for the offer she’s anticipating. “But you’re gonna have to,” Donna continues. “Pretty sure I’m about to retch.”

Mack’s turning green, too, and holding her hand over her mouth. Lucy seems fine, but that’s not exactly surprising.

Spencer steels herself, holds her nose, and leans over, looking down the tunnel. It’s dark and deep, maybe twenty feet or more. Then, taking a risk, she calls, “Quinn?” but receives no reply. No scuttling up the sides to attack her, either. “I don’t see her. I think there’s definitely…” she chooses her words carefully, “…something in here, but I can’t see. It could just be trash.”

Mack’s voice is nasal from the pinching. “Or it could be our friends.”

Spencer squints and tries to adjust to the darkness. She can’t see just where the bottom is, but there is light coming from the other end, like it feeds into a room far below.

*Level 1.*

But some of the light is blocked by whatever’s in the tunnel. Or whoever. Spencer’s glad she didn’t see “Furnace” anywhere on the map. “Okay, yeah, it’s really far down. It goes to the first floor, whatever’s down there.”

“The lab?” Lucy asks.

“Maybe? I can’t tell. But we have to find a way.”

Mack raises her free hand. “I’ll push you.”

“Ha, ha. It’s blocked,” Spencer says. “I’d consider jumping down, but I couldn’t get back out. We have to come at this from the other side.”

“Assuming she’s even in there,” Lucy adds.

“It’s the best lead we have. How do you explain this?” Spencer grabs the yellow thread wrapped around the handle. “I think the spiders cut the gravity, then pull on this to open it and float someone in. When Raven turns the gravity back on, the person falls down, then they eat her. Nobody investigates it because it’s supposed to smell bad in here. Whatever they don’t finish goes out with the other kitchen trash. It’s genius.”

The others don’t seem thrilled by this theory but can’t argue with it, either. It does make sense. In fact, it’s the first thing they’ve found all day that does.

“So, you’re saying Quinn’s in there, half-eaten or whatever,” Mack says, disheartened. “That’s it, then.” She drops her arms to her sides and turns away.

“That’s not what I said. We don’t know if she’s in there. But we do know we have to get *down there* if there’s any chance of saving her.” Spencer takes a breath. “And that means we keep going. Ripley’s still our best shot of finding a way to the lower level.”

“Whatever,” Mack says and picks up her crossbow.
Spencer whispers, “We’re coming,” and closes the chute with her words trapped inside, like a message in a bottle.

********************

They reach a right turn as the hall ends, and Spencer immediately puts out her arms and pushes everyone back around the corner and out of sight. There is a blonde woman standing guard, facing away from them and pacing. She’s wearing a tight, maroon leather suit that makes her look very intimidating, certainly more than the regular guards. It appears she’s standing in front of another hallway that must hold the Solitary prisoners, but Spencer can’t quite see.

“Okay,” she breathes in a hushed whisper, “there’s just one.” Something might finally be going their way.

Lucy steps forward with her chainsaw. “No problem.”

But Spencer grabs her and yanks her back with an angry whisper, “NO! NO MORE KILLING.”

Lucy looks confused, but Spencer’s more than ready for a new approach. “It’s too loud. We can’t draw any more attention. We’re cornered. If we get flanked by more guards, we won’t get out. We do this quietly.”

Lucy sighs and lowers her weapon.

“I think I can get to Ripley if I can sneak past her,” Spencer gestures to the guard with her head. “Maybe if one of you distracts her somehow, I—”

“DIBS!” Mack calls out, and Spencer has to shush and berate her. Someone’s mood seems to have dramatically improved by this turn of events.

Spencer realizes she shouldn’t be surprised. The target is practically a more adult version of Quinn. Well, if Quinn dressed like Mistress Berry. Not that Spencer’s thinking about that now. Except that she is.

Checking to be sure the guard is still unaware of their presence, Spencer says, “Fine. Circle around to the other side and draw her that way. You two stay here in case something goes wrong.”

Donna nods, but Lucy sighs again, looking very bored and disappointed.

“Go,” Spencer says to Mack, who quietly sets down the crossbow on the floor and takes off, doubling back to where they found the garbage chute. It takes less than a minute, and then Spencer sees Mack strolling out from the opposite hallway, about thirty feet away, heading right for the guard like she’s God’s gift to women.

“Hey there.”

The guard turns at the sound.

“I’m Mack. Just thought you should know what name you’ll be screaming later.”

Spencer’s face falls into her hands. Oh my god.

The guard tilts her head curiously and steps forward, not taking her eyes off Mack. “You’re in violation of lockdown, inmate.”

“That’s a hell of an outfit,” Mack says. “Think I could talk you out of it?”
Spencer’s cringing at every word, but the distraction is working—the guard’s leaving her post. Spencer tiptoes out and starts toward the hallway to Solitary. The guard’s now only about five feet from Mack, and Spencer has no idea what’s about to happen.

“Look, I don’t have a lot of time here,” Mack starts again with a confident, cheesy grin. “My face is leaving in ten minutes. Will you be on it or not?”

That stops Spencer in her tracks, and her sledgehammer clangs as it hits the ground. 

Shit.

The guard turns and glares at Spencer, looking a lot more dangerous than Mistress Berry ever could.

“Hey!” Mack shouts and grabs her shoulder, but the guard pulls her weapon from her holster—a maroon baton that matches her outfit perfectly—and pushes the end into Mack’s ribcage. Mack crumples to the ground, screaming and writhing in agony from the contact, like it’s some kind of taser.

Spencer can’t see what’s happening to Mack from this angle, but it sounds awful. So awful, in fact, that Spencer doesn’t see Lucy running in with her weapon raised. With a quick pull on the chain and a battle cry, Lucy plunges the end of the chainsaw straight into the guard’s back so it’s sticking a foot out the other side and inches from Mack’s face, now covered in blood spray as she cries weakly.

“LUCY!” Spencer screams.

Lucy retracts the saw and the guard falls to the ground. She powers down her machine and turns to Spencer, blinking through the fresh layer of blood on her face. “What?”

Spencer is in shock. She doesn’t even know what to say.

“She was going to kill you,” Lucy says. Removing the small loop of three keys from the guard’s belt, she walks past Spencer toward the solitary ward as if she’s done nothing more than squash a bug.

Spencer takes a deep breath and reassesses the scene. Mack is crumpled on the ground and not going anywhere, at least not right now. Spencer’s team is dropping like flies. “Stay with her?” she says to Donna, who nods.

Fortunately, it looks like Spencer was right; there’s only the one guard in this ward. There are three large doors—two opposite each other on the left and right, and one facing her on the end. There are no signs or markings or numbers. Each door is large and blue with a small square window (covered) and a heavy horizontal bar.

Spencer starts with the door on the right, lifting the hinged metal plate to look through the window. The cell is small, dingy, and empty—just a crude toilet and a bare mattress on the metal floor. She peers into the second cell, the one in the center, and is met with two stern, brown eyes staring right back at her.

Spencer jumps back, startled, as the flap clangs shut.

She takes a few steadying breaths and cautiously approaches the window again, preparing for what’s on the other side. She blinks away visions of the “DANGEROUS” file, trying to remember there can’t be anyone behind this door more dangerous than the ally behind her.

Right?
She lifts the flap again. “Ellen Ripley?”

The prisoner is sitting on the mattress with her elbows on her knees. Her uniform is so faded it’s become gray and riddled with holes. One hand is buried in a mop of curly brown hair that’s sure to be a home for god knows what. The smell from the cell is unbearable.

“Are you Ellen Ripley?” Spencer repeats.

The woman keeps staring back. “You’re new,” she says, moving her hand down. Her voice sounds weak, like it’s gone unused for quite some time. “What happened to Cara?”

Who?

Oh…the guard.

“Cara? Oh, she’s…” Spencer half-glances behind her and quickly recovers. “…indisposed. But we don’t have much time. I’m an inmate. We broke out to find my friend who’s been kidnapped by… something loose on the ship. I was hoping maybe you knew something about that.”

Ripley doesn’t blink or flinch or react at all and still isn’t breaking her stare. There’s something hiding behind her eyes. Spencer can see it even from this distance. Whether Ripley’s searching look is an accusation or a silent interrogation, Spencer isn’t sure. But there’s definitely more to this.

“Just how big are these ‘somethings’?”

Spencer holds up her finger and thumb about two inches apart, high enough to be seen through the window.

Ripley releases the air from her lungs and relaxes, as if she had been scared of much worse. “No,” she says, turning away. “I don’t.” She lies back down and stares at the wall, adding, “Sorry,” as an afterthought.

Spencer takes a breath and steadies herself. “You’re lying.”

“I haven’t stepped outside that door in a year and a half.” The traces of sympathy in Ripley’s voice are fading fast. “What makes you think I’d know about anything happening on this ship?”

“We just killed a dozen guards to get to you. I’m not leaving here without answers.”

Ripley turns back at this with renewed interest. “We?” She pauses. “This is a low-security facility. There aren’t a dozen guards to kill. Who’s with you?”

Spencer turns and calls behind her, “Hey,” motioning Lucy over. “Come say hi.”

A smiling, blood-covered face steps in front of the open window. “Hello, Ellen.” Her tone contrasts with the ghastly sight of her; a perfect encapsulation of the walking paradox that has always been Lucy Fabray. “I hope you had a lovely holiday. We missed you.”

Standing and walking over to the window, Ripley takes a closer look at Lucy, or as much of her as she can see through the small frame. The jewels on the chainsaw are barely visible through the layer of gut-splatter. Her once pink uniform is a solid maroon and crusty with stray bits of entrails.

“Looks like you’ve had a fun day,” Ripley says, dryly.

“I really have.” She sounds like someone freshly rejuvenated after a nice long vacation.
Ripley looks at Spencer. “So, are you here to let me out or kill me?”

“That depends.” Spencer’s back in the power position, where she feels most comfortable. Just like her mother. “Why do you kill other inmates? Not a fan of the holiday spirit?”

Ripley’s face flinches ever so slightly at the words. “I’ve never killed anyone.”

Lucy raises an eyebrow with an air of superiority, but Spencer furrows her brow. “That’s not what I hear.”

“They don’t know what they’re talking about.”

“I don’t know,” Spencer says, “they seem pretty sure to me.” As do the forms in her file to back it up. “I’ve got names. Kennedy. Xena. Carmilla. The list goes on and on.”

“THEY’RE LYING.” With a quick step forward, Ripley gets in Spencer’s face, spitting mad. “Do I look like a cold-blooded killer to you?”

Please don’t make me answer that.

It seems this interrogation is going to get heated if it’s going to be successful. Realizing the noise could draw more guards in their direction, Spencer says quietly to Lucy, “Go stand watch?”

The blonde tightens the hold on her weapon and heads back toward the entrance without a word, casting one last glance at Ripley.

Spencer’s trying to wear Ripley down into a confession, but it might backfire on her if Ripley shuts down entirely. Spencer’s questions may be numbered. Hell, her days—her hours—may be numbered, especially if she keeps poking this caged bear. But the emotion in the woman’s voice gives Spencer pause. There’s something there. Regret is written all over Ripley’s face, and Spencer can’t figure out what isn’t adding up. This doesn’t sound like a woman who relishes in murder, not like Lucy. She doesn’t look at all like someone chomping at the bit to get out and kill people. No, Ripley seems devastated and hopeless, like she’s suffered and lost. She sounds broken.

Maybe Ripley’s telling the truth, or maybe it’s all an act. Spencer doesn’t have much time to find out, so she’ll have to follow her instincts. “If you’re not a mass murderer, why are you in Solitary?”

“If I were killing people every Christmas, why would Sue keep letting me out?” Ripley counters.

“You didn’t answer my question.”

“And you didn’t think about mine. I’m not a criminal, I’m a prisoner. My ship, the Nostromo, was attacked by an alien monster that eviscerated my entire crew.” (Spencer’s eyes go wide, but she is too terrified to interrupt.) “I was sent to the Uterius under quarantine, but I was released from the lab after four weeks.”

“You know about the lab?” Spencer asks with renewed interest.

“Sometimes I can hear it,” Ripley says. Spencer almost writes off the comment as the ramblings of an insane woman, but then she adds, “It’s right below us.”

Spencer looks at the floor, stupidly, as if she’d be able to see right through the layers of metal paneling. But if Ripley’s right, she now feels very uneasy standing here. There could be spiders crawling up through the vents as they speak.
“They let me live like a person down there,” Ripley explains. “Even under watch, I had actual quarters and real food. Then one day, the government sends the prison new leadership.” Her face makes it clear who she means. “Sue read my file and moved me here like it was nothing. Some bullshit about ‘unknown incubation periods’ and not trusting I wasn’t ‘a host waiting to hatch and destroy us all.’ It’d been ten years. I tried telling her the incubation period was a matter of hours, but she wouldn’t listen. She was scared.”

Spencer can’t blame her. But, scared enough to fabricate a stack of false reports of violence just to keep Ripley locked away? It seems a bit extreme.

“I’ve never given anyone reason to fear me,” Ripley says. “Sue keeps me in here because she doesn’t want to admit she was wrong. I think she was letting me out on Christmas as some kind of fucked-up apology. And now she doesn’t even do that anymore.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Something changed.” It’s clear Ripley has turned this same question over and over again in her mind. Maybe every minute for the last five months. “You’ve been here, what, a year?”

“Three months.” Spencer sounds a bit more sheepish than she’d like.

Ripley laughs at the idea of someone so green. “I’ve taken shits longer than that.” Spencer makes a face, but Ripley doesn’t back down. “You have no idea what you’re up against.”

“So, tell me! Tell me what happens here! Because it’s happening to my friend Quinn right now.” She doesn’t have time for this crap. Plus, who knows how much longer Lucy can hold out without killing something. “There are spiders on this ship, and I think you know where they come from, and you know that they take people in the night and eat them.” The look on Ripley’s face, complete shock and disbelief, tells Spencer she’s wrong, but she pushes anyway. “So, how about you start telling me something useful, or we walk away and leave you here to keep rotting.”

“I don’t know anything about that.”

“Don’t you?” Spencer presses. “You’ve been on this ship longer than anybody. You’ve got to know something!”

“I swear, I don’t know what you’re talking—”

“Do you think they’ll come kill you next if you talk? We can stop them. Just help us!”

“I don’t know about any spiders!”

Spencer’s voice is rising now, too. “Yes, you do, I know you do. They’re hiding somewhere in this ship. Tell me where!”

“I don’t know.”

“TELL ME!”

“I. DON’T. KNOW.”

Spencer’s fighting back tears. She bangs her fist on the door, screaming, “SHE’S GOING TO DIE.”

Ripley shouts right back, “SHE’S ALREADY GONE.”

Spencer feels like the wind is knocked out of her.
She’s already gone.

“Not your friend,” Ripley corrects, a bit embarrassed by her outburst. “Mine. I don’t know anything about yours. I’m sorry.”

Air begins to flow into Spencer’s lungs again and she closes her eyes for a moment, letting the relief and return of hope wash over her. It’s not over. Not yet.

Looking at Ripley with renewed determination, she says, “Tell me about her,” hoping this gentler prompt might yield a useful response.

Ripley smiles bleakly, like everything is behind her and she knows her life is at its end. “Jenette was…everything. After losing my ship, my crew, myself…I found her. And every year, I had to choose. They made me choose.”

“Choose what?”

Ripley swallows as she breaks eye contact. “Who had to go.”

The air in Spencer’s chest feels trapped once more. This conversation is not good for her health.

“There’s an amnesty program in the space prison system,” Ripley explains. “To make room for new inmates. Because this is a low-security facility, anyone who’s been here at least two years with a perfect record of good behavior can be released early, regardless of the crime. One person at the end of each year.”

This so-called program is news to Spencer, but she hasn’t yet been here at a year’s end to find out if it’s legit. Still, it seems like good gossip that people would be talking about if it were a real thing.

“Every Christmas Eve,” Ripley says, “Sue comes and offers me the same deal. I can choose from the list of eligible candidates, or she can let Jenette go. If I choose from the list, I can spend Christmas with Jenette. But if I let her go, I don’t even get to say goodbye.”

Assuming this isn’t a steaming hot bowl of bullshit, Spencer’s mind reels at the thought of having to make this difficult choice not just once but over and over. To fixate on it every year, knowing it’s coming, and torture yourself with the various consequences of either decision.

“But, if she’s on the list, then what’s the issue?” Spencer asks, and Ripley laughs.

“She’s not. Jenette’s not exactly known for good behavior. That’s why she didn’t know it was even an option for her to leave. Most inmates forget about it because there’s no way they’ll go that long without a write-up. But Sue was going to shred her file and expunge her record, or at least that’s what she told me.”

Ripley pauses for a moment before continuing. “I’ve made the same selfish choice for ten years, exchanging ten years of a life she could’ve lived outside these walls, all so I could have ten afternoons of holding her.” Her guilt seems so crushing, she probably has never said these words out loud before. “But I guess Sue finally got tired of asking me, because I didn’t get the visit this year. Maybe Sue told her I was the one keeping her here. She could’ve been vented into space, for all I know. I haven’t heard anything about her all year.” She thinks for a beat. “Maybe your spiders ate her.”

Spencer’s eyes go wide, running down the list of bodies thus far. Jenette…“Wait, are you talking about Jenny Schecter?”
Ripley scowls. “No!” She seems offended by the implication. “Jenette Vasquez.”

“…Vasquez.”

Ripley nods. She looks absolutely heart-broken.

“Vasquez is fine,” Spencer says with a “What have you been smoking?” tone.

Ripley looks up, eyes filled with light like Spencer’s never seen. “What?”

“She’s down the hall. I just saw her a few hours ago.”

“Are you sure?” Her voice is thick with hope and desperation.

“Short hair? Tough as nails? Obnoxiously arrogant? Yeah, she’s right down there.”

Ripley comes right up to the window. “Let me out.” It isn’t a request.

“Not until you give me something I can use.” Spencer crosses her arms. Hastings aren’t heartless, but they’re not stupid, either. This amnesty program could be a total ruse. Sure, maybe Ellen Ripley is the Mother Teresa of space prison. Or maybe the rumors are true and there’s a pile of bodies hidden in a closet somewhere. Spencer’s seen stranger things today.

Ripley leans forward with her hands on the door, hiding her eyes against her shoulder. She’s barely holding her shit together. “I have to see her. Please. Will you at least go get her?”

Spencer has to give credit to Sue—This is clearly some powerful leverage.

“Tell me how to access to the lower level,” Spencer says. “That’s where we think Quinn is.”

Ripley’s caught between excitement and despair. “I don’t know where the stairs are, but I can help you. Take me to Vasquez. We’ll help you look.”

Now it’s Spencer who shakes her head. “I don’t think so.” She pauses to consider her options. “I go get Vasquez, and if she backs up your story, then I let you out.”

“No, you can’t tell her about Sue. I can’t…” Ripley regains her composure as best she can. “Don’t make me tell her what I’ve done.” She looks right through Spencer with hollow eyes. “She’s all I have to live for.”

It seems sincere, and Spencer gets it. After just three months she’d sell out a lot of people in this place for the chance to spend an afternoon with her friends again. And just like Spencer has this mission, this mystery, this drive within her to figure out just what the hell is going on in here, everyone needs something to keep them going.

She sighs and looks Ripley over one more time. She could just walk away and not risk it. Chalk up another dead end. She’s already given Ripley the gift of knowledge that the love of her life is alive and close. Hope is priceless in a place like this. But Spencer can do more for her, and she knows it. At this point, no one else is looking out for them. They only have each other. And breaking Ripley’s spirit won’t put Spencer’s back together.

It’s time to start trusting yet another potential mass-murderer. Spencer wonders how long this pattern is going to continue before she’s caught on the wrong side of it.
Chapter title taken from this riff on this quote from Aliens, because it still makes me laugh all these years later.
Chapter Notes

Here’s the map of the Uterius and the character photo index.

It takes both Spencer and Lucy to slide back the heavy, metal bar across the cell door, and it screeches loudly as it moves. But then Ripley steps out of the small room and takes a breath of fresh air, her eyes full of life.

“Hey! Let me out!”

The voice is coming from the third Solitary cell, the one on the left that Spencer didn’t check. The door shakes as a fist pounds on the other side, sending a series of booms into the narrow hallway. Spencer jumps and looks to Ripley for a sense of just how scared she should be. Was someone listening to their entire conversation? Could they know something helpful?

Ripley reaches over and flips up the visor to peer into the cell. “Shut up and sit down. Nobody cares about your tampon wrapper decoupage.”

Spencer stumbles, “S-should we…”

“No,” Ripley says, letting the flap drop shut and walking off. “I’m sick of her.”

More banging on the door. “Hey! Goddamnit, Ripley! LET ME OUT OF HERE!”

“GOODBYE, MARTHA,” Ripley shouts over her shoulder, grabbing Spencer by the arm and pulling her from Solitary as fast as she can. “Let’s go.”

Spencer doesn’t need to be told twice. She yanks the keys from the lock and shoves them into her shoe, then takes hold of her sledgehammer and makes her exit. “I’m Spencer,” she calls to Ripley as they run. “In case you…give a damn.” Her voice trails off at the end as Ripley gets out of shouting distance, oblivious.

They reach the end of the hall where they left Mack and Donna, and, other than the bloody guard corpse, the scene is not what Spencer expected to find. Mack is still curled up on the floor, crying and screaming with Donna standing nearby and looking frantic. Lucy’s a few feet away, facing the empty hallway on guard as if nothing weird is happening behind her.

“Oh, thank bloody god,” Donna says. She’s at her wit’s end. “I don’t know what’s wrong with her! I think she likes it! She won’t stop!”

Coming around to the other side, Spencer can now see the situation clearly. Mack’s got the dead guard’s baton and is holding one end of it with both hands. The other end is pressed firmly between her legs. Mack’s body convulses, back arching off the floor as she howls in a strange combination of agony mixed with pleasure.

“I’m really not comfortable with this!” Donna pleads, but Mack just keeps screaming through her tears.
Spencer doesn’t know what to do, either. It looks like the baton is producing some kind of electric current, and she doesn’t want to get shocked. Thankfully, after a few more seconds, Mack drops the baton to the ground, spent. Spencer kicks it away and leans down to check on her. Mack’s face is wet with tears and her body is weak. She’s alive and conscious but in no condition to walk, much less to fight spiders.

Pointing to what’s left of Cara, Ripley asks Lucy, “You did this?”

“It was a rush job,” she replies a bit defensively. “The others are much better.”

“Donna,” Spencer says, “this is Ripley. She’s here to help. I need you to do me a favor and take her back down the hall to the bathrooms to take a quick shower. Lucy can go with you and stand watch. She knows the way.”

Donna raises an eyebrow and says, “Now there’s time for a spa day?” But then she takes a closer look (and sniff) at Ripley and retracts her objection. “Right, yeah, come along.”

“I know the way,” Ripley says. She doesn’t need a chaperone.

“There could be more guards,” Spencer says. “And I want someone I trust to stay with you.” She meets Lucy’s eyes.

“I thought you cleared this level?”

Spencer drops the sledgehammer in case this is going to take a while. “We’re not sure. They keep coming. It’s like they’re clones or something. We don’t know how many there are or if we’ve killed them all.”

“Jenette and I are going after Sue. I know where her office is.”

“She’s not there.” Spencer shakes her head. “She cleaned it out hours ago.” Ripley deflates a bit. “But we’ll find her. You help us fight and find Quinn, we’ll help you find Sue.”

Ripley looks at each woman in turn and makes her decision. “I need a weapon.”

“Take the crossbow.” Spencer pulls a very tired and weak Mack to her feet, wrapping an arm around her to support the weight. “Hand me that?” she says to Ripley and points to the sledgehammer on the ground. She’d consider swapping for the electro-club if it hadn’t just become Mack’s new sex toy. “Thanks.”

“Where’d you get these?” Ripley asks as she checks the various components of the crossbow.

Spencer takes a breath. “A friend.” With a strained step, she starts dragging a very heavy Mack and an even heavier sledgehammer toward the hall on the left.

“So, what about you, then?” Donna asks her.

“I’m going to find Faith and get her back to the cell,” Spencer says, nodding toward Sleeping Ugly. “Meet us there in ten minutes.” She looks to Ripley. “Then I’ll take you to Vasquez.”

Ripley nods. “Alright,” and looks to Lucy and Donna, then starts toward the east hallway.

Spencer readjusts Mack’s torso on her shoulder and stumbles slightly, tripping over the sledgehammer sliding alongside her left foot. She doesn’t know how she’s going to get very far with all this weight dragging her down, but she has to find a way.
It’s been at least three hours since they first left cell 1, and now they’re moving slower than ever. Even with the breakthrough at the garbage chute, it feels like they’re getting further from Quinn, not closer.

Spencer and Mack shuffle along and get about halfway down the cafeteria hall when Spencer hears it—another Boomer is running right toward them.

Spencer says, “Sorry,” to Mack and drops her to the ground, taking the forty-pound sledgehammer firmly in both hands and winding up. She tries to time her swing, but it’s slow to move, tired as her arms are now, and Spencer misses Boomer completely. Her body is thrown forward with the momentum and she stumbles to the ground.

“You really think that’s going to work?” Boomer says, kicking Spencer hard in the gut and reaching for something on her belt.

Spencer coughs and winces, weakly sputtering, “Where’s Quinn?” But then her entire body is on fire with electricity emanating from between her legs.

She’s never felt pain like this in her life. Every nerve in her body is screaming, and she tries to cry out, but no sound comes. Time stops, and all she knows is suffering beyond imagination.

Then, Spencer hears a distant oof and the voltage stops coursing through her. The world snaps back, though fuzzy and distant. Spencer doesn’t know how long she’s been lying here—maybe seconds, but it was more than enough to wipe her out. She jolts with aftershocks, barely able to open her eyes. She manages to focus enough to see the wire hooked to her crotch. Her tired eyes follow it to the hands of her attacker.

But Boomer’s on the ground. Mack’s kneeling over her and slamming her elbow into Boomer’s face, stomach, and chest one slow body drop at a time. The guard’s unconscious and only moving in reaction to Mack’s assault.

Spencer reaches down and delicately unhooks the metal claw from her body, then fights to sit up, nauseated and weak and aching everywhere. She remembers when this happened to Quinn, how that attack lasted for a very long ten seconds or so, and it fucked Quinn up for days. But Quinn took that agony for her, and Spencer will be damned if she doesn’t fight for Quinn now.

She has no choice but to somehow get off this floor.

She digs deep within herself, drawing strength from how very, very angry she is. Angry this is happening. Angry about Quinn. Angry they can’t find her. Angry at her mother. Angry at everything. She pulls herself to stand, reaches slowly for the sledgehammer, and lifts it as high as her chest before it falls out of her hands, right onto Boomer’s bloody face. The cracking noise her skull makes is pleasantly familiar and every bit as satisfying as she remembers.

“Come on,” Spencer breathes in a dry whisper to Mack, who nods, and they help each other get back on their feet.

The task is much harder now that Spencer’s had the life knocked out of her, but she uses the sledgehammer almost like a crutch, leaning on it for stability. One painful step at a time, they eventually make it to the end of the hall by the entrance to the cafeteria.

“Anybody got a cigarette?”

Faith comes strolling out from the direction of the cell block, looking like the cat who caught the canary and then fucked it majestically for an hour. But her face drops when she sees Mack and
“Whoa, who ran you two over?” She runs up to them and checks for serious injuries but finds none.

“Boomer,” Spencer says. It hurts to talk, but her nerves have mostly stopped spasming now, thankfully.

“Shit.” Faith reaches out to support her and wraps an arm around Spencer’s lower back.

Spencer blinks through the weakness and pain, trying to regain a sense of normalcy and control. “We gotta get Mack back to her cell.”

“Mmhmm,” Mack weakly hums. “And go get my stick.”

“Wait, where’re the others?” Faith asks, looking around. She’s clearly worried the answer is, ‘They’re dead.’

“They’re with Ripley. I told them to meet us there.”

“Too late for that.” It’s Lucy.

Ripley and Donna are following right behind her, exiting the bathroom, not twenty feet from where Faith’s standing. Spencer notices a new pile of what must have been another Boomer by the door. She wonders how all of those separated parts ever once constructed a whole person.

“Where’s Vasquez?” Ripley says, wringing some water out of her hair. Her uniform is dripping wet, like she just wore it right into the shower. Still, it's a vast improvement.

“Fifteen,” Spencer says.

Ripley walks over to Mack, picks her up, and slings her over her shoulder like a sack of flour. Spencer’s eyes widen at the surprising display of strength, but Ripley just says, “Let’s go.”

Spencer exhales with a nod and starts moving. The group enters the back end of the cell block, where the TARDIS is still parked outside the empty cell 1. Ripley gives it a curious look as she passes by but doesn’t stop to ask questions.

“Faith!”

It seems cell 1 isn’t vacant after all. Spencer turns to see a very pissed Buffy Summers climbing out of what used to be Santana’s bunk. The guard’s uniform is torn down the front and she’s stumbling as she walks, holding a hand against the side of her head. Faith must have knocked her unconscious, dragged her into the cell, and locked her in there. But they continue onward.

A few prisoners in other cells step back from bars, saying things like “Oh shit, it’s Ripley!” as the group walks through.

But Ripley doesn’t seem to hear them. She’s running ahead, still carrying Mack and watching the numbers above the cells just like Spencer did earlier today. They’re still going in circles.

They pass the bloodbath in cell 8, where Kat hasn’t moved from the back corner. The entire floor is flooded with red. Spencer still feels awful for what happened, but there isn’t time to dwell on that now.

“Hey, wait! Stop at ten,” Spencer calls out to Ripley. They backtrack and Spencer meets them, slightly out of breath.
Aphasia jumps down and shimmies the door open so Ripley can carry Mack inside. “What the hell! You kill her?! Nobody told me it was Christmas! I gotta put up my tree!”

Lucy and Donna stay back to give their fallen comrade some space.

“She’s fine,” Spencer insists. “She just needs to rest. We’re still looking for Quinn. Everyone’s fine.” Turning to Ripley, Spencer says, “Go. I got this.”

Aphasia watches her leave without asking any more questions. She takes a deep breath and says, “She need anything? I got all kinds of drugs and stuff.” When Spencer’s head whips around, Aphasia clarifies, “from the infirmary.” It’s clear from her tone that she’s still pissed at Spencer, but they’re meeting on common ground right now. For Mack’s sake, of all people.

“Painkillers,” Spencer says. “But she’ll have to wake up first. For now, just stay with her and keep an eye on her.” Spencer heads back out quickly, then stops at the door and turns around. “Thanks.” She meets Aphasia’s eyes with sincerity. They’d all be long dead if she hadn’t loaned out her stash of weapons.

But it’s too early for congratulations, not when Quinn is still MIA. There are too many unknowns.

“Hey.” Spencer takes one step back inside as her eyes trail down to the floor. “Quick thing.” She pauses and considers her words. “You had my file, when I first got here.”

That strikes a nerve. Aphasia tuts and looks around like she can’t believe what she’s hearing. “Here you go again with more paperwork bullshit. This is not a good look for you.”

“I just found it in Umbridge’s office,” Spencer says. “Was that the same one? Did you put it back?”

“Yeah,” Aphasia says, staring her down hard. “You are boring.”

Spencer tries not to get emotional again. She’s already appeared weak in front of Aphasia enough times today. Meeting her eyes, Spencer pushes through the hurt and frustration. “But you read it. And then you kept it from me.”

She lets her eyes say the rest. You knew. You even said I had “Mommy issues.” You knew who put me here.

Aphasia’s expression softens ever so slightly. “Like I said. It was boring.” She waits a beat and then clarifies, “I guess I didn’t think there was anything in it you’d want to know.”

A quiet moment of understanding passes between them. Spencer takes a deep breath and wipes her eye with the heel of her hand. “Yeah. Okay.” Enough conversation, enough wasted tears on her betrayer. “I’ll be back soon,” she says, and turns away.

Spencer sees Ripley stopped up ahead in front of what must be cell 15. She’s facing the cell door and covering her hand with her mouth, overcome with emotion.

Vasquez is out of sight but her voice is unmistakable. “Holy fuck.” She runs up to the bars and Ripley meets her there in what looks to be a very passionate and unhygienic kiss.

Spencer’s moved by the display—hands reaching through the bars, grabbing at hair and jumpsuits, trying to get as close to each other as they can. It’s kind of sweet.

“Get this goddamn door open!” Vasquez shouts when she comes up for air.
“Oh! On it!” Donna says, running up and fishing for the sonic screwdriver in her jacket.

Spencer follows closely behind. But before Donna can find it, Spencer sees Hermione walk up behind Vasquez. She had no idea they were cellmates. It seems like quite a bizarre match.

Reaching out a hand, Hermione says, “Everyone be still,” and pulls Vasquez away from Ripley. In the same motion, she twists Vasquez’s arm and there’s a loud CRACK! Instantly, Hermione and Vasquez disappear and reappear on the other side of the bars with an identical CRACK!

Donna blinks. “Or…”

And now with nothing separating them, Vasquez and Ripley are back in each other’s arms, fully this time, and they don’t hold back. It’s clear that Ripley has been telling the truth, at least about her love for Vasquez.

“What are you doing here?” Vasquez asks, pulling Ripley closer as they embrace.

“They got me out.” Ripley gestures to Spencer and the team with a grateful smile.

Vasquez takes a step back and looks at Spencer in disbelief. “Bee-Stings broke you out of Solitary?”

Spencer scowls at the nickname and glances briefly down at her chest. “We’ve taken out eleven guards so far,” she says in her defense. As if that would make her boobs bigger.

“Twelve,” Faith corrects with a wink.

“There are killer spiders living in the ship,” Ripley says, looking at Spencer to show she believes her story.

“No shit?” Vasquez sounds a little scared, or at least what passes for “scared” from someone this badass.

Ripley’s voice is soft. “They took her girl.”

“They took my sister,” Lucy corrects.

“Pink?” Vasquez says.

Ripley picks up the crossbow from the ground. “I’m going to help them find her. Hopefully I can take out Sue in the process. You in?”

“Lead the way,” Vasquez grins, reaching for another heated kiss.

It’s music to Spencer’s ears. She needs an army, and if this gives them another fighter in the battle, then all the better, especially with Mack out of commission. When the makeout session ends, Spencer says, “You’ll need a weapon. Come on.”

The group moves back toward cell 10, now joined by Vasquez and, it seems, Hermione. Spencer wonders how Aphasia’s going to handle that news. From the look on her face as they come into view...not particularly well.

“Hi,” Hermione says quietly, stepping out of the shadows.

Spencer wants to give them their moment, but they’ve already lost so much time. “Hey, I’m sorry to even ask, but do you have any more weapons? Vasquez needs something.”
Aphasia sighs, then lifts the mattress and rummages around underneath. She digs deep with one arm, reaching to what must be the bottom of the pit, and winces. Then, she pulls out an absolutely gigantic weapon that Spencer can only guess is a...bazooka? Grenade launcher? It barely fits between the bars.

“Merry Christmas,” Aphasia says and hands over the heavy artillery.

“Sweet,” Vasquez says, stepping forward to take it. She faces the back of the cell and pulls the trigger. A huge stream of flames bursts from the end, roaring loudly, and chars the back wall in black as she oscillates left and right. The toilet paper roll keeps burning after she stops. “Bitchin’.”

Spencer has stopped wondering just how Aphasia acquired all these items and is simply grateful that these spiders are going to be really fucking dead.

Aphasia looks at Spencer’s accessory and says in disbelief, “Damn, you still carrying that thing around?”

“Yep,” Spencer says, groaning as she lifts the very, very heavy sledgehammer once again. “Remind me to switch to a golf club next time I go on a murder spree.” She drags her tired ass out into the hall once more, regretting her many life choices.

Aphasia’s mood changes once she sees she’s left alone with the final visitor—Hermione. Spencer hangs back just outside the door, her curiosity getting the best of her.

It seems Hermione is every bit as unsure of how to navigate the situation as her girlfriend is. “Hi.”

“Hey.” There’s an awkward silence, then Aphasia gestures beyond the bars and says, “She coulda just asked for a golf club. I got three of ‘em.”

Goddamnit, Spencer thinks, but it’s too late to do anything about it. No trade-ins for eavesdroppers.

A beat passes. “Do you have it?” Hermione asks.

Aphasia bites her lip and steels her expression, pretending to be okay. There’s nothing she can say, so she just reaches back under the mattress. She doesn’t have to dig or even look this time. She knows right where it is.

Hermione reaches to take the long, wooden wand, but Aphasia doesn’t let go right away. Their hands rest for a moment on opposite ends, inches apart. Spencer wonders how many layers to this moment there are—how long Aphasia’s been keeping the wand from her, how Hermione really feels about that, how many times they’ve been through this. If it gets easier each time, or that much harder. Or if Aphasia knows just how easily Hermione can teleport herself out of her cell to anywhere she wants, yet she never comes here.

“Thanks,” Hermione says, and Aphasia finally releases her grip. “Are you sure you don’t want to come with us?”

Spencer hadn’t realized Hermione was joining the team. Well, the more, the scarier.

Aphasia shakes her head. “Somebody needs to be here in case Quinn comes back. And I gotta watch the stuff.” She shrugs half-heartedly. “You know.”

Ripley comes up behind Spencer and pulls her aside. “I thought maybe Jenette would know a way downstairs, but I’m sorry, she doesn’t. But all we need is one guard,” Ripley assures her. “We can make her talk.”
Spencer looks back down the hall toward cell 1. “I think that can be arranged. Come on.”

Ripley joins Vasquez, Faith, Lucy, and Donna, who are chatting with other inmates a few cells down the hall. Spencer looks back to thank Aphasia again for her help, only to discover she’s interrupting.

Hermione steps onto the edge of the bed so she’s eye-level with Aphasia and kisses her, pulling her in with one hand firmly gripped on the collar of Aphasia’s uniform. It’s firm and intense, and Aphasia seems surprised by the move. But then she appears to accept what’s happening and relaxes to melt into the kiss. When Hermione breaks away, she hovers an inch from Aphasia’s lips, their foreheads touching, and whispers, “I’ll come back for you. I promise.”

Then, as quickly as she made her move, Hermione turns and charges out of the cell to catch up with the group. She’s startled to see they had an audience, but Spencer gives her a supportive, pursed smile as they walk together toward the distant shapes of their friends.

“Did you want a weapon?” Spencer asks as they pick up the pace.

“I have one.”

*If you say so.*

There’s some movement happening down at the end of the hall, and Spencer hurries to catch up. Members of the group are looking in the cell and talking to each other. It seems the Buffy interrogation has already started.

But then Spencer sees the open door—and the empty cell. She slows to a halt behind Vasquez and Lucy and looks inside. “What happened?!”

“Looks like *someone* didn’t take her keys,” Donna says, glaring at Faith.

“Hey, I never saw any keys,” Faith says, holding her hands up.

“Did you check *outside* her vagina?” Spencer snaps back. She runs a hand through her hair and tries to keep her cool. Just when she thought they had a functional plan in place…

“Hey, who knows if she even had keys in the first place.”

“She just let herself out of a locked prison cell?” Spencer asks.

Faith shrugs. “Girl’s wicked strong.”

Spencer’s learning that it’s not as hard to break out of this place as she previously thought. Aphasia does it. Hermione does it. Hell, with Donna’s help, Spencer’s done it, too. Even tiny cheerleaders can do it.

“So, we go after her, right?” Spencer asks. “You gave her a concussion. She couldn’t have gone far. Maybe we can follow her to this secret staircase or whatever.”

“Bet she’s going right to Sue,” Vasquez says, leaning the flamethrower against her shoulder.

They quickly decide to split up and do a lap of the ship, then meet back here with their intel. Hermione, Vasquez, and Ripley head down the cell block while Donna, Lucy, Faith, and Spencer take the classes corridor. They move at a jogging pace, reaching the hallway’s end with no sign of Buffy, or anyone for that matter. Running faster, they double-check the dead end past Sue’s office
and circle back.

The other group’s already waiting for them.

“Anything?” Spencer pants as they reach the TARDIS.

They all just shake their heads. “No trace,” Ripley says.

“How can she just be gone?” Spencer paces in frustration. “We’re trapped in space. People can’t just disappear.”

“Well, actually—” Hermione starts, but stops at Spencer’s glare.

“D’you think we can find any more of these Boomer types?” Donna asks. “Make one of them talk?”

“We didn’t see any on the west end.” Ripley looks to the others for confirmation. “Not alive, anyway."

“Neither did we,” Lucy says with a hint of disappointment.

“Then we keep looking. And there’s something I want to show you,” Spencer says to Ripley. “I think I know where the spiders take their kills. This way.”

They squeeze by the TARDIS and reach the main intersection again. Outside the bathroom is a pile of at least five Boomer bodies, sliced and stacked like a Jenga set.

“Daaaaamm!” Vasquez says, slowing down to examine the handiwork.

“Thank you,” Lucy beams.

“Keep moving,” Ripley says and starts heading up the classes hallway, but Spencer calls to her to stop. The group’s standing at the entrance to the southern hallway and gesturing for her to follow. But Ripley doesn’t seem keen on taking another step in the direction of Solitary.

“There’s a garbage chute behind the kitchen,” says Spencer.

“Sounds lovely,” Hermione mutters.

Spencer leads the way, retracing her steps where that asshole Boomer clit-tasered her, and she moves a little faster, strengthening her resolve. She looks in all directions as they walk just in case there’s another hidden gem like the gravity control panel. But there doesn’t seem to be anything on this hallway other than a locked custodial closet. Faith breaks the door in because she can, but there’s nothing of note inside. Though, Lucy could certainly use a good bleaching at this point.

When they reach the clearing, Spencer runs up to the garbage chute and says to everyone, “Hold your breath.” Yanking the handle open all the way, she looks down into the darkness once more, as if something would have changed in the last half hour. It hasn’t. “I still can’t see what’s down there,” she says, pinching her nose.

“Here, let me.” Hermione makes her way forward through the group. She stands next to Spencer and leans over to look inside. Pointing her wand down the shaft, Hermione says, “Lumos!”

Spencer jumps as the chute lights up with a white glow. “Whoa!”

“Much better,” Hermione says and starts moving the wand around for the best angle, like it’s a flashlight
Spencer has many questions but keeps them to herself. “Oh my god,” she says, looking down and covering her mouth with her hand, fighting back the tears.

She’s never been so unhappy to be right.
Quinn Fabray opens her eyes.

The room is just as white and weird as when Sue locked her in here last night. Quinn would’ve been more apprehensive about being held somewhere if she hadn’t spent the last two years in a prison cell. And whatever this is, it’s a step up in that department, even if it’s a strange step.

It appears to be a child’s room, maybe for a six-year-old girl. The bed is small and lined with a pink blanket and lace pillow. A metal bookcase stretches halfway up the wall on the far side of the room, but it’s mostly empty. A few scattered large-print picture books sit tattered and worn with no sense of organization. Quinn doesn’t recognize any of the titles—basic informational texts about animals and weather and simple machines. An art gallery fills the wall space between the bookshelf and the corner, old faded drawings with childlike scrawl across the bottom. They provide some much-needed color against the bright white walls. But the large square tile pattern makes the room feel more like a padded cell than Quinn’s comfortable with.

Why a prison has a kid’s room, she doesn’t know, and she doesn’t care. Maybe Sue had a daughter once and she grew up and moved out. But then, considering the room seems frozen in time, it’s unlikely.

Maybe her daughter died? Almost makes me feel bad for her.

There are a few trinkets here and there, but nothing that holds Quinn’s interest for more than a passing moment. In fact, she’s quite bored. There’s a small turntable with some brightly colored plastic records, but it seems to be broken. The paint supplies in the cabinet are dried out and molded. The reading material lacks a certain...something. She even cleaned up the mess from the gravity disruption last night simply for something to do.

Sue said it was just for a day at the most, but it’s hard to know how long she’s been here without meal time and classes and Aphasia’s idiotic dancing during Power Hour. The days don’t seem to matter as much, anyway, since Spencer got transferred out. Not that Quinn’s thinking about that.

Just like how she doesn’t think about Spencer when she crawls under the covers and drifts into unspeakable daydreams spelled out by skillful fingers. At least, not here. Because this is a child’s room and that would be wrong.

But Quinn does it anyway and caps it off with the final cigarette in her pack, and then a nap. She missed having a seat belt to get her through the long night and spent most of it trying to fall asleep against the ceiling. It didn’t work.

After what must be several mind-numbing hours (and forty-five more interesting minutes), the silence is broken by the rusty flap near the bottom of the door. Sue’s hand reaches through and places a tray of food on the ground. It’s usual prison stock but maybe a little more than the usual servings.
“Bon Appetit!”

Taking it to the miniature table and chairs in the corner, Quinn hosts a very pathetic tea party for the only company she can find. The brown stuffed dog in the opposite chair is staring at her.

“Get your own food.”

I’m talking to a toy.

Mack would have a field day with this place.

She reaches over and turns the dog around, then feels even more ridiculous. Grabbing it, she goes to throw it across the room, but her thumb brushes against the tag sticking out of the back, and she stops. There’s a name scrawled in faded red marker. A name she’d know anywhere.

Quinn’s eyes go wide. She swallows the food she didn’t realize she’d stopped chewing and looks around with a heightened sense of concern.

What the hell is going on here?

********************

“Fuck!” Spencer cries. “They’re all dead.” With the light from Hermione’s wand, she can see the pile of bodies—well, parts of bodies—at the bottom of the garbage chute.

“Who’s dead?” Faith says. “What do you see?”

But it’s all too far away and too terrible. Spencer sees arms, faces, legs, all half-eaten and sticking out at weird angles. And blood, so much blood. “I don’t know! It’s just a lot of dead girls.”

The stress and exhaustion and fear has caught up to her again, and Spencer’s fighting to not lose her shit completely in the wake of this development. She managed to pull it together in the bathroom an hour ago, but that was before she saw what several of her friends’ insides looked like.

“Come on,” Lucy says sweetly, holding out her hands. “Let me see.”

“No!” Spencer snaps through her tears. “I have to find Quinn!”

The other six women look at her sympathetically, but no one argues.

“Any pink hair?” Faith offers.

Spencer looks again. The light from the lower level is casting a golden glow on everything and most of the body parts are too covered in blood, anyway. “I…I can’t tell. I don’t think so?”

“We have to be sure,” Lucy says. She tightens her hold on the handle of the chainsaw like it’s a security blanket.

“I have an idea,” Hermione says. “But I have to turn off the light to do it. Is that alright?”

Yes, please. I don’t ever want to see those horrible things again. Ever, ever, ever.

Spencer holds a hand over her mouth, turns away, and nods, squeezing her eyes shut tight.

Hermione gives her wand a swish and the light goes out. Then, pointing down the shaft again, she whispers, “Wingardium Leviosa!” For a moment, nothing happens, but Hermione keeps her wand
downward.

“What are you doing?” Spencer’s voice is trembling.

“Almost… there…” Hermione strains, not wanting to break her concentration, and then finally her wrist shifts as she changes her angle.

A severed head appears at the top of the garbage chute, floating in mid-air. It’s gray and green and disgusting. One eye is missing, as is the entire left cheek and a large patch of hair on the right side.

It’s Paulie.

Spencer screams, “WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!” while the others jump back with scattered curses and a loud “Whoa!”

“We can’t get down to examine them,” Hermione replies, “so I’m bringing them to you.”

“I DON’T WANT YOU TO BRING THEM TO ME. I WANT THEM TO STAY WHERE THEY ARE.”

“This is fucked up,” Faith says, shaking her head as she moves a few feet backward. She accidentally steps on Donna, hiding behind her.

Spencer crumples into a heap on the floor, pulling her legs to her chest and wrapping her arms around them. She buries her face between her knees and wonders how any of this is happening—how she’s in prison in space and her kleptomaniac cellmate’s wizard girlfriend is floating the severed heads of her friends out of the garbage.

She just wants to go home and not know any of this.

But she can’t. She knows she can only go forward. She just doesn’t want to anymore.

Her face still buried in darkness, Spencer hears Lucy say, “That’s not her. Try another one.”

There’s a dulled thud as Paulie’s head drops back down the chute. Spencer cringes. Then Hermione repeats, “Wingardium Leviosa.”

This isn’t happening. This isn’t happening. This isn’t happening.

A long thirty seconds later, Faith says, “Shit, that’s Vause.”

“Fuck,” Vasquez concurs. “This is sick.”

“See if you can find a foot that’s missing a toe,” Faith says, and Spencer looks up to shoot her a glare. “What! I’m helping!”

A few pulls later, still no Quinn. But they’ve found Aeryn Sun, Stacey Merkin, and some blonde Spencer didn’t know.

“I’m running out of heads,” Hermione says. “There’s one at the bottom but I can’t quite reach it. I think it has long hair.”

“Leave it,” Spencer says. “It’s not her. Quinn’s not here. That means she’s alive. Let’s get out of here.” Without another word, Spencer stands up, wipes her hands down her face, and pulls herself together.
Faith cracks her knuckles. “Let’s go find ourselves a Boomer.”

With a loud bang, Hermione lets the garbage chute slam closed. Spencer hopes it can stay that way forever. As much as she wanted these spiders dead before, the feeling’s now increased exponentially.

She’s going to burn the little fuckers to the ground.

************************

Quinn hears the whining of the rusty door slot again and doesn’t bother looking up from her fifth reading of the blurbs on the plastic records’ sleeves. “How much longer do I have to stay here? You could at least bring me a book.”

A quiet moment passes with no trademark retort from Sue, and Quinn glances over, eyebrow cocked high, to see what miraculous cuisine Martha has graced her with this time.

But there is no plastic tray, no Sue, no anyone.

Only a swarm of large, black spiders scurrying one by one through the door slot, coming right for her.
Spencer and Faith lead the charge down the hallway, passing under the G-SPOT and ending at the library. Ripley and Vasquez follow closely behind, weapons cocked and loaded. Donna, Lucy, and Hermione bring up the rear. Spencer’s keeping the chainsaw massacre fiend at bay now that they want the guards alive.

Where’s an asshole when you need one?

“Here,” Spencer says, “let’s split up again. You three”—Vasquez, Ripley, and Hermione—“go back up through the cell block. Head right at the T and meet us in front of the engine room. We’ll come up the other side and head toward you. One of us is bound to find something. If we don’t make the rendezvous, come help us.”

“Copy that,” Ripley says, slinging the crossbow over her shoulder and splitting away from the group. Vasquez and Hermione peel off after her. The visual difference between Vasquez’s giant flamethrower and Hermione’s tiny wand is striking, but Spencer suspects it can hold its own.

“Oh kay,” she says to her original team of Lucy, Donna, and Faith, “Let’s go.” After a few steps, she turns again and tells Lucy, “You stay in the back. Faith, up here.”

“I must say, I’m surprised,” Lucy offers casually. “Who knew you’d like giving me orders as much as taking them?”

Spencer tries to just let it slide. “Keep your eyes open.”

“Yes ma’am.”

They reach the Arms rooms, and still no sign of any guards.

“Shit,” Spencer mutters. She turns to Lucy, “Did you really have to kill all of them?”

Lucy comes to a stop and rests the chainsaw against her bloody uniform. “Yes. I’m thorough.”

They trudge onward and reach the T-intersection on their side. They’re almost at the meeting point, and they haven’t heard any signs of action from down the hall, which is both good and bad.

“This way,” Spencer leads, but Donna interrupts her.

“Oi, boss lady, is there a loo in that direction?”

Spencer turns and stares at Donna incredulously. “We just passed a bathroom back there.”

Donna huffs up and spits back, “Well, I didn’t need to go back there. It’ll just take a minute!” She starts to double back down the hall, but Spencer calls after her.
“Hey! No, you can’t do that.”

“The hell I can’t!”

“You can’t take off on your own!” Spencer shouldn’t feel like a parent with a petulant child, considering this woman is older than her.

“I’ll go with her,” Faith offers.

But Spencer’s looking ahead toward the atrium. “It’ll take too long. They’ll think something’s wrong.” Looking left and right to consider her options, Spencer says, “Come on, there's a closer one.” She starts to the right down the side hall, in the opposite direction of the meeting point. “Hurry up!” she cries as the others lag behind.

A hundred feet down, just past the processing room, they reach Sue’s office. “There’s a bathroom in here. Faith, help me clear the room?”

Faith nods and enters, knife at the ready. Spencer’s right behind with her sledgehammer, but the room’s just as empty as before. “In there,” Spencer says to Donna, pointing to the door on the far side.

“Cheers,” Donna replies and heads inside. But before she can close the door, the loudspeaker overhead crackles to life.

It’s Becky.

“ATTENTION, GUARDS! GET YOUR ASS TO THE CELL BLOCK RIGHT NOW. PRISONERS ARE ON THE LOOSE, I REPEAT, PRISONERS ON THE LOOSE. NOW, BITCHES!”

The system shuts off with a thunk, but the words still ring in Spencer’s ears. She, Lucy, and Faith exchange silent looks, all different versions of, We are so fucked.

At the same time, it’s a little hard for Spencer to be too concerned when they’ve been roaming for three hours and killed every Boomer they’ve seen without suffering any casualties. If Buffy—who seemed much more concerned with banging an escaped prisoner than arresting her—is the gold standard of outerspace corrections, then they should be fine. But it’s still entirely possible that they’ve just been battling the pawns. Spencer has a feeling that the proverbial queen, Sue, will put up much more of a fight. Assuming they can even fucking find her. Becky wasn’t broadcasting from this office, so where the hell are they?

Donna calls through the closed bathroom door, “Spencer? I think you'll want to see this.”

Lucy smirks, and Faith just laughs and says, “Have fun.” She leans back comfortably in Sue’s large chair, propping her crossed feet on the desk just like Spencer did earlier.

Spencer approaches the wooden door and holds her face close to it. “Um…everything okay in there?”

The door flies open, and Spencer jumps, startled. Donna’s standing there fully clothed. She points to the wall behind the door and says, “D’you know about this?”

Spencer steps inside the small room and stands beside the toilet and sink so there’s room to close the door. Now she can see the far wall clearly. It’s metal with a split down the center and a single button panel off to the side.
An elevator.

They stare at it in awe. “Bingo.” Spencer quickly heads back into the office to tell Lucy and Faith the good news. “We just found our way down.”

Faith nods with pursed lips, trying to hold back her laughter. “Did you now?”

But the double entendre flies right over Lucy’s head. “Is it a stairs?”

Spencer makes a face at them. “No. Look, we have to get back to the others. They probably think we’re in trouble.”

Grabbing her sixty-pound sledgehammer off the desk, Spencer takes off down the hall and the others follow behind. As she gets closer, she hears the distant sound of new footsteps ahead, but a quick glance down the classrooms hallway confirms it’s still empty.

They continue running full speed until they reach the atrium, where Ripley’s waving an arm in the air and holding a finger over her mouth. Behind her, Vasquez and Hermione are using the curved wall as cover and peering around it. There’s also a pile of three or four dead guards with arrows through their heads.

So much for pumping them for information.

“It’s fine,” Hermione says. “They can’t hear us. Just stay out of sight.” She pulls her wand out of her sleeve and points it around the wall, whispering, “Muffliato.”

There’s a rising clamor of shouts and banging on bars coming from the cell block, as if something’s riling up the prisoners.

Spencer quietly approaches Ripley and asks, “What’s going on?” as the others catch up to her and file in behind. “Did you guys hear the announcement?”

“Guards. Must be two dozen of them.”

“What?!” Spencer says louder than she means to. How could they have already killed ten and there are still twice as many left to go? She rushes over to see. There in the T-intersection of the hallway are the first Boomer Lucy sliced up, the second one that came later, and the giant pool of blood the fugitives have repeatedly walked through. It’s really quite the mess.

But now there are new footprints from the large group of guards gathering in the north half of the cell block. Spencer’s having trouble counting them, perhaps because they’re all identical.

“Where did they—” she begins, but then the question is answered for her.

There’s a door, right there at the intersection. As it’s pushed open by another guard, Spencer can see the faint **BARRACKS** sign on it. It’s subtle and monochromatic just like the Engine Room sign, but she can still read it from twenty feet away.

Hermione points and whispers, “Muffliato,” again, but Spencer barely hears it. She’s just staring at the door.

It’s been there the whole time. They passed it over and over again. They were simply too horrified by their own destruction to take in the full scene. They could’ve gone downstairs ten minutes into their adventure. Granted, they wouldn’t have even known to at that point, but still. If she learns they could’ve saved Quinn in time…
Spencer watches the door with fire in her blood. All that time the hall was abandoned and quiet. All those missed opportunities. And now there’s an endless stream of Boomers emerging like a clown car from Hell.

“Jesus,” Ripley whispers, watching them—one after another, after another. “They’re like ants.”

Lucy disagrees. “My two aunts didn’t look anything alike.”

Just then, one of the guards starts walking toward them. Spencer pulls back so she’s hidden behind the wall and leans against it, closing her eyes and covering her face with a hand.

What are we going to do?

Hermione furrows her brow in concentration and whispers, “Confundo!” A moment later, she taps Spencer on the shoulder. “It’s alright. She walked off.”

“What?” Spencer opens her eyes and looks around. “Why?”

“It’s a confusion charm. I made her forget why she was coming over here. It’s worked…much of the time.” Hermione glances over to the pile of arrowed corpses with mixed emotions. “It’s a very difficult spell,” she justifies. “I’m doing the best I can.”

Spencer softens for a moment. “You’re…great. Thank you.” With a squeeze to Hermione’s arm, Spencer moves over beside Ripley and quietly asks, “What happened to trying to get information from one of the guards?”

“We never had the chance. We were lucky to already be around this corner before the door opened. Jenette wanted to go back for one, but we were outnumbered.”

“Somebody knows something!” one of the guards yells in the cell block. “They didn’t just escape on their own. Tell us where they are, and we won’t kill you.”

Spencer hears the inmates hollering crude responses and kicking the bars. One distinct voice cuts through the noise.

“IT IS NOT OUR FAULT YOU ARE BAD AT YOUR JOB!” Jessica Huang shouts. “PERHAPS YOU NEED MORE ONLINE TRAINING. YOU ARE EVEN WORSE THAN THE POLICE AT THE MALL!”

“We can’t get downstairs that way,” Ripley tells Spencer. “God knows how many are down there, and these’ll kill us before we even reach the door.”

“We found another way,” Spencer says as Hermione casts another confounding charm. “There’s an elevator in Sue’s office.”

Vasquez and Ripley exchange looks. “That bitch,” Vasquez says. There’s no shortage of hatred for the warden between these two.

Judging from the rising din up ahead, there’s enough hatred to go around. The prisoners sound like they’re chomping at the bit to rip the guards in half. Spencer’s inclined to let them.

“Okay, so we make a run for it,” Faith says. “They won’t see us.”

“They could,” Vasquez counters. “And then we’re fucked.”

“For all we know,” Ripley points out, “some of them could’ve gone down the cell block to come up
the other side. We’ll be cornered. If we’re going, we need to move now.”

“But it still doesn’t solve the problem of when we come back up,” Spencer adds. “As much as I have faith in your murder skills,” she says to Lucy. “There are too many of them, and they’re armed. You can’t take them all. Not before they start killing the other inmates.”

“I’m quite capable of handling—”

“NO,” Spencer says. Her body still aches from the taser just an hour before. She won’t let that happen to any of her friends. If three or four of those fuckers attacked Lucy simultaneously, the current would kill her for sure. “The tasers, they’re…No.”

“So, I barbecue ‘em,” Vasquez says, taking hold of the flamethrower.

“No!” Spencer reaches out to stop her. “There’s no way you can be sure you won’t hit us.” No more inmates are dying on Spencer’s watch ever again. She takes a breath. “Remember, one taser and you’re down for the count. Trust me.”

“So, what then?” Faith asks the group. “We movin’ in or out?”

“Well, it’s obvious, isn’t it?” Donna asks, trying to lighten the mood, but everyone just stares. “We just have to ask the guards nicely to give us all their weapons first, then we attack.”

The others huff in a weak attempt at laughter, but Hermione says, “Hold on…I think I’ve got it.” She thinks for a moment, then says, “Yes, I can do this. Just be ready to run on my signal.”

Spencer swallows. Something tells her the shit is about to hit the fan. But there’s nowhere else to run or hide, no other way out. The engine room door is right here, but even if they could somehow get Raven’s attention without giving their position away, hiding in the engine room would simply leave them trapped. If the guards surrounded the door, they’d never make it out alive. This is a battle they going to have to face. At least right now they still have the element of surprise.

“Stand back,” Hermione says and extends her wand. Aiming it at the barracks door, she whispers, “Colloportus!” It slams shut on its own, and Spencer hears a locking sound.

_Holy shit._

Then, angling to the crowd of guards in the block, Hermione says, “Accio taser!” Suddenly, one of the tasers flies right out of the nearest guard’s holster and into Hermione’s hand, fast as a pitched baseball. She drops it on the ground and repeats the motions.

_HOLY. SHIT._

“How did you do that?!?” Spencer cries, but Hermione’s ignoring her. Casting the spell again and again, she’s unarming the guards one at a time, and they haven’t even noticed.

Spencer doesn’t know how long it’s going to take, and surely one of them is going to see an item whizzing through the air before Hermione can get to all thirty or so. But it’s still better than nothing. Hermione’s shifting the odds in their favor. Spencer reaches down to the growing pile of tasers at their feet and starts handing them to Donna to put in her jacket pockets.

But Donna’s looking at the small black devices uneasily. “These aren’t going to go off?”

“Whoa!” one of the guards says, “What the...What was that?”
Hermione quietly curses, then asks, “Everyone ready? I’ll hold them off as long as I can. Wait for the signal.” Then, stepping out into the corridor, strong-willed and alone, she points her little stick at three dozen guards and says, “Come and get me, you dull-headed pricks.”

There’s quite the bustle as all the guards reach for their holsters, but half of them come up empty.

Hermione shouts, “*EXPPELLIARMUS!*” over and over, and Spencer sees the remaining tasers fly out of each Boomer’s hand one by one, only to land a nearby cell. Then, when all the guards are weaponless, Hermione takes a deep breath and points her wand one more time, shouting, “ALOHAMORA TOTALA!”

Suddenly, a loud chorus of metal clanging sounds through the cell block as every single door unlocks simultaneously.

Hermione says “Colloportus decem,” aiming with precision, though Spencer can’t see the target. Hermione lingers for a second, as if to be sure it worked, but Spencer pulls her out of view and urges her to get down.

It doesn’t take long for the prisoners to realize what’s happened, and they storm out with screeching war cries, firing the tasers at the crowd of helpless Boomers. In an instant, the angry mob turns the once peaceful cell block into a violent battlefield. It’s the perfect distraction for their getaway.

*And, frankly,* Spencer thinks, *the guards had it coming.*

From her vantage point, she sees Dark Willow emerge from cell 11, arms outstretched and eyes black as space. Fireballs fly and light up the guards in bursts of orange flame and blood-curdling screams. When one Boomer runs full speed at her, Dark Willow turns her outstretched hand, and the guard’s uniform rips clear off her body. Then, with a second flick of her wrist, the guard’s skin flies off just as cleanly.

Spencer screams, and Hermione slaps a hand over her mouth. “*Shhh! Do you want to get us killed?!*”

But no one hears Spencer over the sounds of war in the corridor. Pent up aggression and years of goading are finally manifesting in the beatdown of the century.

Shaw’s running up all the way from cell 3, punching the life out of every guard in her path. Seeing this, Starbuck struts out of cell 6 with a shit-eating grin.

“Looks like Christmas came early this year, ladies.”

She joins in the fistfight action and barely misses getting kicked in the face by Alice, who snaps the neck of a guard like it’s nothing. Nearby, the two Sarah Connors stand back to back, fighting in tandem and watching guards fall like dominoes.

Poussey and Suzanne seem to have their own system that involves a lot of hair-pulling and clawing, and Spencer’s pretty sure she just saw a chunk of flesh get ripped off a guard’s face. Big Boo, meanwhile, is sitting on one Boomer’s head (suffocating her?) while Johanna and Nichols kick and punch her in the crotch and stomach, shouting vulgar taunts and slurs that would make even Lucy blush. On Nicky’s signal, Big Boo stands up and drops her full weight on the guard’s face, knee first, in a bodyslam that no one could survive.

Something catches Spencer’s eye, floating high above the crowd and right into the hands of Violet. Looking back, confused, Spencer sees Donna handing tasers to Hermione, who’s using her *Wingardium Leviosa* spell to deliver them to the more dignified inmates. As a result, Regina, Lucy
Diamond, Root, and a handful of others are having what looks like the time of their lives. They’re talking amongst themselves about what happens when you taze various body parts—eyes, tongues, nipples, crotches—like they’re swapping tips on Pinterest. Root has never looked happier, her smile glowing brighter than the sparks emanating from the guard’s mouth.

Jessica Huang, with a taser in each hand, is giving one Boomer a very terrible afternoon. Flaca and Maritza are jumping up and down on fallen guards like monkeys on a bed. Sophia’s in the fight as well and kicking serious ass, though she doesn’t seem to be enjoying it. She knocks out another guard with a solid punch and shakes out her hand, like the whole thing is a big inconvenience in her day.

Spencer sees Vee walking up and down the cell block as if she’s overseeing the whole operation. She gives Jessica a heads-up when another guard approaches, then encourages Tastee to start searching the bodies.

River Tam is, surprisingly, the most capable fighter here. Her grace, skill, and prowess make the others look like clumsy toddlers. As River twirls and kicks and chops, Spencer’s absolutely mesmerized. It’s like ballet, but with killing.

*Killet!*

Spencer has no doubt her people will prevail here. The inmates simply want it more. This is their Bastille Day. And with each fallen Boomer, they have the guards more and more outnumbered, as long as that door stays locked. But then, if it comes to it, there must be more weapons the prisoners could use in Apha—

*Wait.*

Spencer scans the crowd, but the hoarder extraordinaire is nowhere to be seen. Following the numbers, Spencer’s eyes find cell 10 and look down. *There she is.* Aphasia’s safely inside, clutching the bars and yelling obscenities, cheering on her friends. It’s the only door still closed.

*Hermione protected her. Of course. That must’ve been the locking spell she fired—with the Latin word for "ten."

Aphasia’s proven she can break out of the cell any time she wants, but Spencer’s willing to bet this spell is strong enough to keep her in. With Mack lying unconscious on the bunk, she’s especially grateful no one’s getting in there. Spencer has to marvel at how damn smart and capable Hermione is.

But then, as if on cue, the barracks entrance opens again and five more guards storm out, tasers at the ready.

“Shit,” Hermione says. “I didn’t mean *all* the doors!” The noise catches one Boomer’s attention, and Hermione and Spencer aren’t able to hide in time. The new guards turn away from the fray and come charging toward the rebels instead. Hermione pushes off the floor and yells, “NOW!”

The others take off running back toward Sue’s office, clutching their weapons and trying not to slip on all the blood on the floor. Spencer leaps over the pile of bodies and grabs her sledgehammer, looking back to be sure her new friend is coming, too.

Hermione’s right behind her and fires “*Colloportus!*” at the barracks as she runs, but neither of them seems confident that it found its target. They exchange a silent look that says, *We’ll just have to hope. There’s nothing we can do now.*
Hermione then fires off “Stupefy!” several times at the three Boomers on their tail, slowing them down significantly. “RUN!”

Spencer sees who Hermione’s yelling at—up ahead of them, Lucy’s firing up her chainsaw and standing her ground.

Spencer swings wide to avoid her and slows to a halt. In one swift motion, Lucy slices through one Boomer, then two, and starts walking slowly back toward the fray.

“LUCY!” Spencer screams. “Come on!”

“They need me!” Lucy yells over the metallic grind of the motor, cutting through another guard. “Go!”

“I NEED YOU,” Spencer’s voice cracks.

The words hang for a moment, and Lucy searches Spencer’s eyes for the meaning behind her words.

“Look out!” Spencer screams as another guard charges in, but with a swift pirouette Lucy spins and slices right through Boomer’s neck, graceful as a swan. A very violent, bloody swan. Without breaking step, Lucy uses the momentum to propel herself forward and starts running toward Spencer as she powers down the chainsaw.

When all this is over, Spencer’s going to suggest that Lucy and River form their own killet troupe for hire, or at least offer a class.

The group charges around the curved hall, panting hard with their heavy weapons still in tow. Faith, Ripley, Vasquez, Donna, Hermione, Spencer, and Lucy file past Processing and toward Sue’s office at full speed. It’s hard to tell just how many guards are following them now, but Spencer’s not about to slow down and count.

As they get further from the bloodbath, she wonders just how bad it is and how many of the inmates have fallen. What will she and the others find when they come back upstairs? Assuming they ever do, of course. Right now, she’s more worried about what they’ll find at the bottom of this elevator.

But it’s time to find out.
“Quick, lock the door,” Spencer says to Hermione as they’re all safe inside Sue’s office. After the spell is cast, the group quiets down and listens for any guards running by. Everyone is tense and trying to catch their breath, still very much on high alert. They’re far from out of the woods.

Spencer breaks the silence. “We don’t have long before they figure out we’re in here.”

“I can enchant the door to look like something they wouldn’t notice, something that wouldn’t catch their attention,” Hermione offers. “If that helps.”

“Yeah.” Spencer can see why Aphasia has such a boner for this girl. She’s a fucking badass. “We need all the help we can get.”

“So, what’s the plan when we get to Sue?” Vasquez asks. She cocks the flamethrower like she’s itching to burn someone to the ground.

Lucy furrows her brow. “I thought we’re going after Quinn.”

“We are,” Spencer says, holding out her hands to keep the situation calm. “Quinn is the priority. But Sue’s got to be down there, and who knows what else.”

“Two teams,” Ripley offers. “You find your girl, we find Sue.”

But there’s a homicidal gleam in Vasquez’s eyes. Spencer will never get answers if Sue’s dead when she arrives.

She shakes her head. “No, we stay together. We don’t know what we’re up against. Safety in numbers.” She starts to reach for her sledgehammer but adds one final point, “And no one lays a hand on Sue until I’ve had the chance to talk to her.”

Vasquez doesn’t seem thrilled and huffs, “About what?”

It’s a simple question but hardly a simple answer. Spencer’s eyes gloss over momentarily as she relives every shitty memory—every interrogation, every lie, every horror, every ounce of pain, every moment of isolation and despair. She steels her resolve and says, “Everything that bitch owes me.”

Vasquez’s eyes narrow. “You been here, what, a week? Whatever shit you think you’ve been through, I promise it ain’t got nothin’ on us.”

Lucy gently squeezes Spencer’s hand. “Let’s go find Quinn,” she says and picks up her chainsaw.

Donna leads them into the bathroom. (“Now’s the time if anyone needs to go. No complaining an hour from now when we’re all being eaten by spiders and you need the loo.”) It’s a very tight fit with seven women and four large weapons, and they all end up stepping on each other’s toes to get the door closed.
“Not a bad design, really,” Donna comments, looking around at the maroon wallpaper and cream-colored hand towels hanging above the standard issue prison toilet. It’s the closest thing to civilization most of them have seen in a long while.

Lucy nods in agreement as she glances around. “Looks like blood.”

Donna glares at her. “*Pick a new theme.*”

“Speaking of,” Spencer says, grabbing the small towel off the metal rack and handing it to Lucy, “Here. You’re terrifying.” She’s almost gotten used to Lucy looking like a red version of Mystique, but that doesn’t mean it needs to continue. Lucy smiles at the compliment but begrudgingly reaches for the towel.

“No,” Hermione cuts in, and everyone turns. “Leave it. You’re…scarier that way. It’s good. Maybe we can use it.”

Spencer reluctantly agrees and hangs it back on the rack. Taking a deep breath, she pushes past Faith and steps up to the elevator, reaching out to hover her finger an inch from the button.

“Here goes.”

She presses it, and a dull grinding noise starts as the elevator car makes its way back to the second level. Spencer looks to Faith and Lucy, lifting her eyebrows. Whoever took this elevator last stayed down there.

Ten seconds later, the doors slide open with a small *ding!* The car is unusually small, about the size of a single-person shower. It’s clearly not meant for more than two people at a time. Of course, there aren’t any helpful weight limits posted or inspection dates anywhere, because safety is just a silly Earth concept.

Spencer’s seen the two other ways downstairs, and she didn’t like either one. This has to work. “Okay, same teams. Lucy, Donna, Faith, we’ll go first and wait. You three follow right behind.”

Ripley nods, and they slide over to let Donna make her way past. Lucy steps on last so she’ll be first out, should there be trouble waiting on the other end. She looks up to make sure her chainsaw will fit in the door when it closes and adjusts backward slightly.

As Spencer reaches for the 1 button, she hears Hermione say to Vasquez and Ripley, “When it’s our turn, please remember elevators are for transport and not for—” but they’re already making out. Hermione looks at Spencer and calls out, exasperated and annoyed, “*They keep doing this!*” as the doors close with another *ding!*

All four women start laughing, which only compounds the humor of the moment. Faith braces her hand on the wall to keep from falling over, and Donna’s leaning against her shoulder.

“Her face!” Spencer wheezes, flapping her hands.

Even Lucy, who smiles often but never laughs, is getting caught in the group’s giggle loop. The levity is sorely needed. For one blissful moment, the gravity of the situation falls away and they’re not paralyzed by anxiety and mind-numbing fear or surrounded by death and imminent danger. They’re just thinking about their friend, awkwardly stuck with two horny, reunited lovers at the end of the world.

“That poor girl,” Faith says, wiping a tear from the corner of her eye.
As the laughter dies down, they all wait in awkward silence for the badness to resume. The elevator is eerily quiet when they pull themselves together. And it’s…not moving.

“You did…push the button…” Donna prompts.

When Spencer just blinks, they all start laughing again.

Then, a loud pounding on the door makes everyone nearly jump out of their skin.

Hermione’s muffled voice calls out from the other side, “ARE YOU GOING OR WHAT?”

Spencer scrambles to push the 1 and calls out, “Yes! Sorry!”

Faith stifles another laugh while Lucy just smirks at Spencer’s mistake like they’re high school girls who got caught smoking. It takes a beat for Spencer to remember that just five months ago, that’s exactly what she was—just another high school girl.

She’s pulled from the memory by elevator music that starts as the car begins moving—a terrible MIDI version of what seems to be Madonna’s “Holiday.” Spencer opens her mouth to say something, but really, why is she even surprised?

They travel the rest of the way in silence, other than Lucy humming along, and it occurs to Spencer just what a bizarre crew this is: The cheeky random stranger from a time-traveling machine; a devil-may-care combat expert with super strength and self-esteem problems; a masochistic, mass-murdering clone with Miss America glamour and the education of a six-year-old; and…whatever Spencer is these days. But they’ve been through a hell of an adventure today, one she’ll never forget as long as she lives. However long that ends up being.

The elevator *dings* again, and everyone tightens the hold on their weapons.

---------------------

For a moment, it seems like a dream. Like they’ve stepped into a movie about one of those underground high-security facilities that’s pristine and state of the art. Or like they’re finally on a legitimate space ship once and for all.

Faith voices what they’re all thinking. “Whoa.”

It’s a long hallway, blinding white on all surfaces, making it hard to see where the wall becomes the floor. When her eyes adjust to the light, Spencer sees there are large square patterns on the walls, like tiles four feet high, white on white. She can’t tell what the material is, but it’s certainly not metal. The air is much cleaner—fresh, even—and cold. The general stench of cafeteria and death and rotting prisoners is gone. Well, other than what the four women brought with them.

It seems impossible that this could be the same ship they’ve been living in. This is like a museum, not the zoo they know.

The door behind them *dings* once more as the final three members join their party. Vasquez echoes the “Whoa.”

“Yeah,” Spencer says. “Now we know where all the money goes.”

The group stands there, uncertain how to proceed even though there’s only one direction to go. Maybe they’re scared they’ll get the pretty floor dirty by walking on it with their blood-stained Keds.
Spencer’s never seen Lucy look so anxious and uncomfortable. Catching Lucy’s eye, she says, “We can do this. Let’s go.”

Lucy doesn’t seem to share the sentiment. She exhales and furrows her brow, but doesn’t object.

They start forward, much more cautious now that they’re in unfamiliar territory. Spencer can sense that they don’t belong here, like a primitive species dropped into a habitat far more advanced and evolved. Each step they take just makes her brain churn.

*What is this place? What happens here? Who’s responsible for all this?*

They finally see a door about fifty feet down the corridor on the left. The etching reads A12, but it has no handle or opening mechanism of any kind—only an electronic scan reader. No pictures or words or buttons, nothing to indicate what’s behind the door or how to open it.

Spencer waves her hand in front of the reader, but nothing happens. She leans closer to inspect it. Suddenly, a red laser moves left to right across her eyes, and she jumps back with a gasp. The scanner makes a three-tone sound of rejection.

“No joy?” asks Faith.

“It’s a retinal scanner,” Spencer says. “This place has some serious funding.”

“And something to hide,” Ripley adds.

*Most rich people do.* Spencer’s threadbare uniform feels noticeably scratchy against her naked body underneath. She misses having money. And undergarments.

“Can you hack it?” Faith asks.

Spencer laughs but it’s not really funny at all. “With what? My good looks?”

“So, we fry it,” Vasquez says, swinging the flamethrower up and taking aim.

“NO!” Spencer shouts much louder than she means to. “Then we’ll never get in. It’s probably a sliding padlock.” Looking to Hermione, she says, “What about that spell? The door-opener one.”

“It’s doubtful,” she replies. “It’s not that the door is locked, it’s that we have to make the system believe you’re someone else.” She sighs, “I do know a potion for that, but we don’t have the ingredients or the month it takes to make it. And we don’t even know who we’d need to turn you into in the first—”

“Please just try the spell!” Spencer interrupts, holding her hands out.

Hermione straightens her posture and replies, “I’m simply explaining the situation so you won’t get upset when it doesn’t work.” But she readies her wand anyway and says, “Alohamora,” yielding no results, as predicted. She raises her eyebrows at Spencer with a clear, *I told you so.*

“What about the one where you disappear?” Spencer asks. “Can’t you zap inside and see if she’s there, or something?”

“It’s not that simple, and it’s *incredibly* dangerous,” Hermione says condescendingly. “I’ve never been in that room before. I have to be able to visualize exactly where I’m going, or I can get splinched.”

“Splinched?”
“Part of me out here, part of me in there.” Hermione lets the image settle before continuing. “It’s a lot harder to escape a locked facility than I may make it appear. Which, I’ve been meaning to ask, how did you get out of your cell?”

“Oh!” Donna cries, “That was me!” She rifles through her pockets, dropping a few tasers, and finally locates her own little silver wand of sorts. She shakes it a few times and points it at the scanner, but other than emitting a buzzing, high-pitched sound for a few seconds, it does nothing.

“And what is that, exactly?” Hermione asks, curious but quite underwhelmed.

Donna huffs and points it at her, but Hermione doesn’t even blink.

“Sonic screwdriver,” she says. “I just don’t know the setting for…fake eyeballs.”

“So, we get the real thing!” Spencer says. “I bet the guards have clearance for these rooms. There’s certainly no shortage of them upstairs.”

“Anybody got a toothpick?” Vasquez asks.

Spencer had forgotten all about that story. She shivers and hopes it doesn’t have a sequel today. “All we need is a head,” she says, shaking hers. “We go back upstairs and grab one.”

Considering just an hour ago she was crying and nauseated at the sight of body parts in the garbage chute, it feels bizarre suggesting they fetch and lug around a rotting Boomer skull. Maybe she’s growing as a person.

“What about the lock on the office door?” Ripley asks, looking to Hermione. No Boomers have followed them, which means the spell must be holding up.

“You should be able to open it from the inside, just don’t let the door close behind you.” Hermione looks to Spencer as she says, “I made sure it didn’t lock on both sides so you wouldn’t be trapped down here if something happens to me.”

Spencer continues to be impressed by this girl’s acumen. She purses her lips for a moment, as if to say thank you. “Nothing’s going to happen. To any of us.”

“We should move fast if we’re going back up there,” Ripley says. “We’ll go,” she gestures to Vasquez, then tells the rest, “Stay here.” Side by side, they head back through the mess of bloody footprints without another word.

Spencer turns to Faith and says, “Watch the elevator?”

“You bet.”

The remaining women stand there for a moment before Hermione turns to Spencer and whispers, “I was hoping we could chat.” She pauses briefly. “We haven’t had a chance to talk, between the jailbreaking and war and now this rescue mission.”

“Yeah, sure,” she replies, wondering what this might be about. “What’s up?”

Hermione walks in the opposite direction of Donna, and Spencer follows beside her until they’re a few feet away. “I don’t know what all she’s told you, so you’ll forgive me if I seem a bit uneasy.” Spencer still has no idea what’s going on. “Matters of the heart are both what give us the most strength and make us the most vulnerable.”
Ah. Right.

There’s a longer pause, as if Hermione doesn’t know how to say what’s really on her mind. “…Is she happy? I mean, as much as anyone can be in this place.”

Spencer tries to think back to when she saw Aphasia every day. Her cellmate is one of the most upbeat and fun-loving people she’s met here, but that doesn’t mean she’s genuinely happy. Spencer’s seen more than a few moments of loneliness underneath the cheerful surface armor. But that doesn’t tell her what she’s supposed to say here.

“I think so. She’s happy.”

Hermione gives a small smile and looks down. “Good. That’s good.” She meets Spencer’s eyes again. “We all need something to live for, especially in these times. It could be a purpose, or a cause, or a person. A family. And I’m both blessed and burdened because I have two things to live for—the war, and her. She’s my anchor. The one thing that makes perfect sense in this crazy world we live in.” She swallows and takes another breath. “But I think Aphasia…She’s only living for me. And that’s a lot of pressure, especially for a soldier.”

Spencer nods. A quiet moment passes, then she says, “But it’s working. She keeps going for you. She doesn’t get defeated in here because she has you. Yeah, it’s hard for her when you leave, but being able to steal your wand so you can keep fighting—you have no idea how good that makes her feel about herself.” She chooses not to spill the beans on the destroyed invisibility blanket; it won’t help right now.

Hermione purses her lips and nods back. “I think I do. Please don’t ever tell her, because it would just utterly destroy her, but…I could get the wand back myself if I wanted to. I’ve become quite skilled at wandless spells, and there is a common summoning charm I’ve perfected. You saw it earlier. This wand knows my voice like a child knows its mother. I could call it back to me from anywhere at any time.”

Spencer considers this information—both the physics bending and the implications—and says, “Then why let her keep risking so much for nothing? If she gets caught, she’ll be thrown into Solitary!”

“But it’s not for nothing! You said it yourself. She feels it gives her purpose. It keeps her going. That’s so important! And she’s so clever, I don’t have to worry about her being caught. Do you really think a simple Solitary cell could hold her? Have you met my girlfriend?” Hermione gives a small smile. “Aphasia can take of herself. I trust that. And this way she gets to feel like she’s also taking care of me. You just confirmed that it makes her feel needed.” Before Spencer can interrupt, Hermione adds, “And I do need her. She loves me, Spencer. And I love her. I love her with everything I have.”

“Does she know that?” Spencer remembers having this very conversation with Aphasia. What a damn soap opera they’re living.

Hermione looks sure. “She knows. I don’t let myself get carried away with feelings. I can’t draw attention to her and put her in danger. I’m a very difficult person to love, in that way. I have to put safety first. I have a lot of enemies far more powerful than someone like Sue Sylvester.”

Spencer doesn’t ever want to meet them, that’s for sure. It sounds like the wizard mob. For a hot second, she imagines the cartoon Merlin from Disney’s *Sword in the Stone* sitting behind the Godfather’s desk. But it’s probably not like that.
“The reason I’m telling you all this,” Hermione says, “is because I know what it’s like to need something—or someone—to keep you going. To give your days here meaning. So does Aphasia. And I see that same look in your eyes when you talk about Quinn.”

Spencer feels her cheeks redden, but she doesn’t deny the remark.

“If finding her is what you need to be alive out here, then I’m going to keep helping you until we do. We all are.” Hermione gives a little smile and adds, “Everyone should be so lucky to have what we have.”

“A murder rap and a life sentence?” Spencer smiles.

“We could do worse,” Hermione grins back. "There could be men."

“Oi!” Donna interrupts from over by the door. “Should, um…”

Spencer looks and sees that Donna’s pointing to Lucy, who’s standing off by herself and looking quite depressed. Spencer motions for Hermione to follow her back to Donna, then says to them, “Keep working on the scanner until they get back. We might get lucky.”

They look at each other like two disappointed, mismatched science lab partners but don’t complain. As they take turns pointing and mumbling at the little piece of plastic by the door, Spencer heads toward the suspiciously quiet and aloof member of their team.

Lucy’s ten feet down the hall, leaning against the far wall and staring down into the endless white. The chainsaw’s on the floor a ways behind, forgotten.

Spencer walks up beside her and stops, saying, “Hey,” gently. “You okay?”

Lucy’s eyes are shining like glass, and reflections of the bright lights shimmer off the moisture building under her lashes. A few tears escape and streak trails through the blood stains on her face. She looks lost and distant, and it chills Spencer to the core. Lucy’s scared—trembling, even. Light years away from her usual position of control. This environment must be a huge shock to her senses after spending so long in those dark prison cells.

“I know this is weird and new,” Spencer starts, “but I promise we’ll—”

“It’s not new,” Lucy says. Her voice is shaky and weak, like she can barely form the words, but they’re clear enough. She wipes her eyes with the heel of her hand and sniffs, throwing her hair back in a noble effort to pull herself together.

Walking over toward the locked door, where Donna and Hermione are bickering like children, she ends their debate definitively. “She’s not in there.”

That gets everyone’s attention. Spencer steps between Lucy and the locked door and looks right into her eyes. “How would you know that?”

Even in her heightened state of emotion, Lucy doesn’t back down from Spencer’s intimidation. In fact, she returns it two-fold. “You don’t get to ask me questions. But if you want answers, I suggest we keep moving.” Lucy turns and storms off, grabbing her chainsaw along the way.

Hermione and Donna exchange looks and take off to catch up. Spencer reaches her first, just past door A10, and grabs Lucy’s elbow. “Hey!” She instantly regrets startling an armed psychopath, but she can’t take it back now.
“Beth said ‘G’. That’s where I’m taking you.” Yanking her arm free, Lucy starts off again, holding the chainsaw with more intent as a warning to her companions.

It’s not until Spencer hears the running feet behind her and the voice calling, “Wait! We got it!” that she remembers the other part of the plan.

Vasquez is closing the gap between them, her fingers firmly entwined in the black hair of a Boomer head, dripping glops of organic matter on the floor.

“Where the hell are you going?”
Lucy Fabray is marching with determination.

Trailing behind her in file, Spencer, Hermione, Donna, Faith, Vasquez, and Ripley keep up as best they can. They don’t waste time testing their new toy on any of the many doors they’re passing, not when Lucy clearly knows where she’s going. Spencer should be glad, but it’s too unsettling. There’s more going on here than she knows, and she doesn’t like that one bit.

Finally, Lucy slows to a stop at a major intersection. Spencer catches up and analyzes their surroundings. They seem to be in the middle of the ship, as the distance behind her looks equal to what still lies ahead. To their right is a giant window that reaches from halfway up the wall to the ceiling. It’s much wider than the window in the processing room. The room on the other side of the glass is pitch dark. According to the map, it must be the docking bay. It’s locked by another scanner, but Spencer’s not eager to see if there are any guards working inside.

To their left, where Lucy’s looking, is another hallway. There’s only the one, straight down the center, unlike upstairs where two hallways run on either side of the engine room and eventually meet in a V shape. A few feet beyond where they’re standing is a door marked TO LEVEL 2. If they’re currently right under the atrium like Spencer suspects, this must be the staircase all those guards used to get to the cell block. If they need a quick escape, it’ll be much better than running all the way to the slow-ass elevator. But it’s not lost on Spencer that they must be standing in the middle of a Boomer hive.

The new hallway is just as long and bright white as the first, but there are more doors on either side, what must be dozens. Spencer’s heart skips a beat when she sees the way they are coded. Immediately to her left is G1, to her right is G2, and so on. Spencer can’t quite see what’s straight ahead at the end, even when she squints. It’s simply too far away. If Quinn’s here, it could take hours to search all these rooms.

Faith must be thinking the same thing. “That really narrows it down.”

Ripley adds, “Good thing I canceled my plans.”

They stand there taking in the scope of the task at hand. Then, Spencer hears Vasquez behind her. “What’s behind door number one?”

Time to get started.

Lucy takes the lead and starts down the hall. “This w—”

But no one else hears her over two high-pitched beeps and a whooshing sound. The group turns to see Vasquez holding Boomer’s head by the hair, raised up so it’s level with a retinal scanner to room G1.
“Ca-ching.”

Thankfully, the noise doesn’t draw any uninvited company. Spencer looks at Lucy, but her expression is hard to read. This room isn’t where she wanted to go, but she’s not putting up a fight. Hermione walks inside first, followed by Ripley. Now there’s no choice but to check it out.

“You…might want to come see this,” Hermione calls out to them.

That’s not good.

Stepping cautiously toward the door of room G1, Spencer peers over Faith’s shoulder. She can’t see anything yet, but she can sure smell it.

“Right,” Donna starts. “What the bloody hell is that?”

A series of five bathtubs takes up most of the room, arranged like petals of a flower. Each one is red metal, glowing eerily from bright lights mounted inside the tubs. There’s an unsettling, alien quality to them. Everything about this feels wrong.

And that can’t be water—it’s viscous and milky—but there are bodies floating in it. Presumably human ones, adult size and very naked, all women. Each has her wrists chained to the edge of the tub as her head floats above the surface of the liquid. There’s no way the woman in the nearest tub is Quinn—the long, dark hair is unmistakable.

Spencer’s eyes adjust enough to see the face more clearly. Boomer’s face.

She looks from one chamber to the next, but they’re all the same. Turning around, she notices the giant set of lockers on the near wall behind her, probably lined with weapons. Their clone theory was correct, it seems. Sue is somehow growing an unlimited supply of guards.

“I’ve seen my fill of aliens, and I try not to judge,” Donna says, waving her hand in front of her face, “but this is just foul.”

Hermione’s nose is buried in her elbow. “Agreed.”

“I vote leave,” Faith says, turning and taking a step backward, right onto Spencer’s shoe.

But Ripley’s moving forward. Crossbow in ready position, she approaches the nearest pod with a calculating expression.

Looking down and around, examining the twisted black cables wiring the tubs to each other, Ripley finally replies, “No,” but the tension remains. “I agree. We need to leave. Now.”

“GAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHH!”

Without warning, the Boomer from the tub on the back-left side comes alive, gasping for air and fighting against the restraints. The women jump, startled, and Spencer drops the sledgehammer on the floor with a deafening clang. The noise draws Boomer’s attention, and she blinks against the brightness, still convulsing. She seems unable to speak at first and struggles as if in pain, but nobody dares take a step toward her. After a very long minute of watching the alien-person-thing work through it, the room falls silent and still.

Boomer looks at each of the women in turn, eyes finally resting on Lucy, who is standing on the far side. “YOU!” she growls, testing out her new vocal chords. “You…You killed me!”
Lucy seems unfased by the accusation. “I’d be happy to do it again.”

“You remember that?” Spencer asks Boomer. “How?”

Donna chimes in randomly, “What sort of alien takes a sperm bath?”

Hermione scowls and recoils at the description, but Donna isn’t done being disgusted with the state of this room. “Is soap that difficult to come by out here?”

“I’m not an alien,” Boomer says. Her voice is husky and low, like she’s battling a nasty cold. “I’m a Cylon.”

Donna turns, confused. “One of those orange cone things?”

Crossing her arms, Faith says, “I thought Cylon’s a one-eyed monster.” She sounds quite suspicious, considering Boomer has two.

Hermione mutters, “Good lord” as Spencer sighs heavily. They’re surrounded by idiots.

“I’m a machine,” Boomer says, her words filling the room. “There are many copies. You can’t kill me.”

“Pretty sure I did,” Lucy says, stepping forward with her chainsaw. “Though I guess it didn’t take. Let’s try again.”

Boomer’s eyes glisten with superiority. “When I die, my consciousness downloads to a new body.” Her voice is getting stronger now. “We are forever. And we will exterminate your entire race, starting with you.”

“Yeah, I don’t think so,” Donna says and picks up the sledgehammer from the floor. The weight seems to take her by surprise, and she awkwardly lifts it up to shoulder level as she approaches the lone conscious Boomer.

“Oh god,” Hermione says, “Please don’t do that!”

Donna ignores her.

“You can’t stop us,” Boomer taunts as she approaches.

Spencer can tell Boomer’s scared, chained there naked and trapped, but the Cylon is putting on a good front.

“Mmm,” Donna ponders. “Pretty sure I can.” With an impressive war cry, she raises the sledgehammer as high as she can.

Spencer turns away. This is going to be gross, as she well knows. She hears a loud BANG and frantic rattling of chains along with a quickly muttered, “Shit! Hang on.”

Boomer yells more angry obscenities, then falls silent as her skull is crushed like a melon.

The sound brings back such sweet memories. For Spencer, anyway. Hermione’s screaming.

“AHA!” Donna cries out. “Take that, you bloody Martian machine!”

All the commotion wakes a different Boomer, and Spencer turns with wide eyes at the familiar gasping noise. “That one!” she calls.
Donna skips around and smashes it on her first try.

“Stop!” Hermione shouts, but it’s no use.

Two more spring to life mere seconds apart, and the inmates suddenly find themselves in a very disturbing game of Whack-A-Mole. But Donna’s got a rhythm now, and they don’t want to get in her way. An unspoken decision is made to off the fifth and final Boomer before she wakes up, just to be sure.

“Right,” Donna asks, breathing hard, hammer still in hand. “Now what?”

An electrical wire to one of the tubs sizzles and shorts out, and the room falls into silence as everyone takes in the violent scene. It’s no deviation from the trail of carnage that led them to this point. Blood spray covers large sections of walls and the floor. Bone fragments and tissue chunks float on the surface of the thick liquid as wispy swirls of red branch out in every direction. The room smells even worse than before.

If Donna hadn’t fit into this band of thieves and murderers an hour ago, she certainly does now.

“You didn’t have to do that,” Hermione says bitterly.

“Well, somebody had to, didn’t they?” Donna retorts. She sounds pissed as hell. “I’ve had enough bloody robots telling me they’re gonna ’exterminate’ me, and I’m not just gonna sit here and do nothing about it!”

“They’re machines,” Hermione says. “She said herself they’re downloaded! We could’ve just unplugged them.” She points to where a giant cable meets a panel on the wall.

Oh.

“Plus, weren’t we going to investigate one?” Hermione reminds them. “Wasn’t that the plan? Find out where they took Quinn?” Nobody seems to know what to say. “Very well executed, everyone. Bravo.” With a huff, Hermione turns and retreats to the hallway, shaking her head.

The others look around awkwardly and survey the gruesome display once more with new perspective. Maybe they did get a little ahead of themselves.

“D’you think these were their last five bodies?” Ripley asks.

“Hope so,” Faith says. “This song got old fast.” She nudges one of the Boomer’s hands with her shoe to make sure it won’t respond.

Lucy sighs in disappointment.

Spencer does some quick math and chimes in. “I can’t imagine Sue would need more than the sixteen we’ve seen, considering she uses them one at a time.”

“Maybe,” Faith says. “Or maybe there’s another set of these things behind every door on this hallway.”

“There’s not,” Lucy says.

Spencer shoots her a look but doesn’t ask the question. “Hope you’re right.”

Ripley starts searching the lockers for anything they can use, but it’s just P.M.S. uniforms and tasers, which they already have enough of. “I don’t know why I thought maybe there’d be a pad in here
“Not like that,” Lucy says. She raises an eyebrow and looks the room over once more in approval.

“Probably not,” Spencer agrees with Ripley, sighing. She’s not feeling very fresh, herself, after this long day of action.

Vasquez, meanwhile, picks up the rotting head they entered with and walks over to the nearest chamber tub, holding the head above the pile of neck mush. It looks both right and very wrong. “Hi, I’m Boomer,” she says in a high-pitched voice, bouncing the head a few inches up and down.

“Come on,” Ripley disapproves.

But her girlfriend isn’t deterred. “It’s just so hard to get a head these days.”

“If we’re done here,” Spencer says dryly, “I thought maybe we could go save Quinn.”

Vasquez makes a face at them and files back out into the hallway, flamethrower and spare head in tow.

The group reconvenes to head further into uncharted territory. They stand in a circle as if waiting for someone to take charge. But Vasquez doesn’t join them and checks the neighboring G3, instead.

“Hang on,” Spencer calls to her. It seems rash taking on a room alone, given what was in the last one.

But before anyone can provide back-up, Vasquez scans the door open. She steps inside, out of sight, and reports back. “Just an empty bunk.”

Lucy looks like she expected that. “This hall is for sleeping quarters. I guess Sue uses it for personnel. But a long time ago, this ship was a military outpost. G is for ‘garrison.’”

Spencer takes in this new information. It certainly explains the “barracks” signs. And there’s no reason why it couldn’t be what Beth was trying to communicate to them. Though, Spencer can’t help but wonder why Lucy knows the word “garrison” and not the word “stairs.”

Ripley asks the more important question. “How do you know that?” The edge of accusation in her voice is unmistakable.

Lucy pauses, as if lost in the answer for a moment. “I think I know where Quinn is.” Without another word, she takes off at a brisk pace.

“Where?” Faith calls after her but gets no reply.

The rooms are packed closely together; odd numbers on the left, even on the right. Spencer doesn’t need the map to know they’re moving along the spine of the ship. As they continue down, she sees the end of the hallway coming closer into view, a white wall with yet another door, wider than the rest. And it has a giant silver DYAD logo on it.

Spencer knows that name. It’s the same company Lucy said her parents worked for.

G20…G30…They keep running, closer and closer still. Finally, the gang of seven can travel no further. As if the massive logo didn’t give it away, a placard under the retinal scanner says “LAB”. And there’s a vague hint of stale cigarette smoke that seems out of place in the otherwise sterile environment.
“You smell that?” Spencer asks.

“Disgusting habit,” Hermione scowls, fanning the air with a hand.

But Spencer’s heart is racing. They’re here. They found the secret lab. Quinn’s just beyond this door. She has to be. It feels right this time. God only knows what’s being done to her, but she’s in th—

“She’s not in there,” Lucy says.

Spencer steps back from the scanner and turns, confused. How is this not where they were going?

“She’s in there.” Lucy points to the next to last door on the right, room G38.

Hermione looks as confused as Spencer feels. “Why that one?”

Lucy sniffs and takes a deep breath. “Because this was my room.”

Realization flashes across Spencer’s face, but Lucy has already stepped away. She leans over in front of the retinal scanner of G38. A few seconds later, it gives the two beeps of success and the door slides open with a fast whoosh!
The moment the door opens, Spencer knows something's wrong. They’re instantly hit with a wall of putrid stench far worse than in the Boomer chamber. Everyone steps back and out of the way, coughing.

“Oh, it’s foul!” Hermione mumbles with her face buried into her arm. She retreats further to escape the invisible cloud of gas, and the others follow.

But Spencer has to know.

Her heart is in her throat as she steps inside the small white room. Fingerpainted animal drawings cover the back wall. Pink pillows and accessories fill every corner and nook. There’s no doubt this is a place young Lucy decorated. It’s probably what present-day Lucy would do to their cell if given the chance. The pink shag rug, the rows of paint bottles on the bookshelf…

The faceless, half-eaten body rotting on the rocking chair.

Spencer screams.

“What! What!”

On the bed, an angry brunette wakes up with a start, swinging her arms and furiously brushing hair out of her face.

Spencer screams again at the sudden movement. She hadn’t seen the bed yet, much less the living person in it, what with the zombie fodder in the middle of the room.

It’s Santana, still naked as the day she was dragged away screaming from the cell block. And either she is having the worst period of her life or someone died on that bed. From the sheer size of the stains, maybe ten someones.

Lucy storms in, armed and angry as hell. “What are you doing in here?”

Santana doesn’t seem the least bit put off by the threatening entrance. “Nice to see you, too.”

Spencer, meanwhile, is still staring at the horror before her. This rotting corpse is going to haunt her dreams. She will never sleep peacefully again. Black tattered shreds of clothing lie strewn across the room and at its feet. There’s no use checking for a missing toe because they’re all long gone. But it still has a full head of brown hair, so this can’t be Quinn. Not to mention the decomposition process seems in full swing, and Quinn’s only been gone since last night. This must be that poor FBI agent who came after Santana. Or, at least what’s left of her.

Spencer lets the seventy-pound sledgehammer fall to the floor and sighs in relief, fighting not to breathe too deeply. But with her mouth open, it’s taking all of her willpower not to vomit what little food is left in her system. The smell’s getting worse the closer she gets to the body.
“Is it Quinn?” Hermione calls loudly from her safe distance down the hall.

“No,” Lucy and Spencer call back in unison.

There’s a brief pause. “Are you coming back out?”

“Not yet.”

“Then will you please shut the door?!”

Spencer looks to Lucy, who walks over to the retinal scanner on the inside wall and complies. Fortunately, the blinding rage in her eyes isn’t interfering with the recognition software.

Santana rubs the sleep away and repeats the question back to Lucy. “What the hell are you doing here? It’s early.”

“It’s five PM,” Spencer says.

Santana ignores her. She’s starting to notice the weapons, then lands on Lucy’s uniform. “The Carrie look suits you. Me gusta. Matches my sheets.” She raises an eyebrow at Spencer. “I guess you two graduated to blood play, which was always one of my fav—”

“THIS IS MY ROOM,” Lucy fumes.

Santana recoils a bit. “Mm, don’t think so.”

“My name’s on everything!” Lucy points to all the artwork. “Look…” Her voice quivers, unable to hide her emotions as the memories come flooding back. “All my paintings…” Lucy walks right past the dead body and runs a finger along the gallery of art on the wall, taking in each one with a smile before moving to the next. “I never thought…” Lucy sniffles and wipes a smear of blood and tears across her face. “And that’s MY BED.”

“Squatter’s rights,” Santana says. “How did you even get in the door? I figured that panel busted years ago. Maybe nobody bothered to fix it because this décor should never see the light of day. But we managed to liven it up a little bit, didn’t we, Clarice? So to speak.” Santana looks to the dead elephant in the room.

Lucy’s not listening. She walks over to the bookshelf, picking up and looking through every title in turn. She seems both overcome with nostalgia and about to erupt. Spencer wonders if it might not be a bad idea to take away the chainsaw. Politely.

Santana picks at something in her teeth. “I thought you were from some spaceship full of mad scientists.”

Lucy doesn’t turn around. “Me too.” The words force their way through gritted teeth.

Santana sits up a little straighter. “Wait, this is where you killed all those people?” She laughs in delight. “No shit. Well, hey, welcome home, Lucy Borden.”

Spencer cringes, waiting for all hell to break loose. Santana is playing with fire by salting that wound. If Spencer’s learned anything about Lucy, it’s that she wants to be in control. She wants power. And people in power don’t like being kept in the dark.

Watching Lucy process the new reality crashing down on her, Spencer can finally put the pieces together: Lucy grew up here and her parents worked for DYAD. They created her sisters in the lab
next door and then shipped them away, so Lucy killed them. After the massacre, she was hauled off to prison, far away from the painful memories of her broken childhood. Or so they said. She must not have ever gone upstairs when she was little or known what was up there. A jail isn’t a place for children to run around, anyway. And the two floors certainly look different enough. It would be easy to sell the story that it’s a different ship if someone just woke up there.

Still, how stupid Lucy must feel right now. How belittled. After everything they’ve seen today, Spencer has to assume it’s not returning to a murder scene that bothers Lucy, but returning to the place where she was betrayed by the people who raised her.

Spencer wonders if the vastness of space feels a lot smaller to Lucy now, like her world collapsed in one moment, revealing the trap she’s been caught in all along. She liked prison so much because she was far from those demons. But all this time, she’s been living in the same walls as her ghosts. She must have known the second they stepped off the elevator. Everything she’s been told is a lie. She hasn’t escaped her past at all.

Spencer’s voice is soft. “You really didn’t know?”

Lucy just stares at the wall. There’s a fingerpainting of what looks like an octopus with a horse head, and Spencer can see the small name scrawled in the corner. It’s just like the art lining the back of their cell. Lucy may be in her early twenties, but really, she has barely aged at all since childhood. Physically, yes—and sexually—but not emotionally. Maybe that’s why she believed their lie so easily.

Spencer hasn’t read Lucy’s file, but she’s willing to bet there wasn’t a formal trial. Maybe there was nowhere else for her to go; a homicidal, orphaned child alone in space. Maybe there aren’t juvenile facilities in the space prison system. Spencer has no idea. Maybe the authorities moved Lucy while she slept, or gave her something to knock her out, like they did to Spencer. But she had to know she was being taken somewhere. What about that whole story with hiding Beth in her hair? No law enforcement officers would ever let someone bring a chainsaw and a pet spider with them to prison, even this one. It still doesn’t make sense. But Spencer’s not raising that point while Lucy’s armed and vulnerable.

Maybe Sue took on a motherly role with Lucy since she was so young. Maybe that’s why they seem to have a soft spot for each other. But that means Sue’s also been in on the lie. If Spencer’s right, Lucy will be eager to find Sue and confront her. They should get going.

For now, Spencer simply offers, “I’m sorry.”

The many sides of the girl Spencer has come to know—the obnoxiously perky queen bee, the encouraging crafts teacher, the ruthless dominatrix—all seem so far from the version before her now. Maybe one of those versions was the real Lucy, the girl she wanted to be once free from this place. Or maybe this is the real Lucy here and now; shattered, distracted and dazed, far from in control.

“Oh, seriously,” Santana prompts, pulling them back to the matter at hand. “If this isn’t a sex thing, then what’s the what? You broke my hibernation state. I’m hungry.”

Oh god.

“Quinn’s been kidnapped,” Spencer says. “We’ve been turning the ship upside down looking for her.”

“And the guards inside out,” Lucy adds.
“Haven’t seen her,” Santana says. “I think it’s safe to say Agent Delicious here hasn’t seen her either. But that’s only ‘cause I ate both her eyes.” Spencer can’t help the face she makes. “Man, it feels like she brought me down for that conjugal months ago. Too bad we couldn’t get the door open to leave.”

“So, you ate her to stay alive?” Spencer asks, horrified. She wonders why Lucy hasn’t complained about this particular piece of redecorating yet. Maybe she secretly approves.

“Please, like you wouldn’t have done the same,” Santana sneers. “I gave her a week just in case someone found us. I’m not a monster.” She seems just oblivious enough to believe it. “I was the best lay she ever had. It’s not like I hadn’t just spent three whole days eating her puss—”

“Oh, okay, STOP!” Spencer holds up her hands. “Nobody wants to hear your story anymore.”

Santana shrugs and lies back down.

Lucy doesn’t have any further comment on the situation. With a glance to Spencer, she says, “Let’s go,” and scans herself again to unlock the door. Both of them jump a bit, startled to see Faith’s waiting right on the other side.

She holds up a questioning finger and says, “Is that…?”

“Faith! Get in here!” Santana calls, spreading out on the blood-soaked bed with a grin.

Faith awkwardly angles past Lucy and Spencer saying, “I’m just gonna…but good luck with the whole murder quest thing.” She has her uniform unzipped before she passes the corpse, and the last thing Spencer and Lucy hear as they exit is the familiar smacking of Santana’s mouth against Faith’s.

Lucy closes the door behind them and rests her fists against it, kicking it hard twice. There’s a faint sound of Spanish cursing on the other side mixed with whatever Bostonian insult Faith selected. Lucy stares at the G38 sign for half a minute, then turns and walks away down the corridor. She begins to drift near Hermione, but at the girl’s gentle whisper of “Are you okay?” Lucy veers in a different direction to isolate herself.

Spencer’s legs, however, don’t have the will power to take her more than a few feet outside the door. Burying her hands in her hair again, she drops the ninety-pound sledgehammer to the ground in the hallway and allows herself to breathe deeply again. But that only triggers the tears of frustration she’s held back, and she throws her weight against the wall between doors G38 and G36 with a strained cry. Her forehead slams hard against the cold, white panel, a dull numbness that gives way to pain. Something she can focus on, something tangible.

Lucy may have just come home, but Spencer’s never felt so lost.

Quinn was supposed to be here. It all made sense, didn’t it? The Lucy connection, the G, the proximity to the lab. All the clues led to nothing but another dead body.

Turning around, Spencer slides slowly down the wall until she reaches the floor, eyes still closed. Maybe the others are standing there watching her fall apart, maybe they’re not. She doesn’t give a shit. Quinn’s not here, which means she must be in there, in the fucking lab, whatever the fuck that means. Poked and prodded, probed and pulled apart. Brain cut out, or maybe lobotomized. Body pumped full of chemicals or drained of all her—

“Spencer!”

The metal flap on the door beside her—thin and hinged like a mail slot—bangs a few times to get her
“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.

“Hey!”

She wipes her tears away quickly and turns to look at the hazel eyes and black polished fingertips poking out.

It’s Quinn.
Spencer’s stunned she’s not receiving the hero’s praise she deserves. “You were gone! Nobody knew where you were! What was I supposed to think? I had to get you out of here!” She waves her hands around the pink bedroom and takes a first good look at it. (The one next door might look like this underneath the giant pools of blood.)

Quinn’s made herself right at home. Her jumpsuit matches the thick, fluffy bedspread well; it’s pulled down now, maybe from rising after a nice, long nap. There’s a tall stack of children’s books on the floor by the bed and one still on the pillow. There’s a large multi-case of purple and green eyeshadow she’s been using as an ashtray. It’s much more comfortable than her prison cell upstairs. She’s probably been happy here.

Spencer feels like an idiot.

“I’m fine,” Quinn says. “Really. Sue said I’d only be here until tonight, after the inspection.”

Lucy steps closer. “What inspection?”

But Quinn doesn’t know. “She just said it was routine.”

Spencer thinks of all the weird kinds of visitors they get in this place—Mistress Berry, Agent Starling, god only knows who else—and wonders what constitutes a routine inspection in space prison. And what does it have to do with Quinn?

“But, why pull you out?” she asks. “Did anyone else go with you?”

“No. She just said it was for my own safety.” Quinn looks around and adds, “Not my first choice, but I’ve dealt with worse.” She can see Spencer’s still on edge, so she adds, “She didn’t hurt me or drug me or whatever you think happened. I walked down here myself. I slept, I ate lunch, I read shitty books.”

Spencer’s trying to fit this new truth into her narrative. Trying to justify everything that’s happened upstairs. Trying to make sense of her clusterfuck of emotions. For hours now, they’ve been running around under the misguided notion that Quinn’s life was in danger. They broke out of prison cells. They murdered over a dozen guards. They sawed an innocent girl’s legs off and left her to bleed to death. They armed the oppressed and then unleashed World War III.

And all the while, Quinn was alive and well, having a goddamn tea party and chain-smoking with a teddy bear, oblivious to everything that’s happened—the paralyzing fear. The nauseating worry. Mack getting tortured. Spencer getting tasered. Killer Cylons in alien goo. The gore and guts and trauma and running in endless circles. The long hours trying to get here, to this place, which they probably could’ve found right away if Beth had been given thirty more seconds to finish her goddamn message.

It was all for nothing. A waste. A lie. Spencer’s subconscious manifested this whole “kidnapping” just so she could save the damsel in distress and get the girl. Who, it turns out, requested no such saving in the first place. And now Spencer’s complicit in enough murders and destruction to land her in Solitary for life. There’s no coming back from this. They can’t undo what they’ve done.

“Hey,” Quinn says, stepping closer. “You okay?”

But no. Spencer’s a fucking galaxy away from okay. She rallied these troops to her cause. She made them believe her. Everyone is looking to her for answers and direction, even now, but she’s had the story wrong from the start. It’s not like she wanted Quinn to be in actual danger, but—to do all this, to come this far, and then find out…
Blood rushes to Spencer’s head, and she wants to just call a do-over on the day and erase all the horrible things that have happened. Go back in time and do it all over again.

Which…could she? In her new friend’s shiny time machine?

Spencer’s heart pounds at the possibility, and her eyes gloss over as she considers the logistics of such an incredible thing. The physics of time travel is well beyond her understanding. But if they could travel back to when Donna first showed up, they could bypass all the awfulness, head right to the elevator, and get Quinn, all in under thirty minutes. Or, they could just leave her here until this “inspection” is over and trust she would be returned safe and sound. They could save Graham and whoever else may be lying dead in the cell block just over their heads.

But then, who’s to say it would play out that easily? If they break out on an altered timetable, they might get caught before they can arm themselves. Even with the sacrifice of Graham, isn’t everyone else better off with all the Boomers dead? It’s a grimly utilitarian perspective, but Spencer can’t dismiss it. If they go back and try to redo it, it could be someone else who is sacrificed. Hermione, maybe. Or Donna. Lucy.

Herself.

As much as Spencer hates the situation they’re currently in, she can’t know for sure there’s a better path. She can’t guarantee an improved outcome. Donna’s even said she can’t be trusted to fly the machine on her own, so god only knows where—*when*—they could end up. What are the rules of time travel, anyway? If they looped back, would there be two of them? That’s just what this ship needs, more fucking clones. Would they create a paradox of the universe if Spencer met herself? She shakes it off and goes back to the beginning. Her mind rewinds to how all this began, a truly horrific day she’ll never forget. And that’s when she remembers…

It started with a spider web. Spencer didn’t make *that* up. Nor did she invent the rotting doctor or half-eaten Umbridge, neither of whom could’ve been Santana’s doing, as she’s been locked up for weeks. Fucking killer space spiders. That threat is still real, and it’s still out there. Wrong as she’s been about everything that’s happened, Spencer can still cling to that.

“You have no idea…” She closes her eyes and takes a steadying breath. “All day… I thought you’d been taken, or the spiders got you.” She opens her eyes. “They’ve eaten people. We’ve seen it.”

“I’m fine,” Quinn repeats, dismissing the topic. She’s not smiling anymore.

That’s not good enough for Spencer, but Ripley reenters the room before she can belabor the point.

“We should go,” she says. There’s nothing else to do here. Looking once more to the boss lady, Ripley reminds her, “We had a deal.”

Quinn tenses a bit. “What deal?”

“We’re going after Sue,” Spencer says with renewed confidence. This mission may not have played out as predicted, but there’s still another one in progress. “I promised, if they helped me find you.”

“Define *go after.*”

It feels like an obvious enough statement to Spencer. “Well, we’re not asking her to the prom.”

“No,” Quinn says simply. “It’s stupid.” Spencer starts to speak, but Quinn adds, “What are you going to do, *kill* her?”
Which only reminds Spencer that Quinn’s an alleged serial killer—a conversation for another time. “If we have to,” she says. “Lucy’s having a very productive day.”

Quinn scoffs. “You won’t get anywhere near her if she doesn’t want you to.”

“I just want to talk to her,” Spencer says, though that line’s getting thinner by the moment. “I want answers for all the bullshit that’s been going on.”

But Quinn doesn’t look convinced. “You have talked to Sue before! About the spiders, about the girls, about everything! How’s that worked out for you?” It’s clear someone still isn’t over the cell transfer. Another topic for later. “She gets inside your head, Spencer. She could probably convince you that you killed those girls if you let her talk long enough! Right before she kills you with your own weapon.”

Spencer isn’t going to justify that with a response. “You don’t have to go if you don’t want to. Maybe you should just stay here. You’ll be safe.” In case it helps, she adds, “Like Sue said.”

“Oh, now that you’re the one in charge, it’s okay if I’m in here,” Quinn clarifies, noting Spencer’s hypocrisy. Her eyes narrow. “I can take care of myself.”

“Maybe you missed the memo of what we’ve been doing all day, because—” But Spencer can’t finish her sentence now that she sees what’s on the floor by the foot of the bed.

Spiders.

Smashed, dead spiders.

Countless smashed, dead spiders—at least thirty, maybe more—swept together in a pile of black tangled legs and blue ooze, and left sitting out like a warning to anyone else who dares tread here.

“They did come after you!” Spencer shouts, forgetting for a moment that they’re fighting.

Quinn shrugs. “I handled it.”

Lucy sees them, too, and instantly tears up. “You bitch. They were probably just hungry! Would it kill you to give away a few bites of your lunch? You never eat it anyway.”

But Quinn’s not having any of Lucy’s shit today. “Forgive me for not thinking to set up a buffet line when a swarm of giant spiders comes flooding into my room.”

“They’re just trying to survive!”

“So WAS I,” Quinn yells back.

Lucy storms out in a huff.

But this development has blown Spencer’s mind. She remembers all too well how terrifying it is when they come in after you, climbing up the walls and filling your bed. Your skin crawls at the very sight of them and how they scurry along, eager and hungry to devour your flesh. Maybe the drug just exacerbated the fear, but that was the worst night of Spencer’s life. And here, this pile easily has more spiders than came after her, yet Quinn wiped them out like it was nothing. It just makes Spencer even crazier about Quinn Fabray.

Which begs the question…did Sue put Quinn in here specifically so the spiders could have better access? She must have. Maybe with Quinn hidden away alone, they could take their time with her,
like the other girls in the garbage chute. Spencer’s seen enough carnage today to know these assholes can work under pressure, but they can’t finish the job in a tight time window. The doctors can attest to that. While it could be a coincidence that the herd just happened to find Quinn out of all the rooms in this hall on the one night she was here…

Yeah, Spencer’s not buying that. But it doesn’t matter, because the plan failed. They’re dead, Quinn’s not, and Sue’s about to be.

*Suck on that, you eight-legged freaks.*

Still, Spencer can’t take her eyes off them. It’s hard to believe that this little mound of fragile limbs has been the source of so much pain and stress in her life over the last three months. They look so small now, like nothing. But this pile of nothing is, well, everything. It’s the signal in the sky that everything’s going to be okay. Spencer’s need to be right in this argument is rapidly dissolving.

“Time to go, ladies,” Vasquez says. “You with us or not?”

Spencer calls back without looking away from Quinn. “Yeah.”

Through the wall, they can hear Santana’s muffled voice from next door. “You girls have fun getting dead.”

Quinn takes a deep breath and sighs. This isn’t how she expected her day to go, but at least she won’t be bored. Her further masturbation plans will have to wait. It seems there’s killing to be done. Fortunately, she’s good at that, too. “Got any more weapons?”

Donna reaches into her pockets and pulls out two tasers, tossing them to Quinn one at a time. “Loads. Many as you want.”

Quinn catches them but looks a little uneasy. “Thanks.”

Spencer remembers they haven’t been introduced. “Donna, Quinn.”

“Right,” Donna smiles and nods. “Love the hair.”

Quinn doesn’t seem to get who this woman is or why she’s here, but she lets it go and stuffs one of the tasers into her bra. That reminds Spencer of what’s stuffed into hers, and she withdraws the crushed pack of Marlboro Lights and holds it out to Quinn.

“Thanks,” she replies with a small smile.

They file out of room G36—Quinn included—and gather one by one around the lab door. It seems more intimidating now that it’s time to go inside it. Like a mouth waiting to swallow them whole.

Quinn and Hermione both have the same idea to turn around and watch for anyone coming down the hall while the others remain focused ahead. They stand side by side, wand and tasers drawn, and Spencer realizes they’re probably stronger allies than she knows. They’re connected through Aphasia, at the very least. Maybe they were lunch table buddies for awhile. Maybe Hermione was even the fourth cellmate in 10 before Spencer or Jenny lived there. Spencer’s a little ashamed that she never thought to ask.

“Let’s do this,” Vasquez says, aiming her flamethrower dead-center where the door halves meet. When she’s ready, she tells Lucy to “Zap it.”

“I never had clearance to the lab.”
Vasquez says, “Here,” to Donna and tosses her the Boomer head.

Donna screams and jumps to the side, letting it fall to the ground with a splotch. “DON’T THROW THAT NASTY THING AT ME, RAMBO.”

Vasquez doesn’t reply, just angles her body with a bored look on her face until the large weapon is pointed right at Donna. She cocks an eyebrow suggestively.

“Faith,” Spencer calls out, keeping her annoyed glare on Vasquez and Donna. “Please be so kind as to get the door.” She’s hoping her cellmate’s fearlessness applies to severed heads. But nobody replies. She looks away now and turns around. “Faith?”

“Occupado!”

The voice is coming from Lucy’s old room. Several moans follow.

*Right.* She’d forgotten Faith was in there. Spencer pauses for a moment to make sure the moans are from pleasure and not from…being devoured, but it’s honestly hard to tell. Maybe zombie!Clarice has sprung to life and they’re…

That’s a threeway Spencer does not ever want to think about again. *Ever.*

She begrudgingly lifts the grotesque head off the floor by its hair and holds it in front of the lab door scanner as Lucy, Ripley, and Vasquez aim their weapons at any oncoming traffic. The red laser scans back and forth, then makes the familiar three beeps of rejection.

“Come on,” Spencer says and tries it again. Nope. “Shit.” The lab must be a Cylon-free zone.

The others are getting restless. Everyone is watching her now, even the lookouts.

“What’s the hold up?” Vasquez shouts.

Spencer wipes blood off the eyes with her suit and tries one more time. “It’s not working.”

“Maybe it can’t be a dead one,” Hermione offers.

After a fourth rejection, Spencer slams the head against the panel several times in frustration, cursing with each hit. It only makes a gross situation grosser, but she can’t bring herself to care. This is yet another dead end. They’re not getting in.

She throws it aside and tries to ignore the horrible sound it makes as it connects with the wall and then the floor.

“I *never did take that community college course on lasers,*” comes a voice from behind them, “*but I’m pretty sure that’s not how that works.*”

Weapons cock and take new aim as the group swivels quickly around.

It’s Buffy. Her uniform is ripped in several places, her lip is bloody, and she’s got a raging case of sex hair. But she doesn’t look the slightest bit worried to have a chainsaw, crossbow, flamethrower, magic wand, and two tasers all pointed at her. After all, she has her tiny stick!

“Oh hey!” she says, catching a certain pink-haired prisoner’s eye. “I found Quinn!”

Spencer doesn’t laugh. “Open the lab door.”
Buffy squints a bit and tilts her head. “Maybe if you say ‘please’? I do like it when you beg.”

Lucy fires up the chainsaw and takes two steps closer, stone-faced and ready to kill. The sound is every bit as deafening in this narrow hallway as it was upstairs, and Spencer grimaces against the grinding roar.

“Do you mind?” Buffy shouts at Lucy over the noise. She points a finger back and forth between Spencer and herself. “We’re trying to have a conversation.”

“LUCY!” Spencer yells.

Lucy shoots Spencer an annoyed look, waits three seconds, and then powers it down. Sputtering in short bursts, the chain blade slows to a stop and the hall falls quiet again.

Spencer refocuses on the guard, who’s now standing with her arms crossed. Buffy’s giving off a very ‘None shall pass’ troll vibe, made worse by the fact that she’s, like, two feet shorter than Spencer.

“Open it,” Spencer repeats.

“I thought you were supposed to be the brainy one.” Buffy’s tone is annoyingly playful. “You know I’m taking you all back upstairs, right? You have to know that.”

“Fun side note,” Donna chimes in, waving a hand at the guard. “Not a prisoner, just visiting. I can leave at any time. I’m fine on my own.”

There’s a quick whooshing sound and Buffy’s right hand shoots up and catches something inches from her face. Spencer sees her fingers are wrapped around the middle of an arrow, just fired by Ripley.

“You really don’t want to make me angry,” Buffy says and breaks the arrow in half one-handed before tossing it to the ground. “Guards don’t work for DYAD. But I do have an all-access pass to kicking your asses, if you wanna just cut to that part.”

Spencer doesn’t know what to do. Standing there, unarmed, it seems she’s now in charge of deciding whether another bloodbath will—

But then the chainsaw roars to life again and Hermione fires some kind of blue light at Buffy, shouting, “Stupefy!” and all hell breaks loose. Again.

Buffy ducks under the spell easily enough and jumps over Lucy’s swiping slash-attack, spinning with a kick to lay Hermione out with a single blow to the head. Ripley fires another arrow, but Buffy’s too close and too fast. She tosses the useless weapon aside and swings an angry fist at the tiny guard, missing at first but then connecting. They trade blows, and Buffy ducks again to avoid another incoming chainsaw attack before kicking Lucy’s knee out from under her, dropping the girl to the floor.

As soon as the machine hits the ground, Buffy kicks the motor cage hard. It slides noisily down the hall back toward the entrance. When Lucy tries to get up to run after it, Buffy kicks her in the chest to knock her down again, taking the wind and the will out of her at once.

Spencer has no idea how Buffy’s doing this, not just fighting off but neutralizing several people at once without breaking a sweat. She’s a superhuman fighting machine. The five-foot-two, probable-former-cheerleader might be the most intimidating thing Spencer’s seen today. Maybe Buffy should submit a killet application.
Quinn gets as close as she dares and fires one taser at Buffy, then two, but both miss. One lands on the leg of the still-unconscious Hermione, causing the limp body to shake and convulse. Quinn curses and yanks hard at the wire, but it takes a few tries before she can rip it free. Spencer remembers how painful just a few seconds of that voltage was, and she’s glad Hermione wasn’t awake to feel it. But now there’s no telling when she’ll wake up.

Ripley and Buffy are trading blows it’s a boxing ring, but Buffy doesn’t seem to even have broken a sweat.

“I can’t get a clear shot!” Vasquez calls to Ripley as she shuffles a few steps at a time, circling the action. “You’re too close!” Her girlfriend takes another punch to the face, then a fist to the stomach. Vasquez screams in rage and fires a blazing stream of orange, but Buffy’s too fast and shifts the fight several feet away. Turning to face Spencer now, Vasquez yells, “GET OFF YOUR ASS!”

Spencer realizes she’s been standing frozen on the spot, helpless, watching the others fight her battle. She takes in the whole scene—Ripley, getting beaten to a pulp as Vasquez abandons her weapon and joins the fistfight. Hermione, unconscious but hopefully breathing.

Donna’s now running over to pick up Spencer’s sledgehammer and get in on the action, shouting, “BACK OFF, BLONDIE!” as she swings the brick-on-a-stick into the open air where Buffy’d been a second before. It’s completely ineffective, but at least she’s trying, which is more than—

“Spencer!” Quinn’s got Hermione’s hands and is trying to pull her out of harm’s way without being noticed. She motions her head toward room G36. “Help me!” she whispers. Her eyes are full of remorse, and Spencer bets Quinn’s thinking about a difficult future conversation with Aphasia. Assuming someone lives to tell their story. The symphony of violence in the background isn’t promising.

Spencer runs to the near wall where the severely damaged Boomer head lies dripping ooze onto the ground. Grabbing it, Spencer hurries over to the G36 door and holds the gray eyes up to the scanner. The laser traces back and forth several times, like it’s unable to make a reading at all. Spencer grunts in frustration and tries to block out the sounds of pain behind her as Lucy takes a loud, cracking kick to the ribs.

“Open the door,” Quinn barks.

“I’m trying!” Spencer snaps back. She takes her elbow and rubs each of Boomer’s eyeballs, clearing away a layer of blood and pus. This time, the scanner beeps and the door slides open.

Quinn and Spencer lift Hermione a few inches off the ground and carry her inside, hoisting her onto the bed. Her wand is still clutched firmly in her fist. Spencer checks for a pulse; it’s faint, but it’s there.

“She’ll be okay.”

They run back out together, and Spencer scans Boomer’s head one more time to close the door before Buffy can stop them. She’s safe for now, but Spencer shakes away the thought that they may have just put Aphasia’s girlfriend inside a tomb. Someone has to survive the day to get her back out, or at least to tell Aphasia where she is. Spencer can’t second-guess her decision. Everything’s happening too fast.

“Anybody tired yet?” Buffy asks joyfully as she connects with Vasquez’s face.

Lucy and Ripley are stumbling and bleeding but say nothing. Donna’s off to the side, hunched over
and panting, hands on her knees and sledgehammer on the ground. It’s clear that their four-against-one won’t hold out much longer. Buffy’s just too strong. Stronger than anyone Spencer’s ever seen, except for maybe F—

Faith.

Stepping into the ring, Spencer says loudly over the distant buzz of the chainsaw twenty feet away, “I guess Faith was right about you.”

That sure gets Buffy’s attention. She pauses the action, as if taking a halftime break, though her opponents clearly need it more. Standing up straight and cocking her head, she considers Spencer’s words and takes the bait. “That’d be a first.”

“She said you were ‘wicked strong’ and had really fast hands,” Spencer starts, then sneaks a look at Lucy with a subtle wink. “…but you just could never seem to finish a girl off.” The look on Buffy’s face shows Spencer struck a nerve. She arches an eyebrow at Buffy with a glare that would make the Fabray sisters proud. “I guess you just don’t have what it takes.”

Buffy locks eyes on Spencer, and everyone else fades into the background as she steps forward, closing the gap between them. “That sure wasn’t the case an hour ago when she was screaming my name. Or maybe your little rebel gang was too busy running in circles to hear it.”

Spencer laughs. “Right. Because she’s not the biggest liar you’ve ever put your stake into.” Buffy’s eyes narrow. Spencer keeps going. “She brags all the time about how good she is at faking it. It’s kind of what she’s known for.” The wheels are turning in Buffy’s head. Spencer can see it all over her face.

But then, the sledgehammer crushes against Buffy’s shoulder from behind, sending her down to the ground hard.

Donna seems surprised she made a successful blow but goes with it. “THAT’LL TEACH YA.”

Buffy groans in pain and rolls over, starting to get up, but Quinn quickly reaches into Donna’s pocket and pulls out one of the spare tasers. She fires at Buffy’s chest, and the probes latch on like nipple clamps. It’s weird, but nobody stops the flow of electrons once it starts. They just watch as it runs itself out, finally incapacitating the guard after twenty long seconds of frying.

When everything stops, the only sound is the continuous hum of the chainsaw in the distance, which Lucy takes the opportunity to retrieve. She powers it down to save whatever little gas may be left.

“Is she dead?” Ripley asks, nudging Buffy’s arm with her foot.

Spencer checks her neck with two fingers. Even after all that, Buffy’s pulse is still stronger than Hermione’s. Damn. She sighs. “Faith said she’s surprisingly hard to kill. I think. Her exact words were ‘hard to keep dead.’”

“I have some ideas,” Lucy says, chainsaw balanced on her shoulder.

“Mm, mine’s better,” Quinn offers. She and Spencer exchange knowing looks and then get to work.

While Ripley and Vasquez tend to each other’s wounds, Spencer and Quinn grab Buffy’s arms and start to drag her off to the side. Donna tries to help by lifting her feet and pushing her along.

“Ready?” Lucy asks, standing by the wall.
Spencer nods. “Do it.”

Lucy scans her eyes and opens the door to G38 once more. Holding their breath, Quinn, Spencer, and Donna shove the guard’s crumpled body into the room. Lucy closes it quickly before Faith and Santana can finish asking what’s going on.

Spencer stares at the metal door. “May the best woman win.”

“That’s fucked up,” Vasquez says, rubbing her shoulder. Nobody disagrees.

But the problem isn’t yet solved, Spencer realizes. “Can you restrict access to this room so that only you can open it?” she asks Lucy. “Otherwise she’ll be able to get out once she wakes up.”

“Assuming there’s enough left of her,” Quinn says.

“Yeah, I think so,” Lucy says. “I figured out how to do this when I was a kid. I used it to keep out… certain people.” She presses a button, scans again, and presses more buttons. It makes a new beep sequence they haven’t heard before. “That should do it.”

“Let’s hope so,” Spencer says.

For the first time in what feels like hours, the women have a moment of peace and quiet to regroup. Looking around, Spencer takes a mental inventory. Hermione and Faith are off the roster. Ripley and Vasquez are bruised and battered, but standing. Thankfully, no bones seem to be broken. Donna’s shaken and tired but still here. Quinn and Lucy seem fine, but they’re mass murderers, so god only knows with them.

As for Spencer herself, the jury’s still out. They have to keep moving forward, if she can figure out what the hell that means at this point. The DYAD logo is staring her in the face again, laughing.

So close, yet so far away.

“We blasting these doors or what?” Vasquez asks her girlfriend.

“You need to rest. Let’s open one of these rooms and lie—”

“I’m fine,” Vasquez insists, “But if you wanna go take a break, I’ll stand guard.”

“No,” Ripley says. “We’re not done here.” She looks at Spencer. “There has to be a way in we haven’t thought of.”

“Well,” Donna starts, “if we’re finished playing Hotel Room Peek-a-Boo, I nominate we toss that rubbish head that’s dripped slime all over my brand new shoes.” She picks it up by the hair and carries it past the group. “I could go ten lifetimes without seeing another one of these crylon buggers, thank you very much.”

“Sure,” Spencer says, only half listening. She’s still staring at the DYAD sign. Maybe if she tries hard enough, she can open it telepathically with The Force. She’s almost considering it. She is in space, after all. Stranger things have happened.

To her left, she hears Donna shout, “Piss off!” and slam a door. Spencer turns at the noise.

Curiously, this door seems to have a regular handle but no lock and no scanner. Under the G39 sign, there’s a simple placard that says GARBAGE.

Spencer’s eyes go wide as she looks at Lucy, then Ripley. It’s the room at the bottom of the chute.
With all her dead friends inside.

Donna’s staring at her, not yet realizing the profound implications of her mindless action. “What? Was I not supposed to throw out the disgusting robot skull?” She turns to glance back at the door and the sign, then her eyes go wide. “Oi, hang on! I think I just found all your dead friends!”
It’s strange being pretty sure you’re about to walk into a room that has chunks of dead women in it.

Spencer steadies herself, second in line behind Vasquez. A few feet back, Ripley, Lucy, Quinn, and Donna are armed and ready to bring up the rear.

Vasquez slowly opens the door, and light from the hallway creeps in, but the far side is still covered in shadows. The room is much larger than Spencer anticipated.

“Anybody see the lights?” Quinn asks.

Spencer reaches inside the door frame for a switch but comes up empty. Nobody replies.

“I can light this place up,” Vasquez offers.

But Spencer quickly objects. “No! If you start a trash fire, we might not be able to get back out.” That’s true but only half the story. Spencer doesn’t want to learn what burning, rotted flesh smells like.

The room stretches out to the right beyond the reach of their limited light source. Spencer slowly steps into the darkness, hoping her eyes will adjust quickly. With one hand balancing the hundred-pound sledgehammer on her shoulder, she keeps the other stretched out in front of her, waving slowly to feel for any walls or posts in the way. About ten feet from the door, she feels something and quickly retracts. Nothing happens, so she reaches out again.

It’s a taut, thick string.

Spencer jumps back and prays this doesn’t mean what she thinks it means. Retreating cautiously, she reaches Quinn and holds on to her arm. “Somebody get the lights. Now.”

“You got it.” Vasquez fires a burst of flames toward the ceiling, illuminating the space.

Spencer winces against the sharp contrast and squints at the burst of light, but she doesn’t get a good look at the room. After three seconds, the room falls into darkness. “Again,” she says. She holds her hands like a visor and stares in the direction of the string. She’s ready.

Vasquez fires, and this time Spencer sees it. A giant spider web. She shouts, “Shit!” and leaps back.

At the same time, Donna screams and stumbles. “Was that…that was…”

“Let’s get out of here,” Ripley says, heading toward the door.

“Right behind you,” Donna says. “I don’t ever want to see that ag—”

Without warning, the room comes into full, bright view.
“Found it!” Lucy calls from a light switch halfway down the side wall.

Everyone stares in terrified awe at the masterpiece before them. It stretches fifteen feet long across the room, slanting down at a forty-five-degree angle from ceiling to floor. The center orbits are formed with yellow string coiled together half an inch thick. They then crisscross with thinner radial cords that extend out to latch on to various points in the room.

As she looks closer, Spencer can see traces of other colors of thread woven in as well, like a kaleidoscope of fabric or one of those multicolored friendship bracelets that kids make at summer camp. It’s much bigger than anything Spencer ever saw in her cell, and much more terrifying. The flung Boomer head is stuck in it, she now notices, just left of center.

Her eyes continue scanning past the web, and Spencer starts to see the full picture of the Uterius’s garbage room. There are of course scattered trash bags and rotting material, but that’s not what’s drawing her attention. A giant yellow pile in the corner towers over everything else—ratted ends of towels, what could be fifty or more of them. Strewn around the base of it lie stray foam cups and underwire pieces from the picked-clean frames of countless bras. And a few feet from where she’s standing, the waistband of her long-lost pair of panties.

Reflecting on that fateful day in the bathroom, Spencer realizes Beth had no need to take any artificial thread. There must have been evil spiders hiding there as well. But it’s not that surprising. Everybody was in that goddamn bathroom that day. Maybe Beth was just trying to warn her to keep an eye on her stuff. She issued a lot of warnings in her time.

All things considered, she truly was a damn fine spider. Unlike these motherfuckers.

There’s a trail of remains from various undergarments and stolen uniforms leading to the far side of the room. It stops a few feet shy of a giant pile of corpses. Spencer’s heart sinks.

“There they are,” she says, pointing across the room.

It’s an even bigger pile than she anticipated, but it’s hard to count the victims, since each body is partially eaten. From where Spencer’s standing, she can’t tell what heads belong to what bodies, or what arms might match what legs. But most of the heads are clustered together in the base of what must be the garbage chute from the kitchen, right where Hermione left them.

The six women start moving closer, letting the door shut behind them. Suddenly, Spencer swears she sees movement in the web lines up ahead. It’s subtle, but it stops her in her tracks, heart pounding. She instantly looks down at the floor, as if expecting to see another dozen spiders closing in on her. But with so many scattered pieces of fabric on the ground, there’s no way to know. They could easily be hiding under anything. Maybe she just imagined the movement. Maybe it was the light.

But then a pile of shredded garments in the corner starts rustling, and Spencer can’t breathe.

“Guys…”

Ripley’s reaching her arm out, like a protective mother shielding kids from danger. She backs away slowly with Quinn, Donna, and Vasquez right in step with her. Everyone’s eyes are on the motion in the far corner of the room by the base of the garbage chute, underneath the web. Even with the lights on, all Spencer can see are clothes shuffling low to the ground. But then the negative space becomes shiny blackness, and there is form, and then shape. And legs.

Eight giant legs.

“Oh my god,” Spencer says, trembling.
One long, black leg tosses a pink bra aside, uncovering eight eyes and a giant mouth. With a flurry of clicking noises, the spider pulls itself carefully onto the far edge of the web. It’s freakishly large, like something out of a horror movie. The abdomen alone must be close to three feet long, while each leg might stretch out even longer. The large eyes are the size of softballs and staring right at Spencer and her friends.

As it moves closer, Spencer can see the familiar neon blue symbol on its back. Only this time, it’s large enough that she can make out what it is.

It’s the DYAD logo.

And yet, the creepiest thing about this monstrous spider heading to devour them might be the shredded yellow half-towel hanging off its head like a veil or a bad blonde wig. It would seem comical on a harmless household pet, like a Halloween costume, but Spencer immediately recognizes it as a sign of intelligence in this beast. It’s mocking them.

“She’s so beautiful!” Lucy says. She sets her chainsaw down carefully and steps forward as the others move quickly in the opposite direction. Her eyes are wide with wonder, like she’s seeing something from a dream.

Spencer would prefer a unicorn in this moment, but whatever.

“Open it! Come on!” Donna yells, banging against the metal door.

“I’m trying!” Ripley’s grasping and clawing, but there’s no handle on the inside.

They’re trapped.

Suddenly, a terrible noise fills the room, like a screeching bark into a roar, and Spencer covers both her ears. She didn’t know spiders could make noises, but then, apparently there’s a fucking lot she didn’t know about spiders.

With a delightful chuckle, Lucy replies, “Hi there!” But she’s clearly misreading the situation and takes another step forward, much to the beast’s dismay.

The spider howls louder and rears back, flailing its two front arms wildly at the intruders.

“OH, FUCK OFF.” Donna yells. She grabs the chainsaw, runs a few steps forward, and chucks the machine right at the spider’s head.

“HEY!” Lucy cries, but it’s too late.

The motor housing connects squarely with two of the spider’s eyes. The beast rears back again and howls even louder.

“TAKE THAT, YOU BITCH.” It sounds especially threatening in the British accent.

Lucy watches as her chainsaw falls through the string web and lands on the ground. It’s entirely out of reach now. “Leave her alone!”

But Donna ignores her and steps toward the monster again, despite being unarmed. “WE SEE WHAT YOU’VE BEEN UP TO IN HERE, AND WE’RE NOT GONNA LET IT HAPPEN ANYM—”

In an instant, the spider scrunches down and pounces on top of Donna, wrapping its front legs
around her and plunging its fangs into her face. Spencer screams and drops the sledgehammer to
grab Quinn’s arm, pulling her to the far end of the room as Vasquez and Lucy quickly follow.

Ripley picks up Spencer’s weapon and bravely runs into the fray. She starts pummeling the spider as
it devours Donna, but it’s moving too fast for her to get a clear shot. It seems Ripley’s trying to avoid
the head to spare whatever might be left of Donna underneath.

“ELLEN!” Vasquez pleads, voice thick with desperation. “COME ON!”

Grunting in frustration, Ripley gets a few more hits in, injuring two of the spider’s legs, but it’s not
enough.

“STOP IT! STOP HURTING HER!” Lucy cries, and Spencer shares the sentiment until she realizes
just who Lucy’s trying to defend.

Ripley screams in rage and gives up, throwing the sledgehammer at the spider with all her might, but
it barely makes a dent. She runs over to join the others in the corner, tears streaming from her eyes.
With the spider adequately distracted, Lucy approaches the web and reaches through a large
opening, fingers outstretched toward her chainsaw a few feet away. Spencer can only imagine how
much nastier this could all get if Lucy comes out swinging.

Vasquez steps forward now. “MY TURN, ASSHOLE.”

Powering on the flamethrower, she sets it to maximum range and lets it rip. A huge stream of blue
and orange bursts forward, lighting up the room like the Fourth of July. As if on cue, Madonna
Power Hour kicks off, blasting “Ray of Light” in the hallway.

Fire bores into the spider, unrelentingly, until it releases its hold on Donna. It howls in agony, turning
to attack Vasquez, but the flames are just too strong. Vasquez can’t seem to control it and sets the
entire room ablaze in a wave of destruction. The web catches fire immediately, as do the shredded
clothes all along the floor. The burning towel threads around the spider’s head blind the spider as its
eyes begin to melt. The screams of agony, matched only by Lucy’s cries of rage and empathy, layer
over the perky synthesizer drum beats buzzing through the walls.

By the time the flamethrower runs out of fuel, the entire room is charred black, leaving embers of the
various fabrics sizzling around a very crispy and dead giant spider. The sole orange flame clings to
the handle of the sledgehammer on the ground. The survivors, sans Lucy, huddle close in the corner
beside the pile of body parts, surveying the wasteland. They’re lucky the walls weren’t flammable.
Even still, they don’t feel very alive. They’re trapped now in this oven of death. And it smells even
worse than before.

Lucy’s casting a look of ultimate hurt and betrayal, tears streaming down her filth-covered cheeks.
Spencer’s crying too, but for better reasons.

Even if Donna had survived having her face eaten off, she never stood a chance against the fire.
She’s unrecognizable now, and Spencer can’t bring herself to look at the body. The group takes a
moment of silence, whether they mean to or not. There just doesn’t seem any point in arguing, and it
won’t undo what’s been done. They barely knew Donna, but she fought by their side all day. After
coming here to save Dolores Umbridge from killer spiders, she ended up succumbing to the same
terrible fate. It just doesn’t seem fair.

Lucy is able to reach her chainsaw now that there’s no web in the way. She coughs loudly several
times as she picks it up. Ripley echoes it, then pulls her shirt over her nose. Spencer’s noticing, too,
just how much harder it is to breathe. There ventilation’s too poor in here. Even if the trash chute
were open on the main level, it’s so clogged with bodies that not much smoke could escape, anyway.

Spencer knows they don’t have much time before symptoms of oxygen deprivation kick in. “There has to be a way out!” she says, but the options are few.

Quinn walks over to the pile of dead girls and starts moving them aside, one arm and leg and head at a time. Lucy starts helping, and they quickly clear the entrance to the garbage chute. The last pieces out are the same ones Spencer saw when Hermione floated them up to her. Paulie’s head; Vause. How was that only a few hours ago?

Quinn says, “Push me up,” and starts crawling into the chute. But it’s at least fifteen feet high and angled steeply enough that she’ll have to climb it. The blood and guts smeared along the side make it impossible for her to get a grip. Even with Spencer and Vasquez hoisting her up by her feet, she can’t get high enough to push the door open, not even close.

Quinn drops with a loud clang and crawls back out, smeared with the messy remains of former inmates. “Now what?”

“I don’t know,” Spencer says, crossing the room to sit by the door. “Stay low to the ground. Cover your face and breathe through your clothes.”

Kicking aside some burnt towel hems, she squats down and finds this door has a flap just like what Quinn looked through to get her attention. She pushes it open, desperate for a breath of fresh air. From here, she has a clear view of rooms G40, G38, and G36. The spiders who went after Quinn had easy access to her from here. Maybe a little too easy.

Suddenly, Spencer hears the sound of footsteps echoing down the white hallway. High heels. “Someone’s coming!”

“Who?” Ripley asks.

“I can’t see yet.”

Peeking through the flap, she trembles as she runs through a short list of possibilities. Did they leave someone alive? A snappy dresser, no less? Is it a visitor? Someone they could call to for help? At this point, she’d settle for Mistress Berry. Anyone who could open the door.

Please, please, please...

The steps get louder and louder, then finally an older brunette steps into view wearing a dress suit and glasses. She carries herself with confidence, but her hair’s a bit mussed, like she pulled herself together a little too quickly.

Coming to a stop just at the edge of Spencer’s range of vision, the woman examines the forensic carnival before her. The hallway is utterly wrecked. All the fighting with Buffy really painted the town red, so to speak. The woman says nothing, just looks around in quiet judgment. Her eyes follow a trail of blood spatter over to the far wall where Spencer threw the Boomer head against the door to G40, then along the path of bloody footprints that lead right to the trash room. Finally, she turns to her left, as if seeking input from someone Spencer can’t see.

“Well. This is embarrassing.”

Any cry for help evaporates in Spencer’s burning throat. Instead, she gives a very emphatic quieting signal to her friends, pointing and mouthing, “SUE.”
“I should think so,” the woman replies.

Sue tries to play it off. “I know Raisin’s got plenty of club soda in that bar of hers. It’s not like she couldn’t get these stains out if she put a little elbow grease into it.”

The woman turns her head slightly, curious, and furrows her brow. She looks right at the door to the garbage room, and Spencer quickly moves her face out of sight, careful not to let the noisy flap drop.

“Something’s burning.”

“We’re right below the engine room.” Sue steps forward, looking more disheveled than usual, and carves a path around the worst of the stains to approach the retinal scanner for the lab. It beeps twice, sliding open with a *whoosh*, and Sue turns to extend a hand to her companion. “Madam President?”

With a step over a small puddle of blood, Laura Roslin follows the warden inside, and the door closes behind them.

Spencer feels paralyzed. All this time, Sue was out there, accessible. She must have been in one of the rooms on this floor that they didn’t check. But wouldn’t the noise of the chainsaw have drawn her out? They never went past the staircase; maybe she was holed up on the other end of the ship. Spencer was in such a hurry to get to the lab, they could have blown right past her. And now they’re trapped in here choking to death, and there’s no one coming to rescue them.

The fact that they know Sue’s current location is of little comfort. She’d trade it for an oxygen tank. Or Donna.

The lab door just a few feet away is taunting her. Sue made it look so easy to get inside. But Spencer isn’t even sure she wants to know what’s behind that door anymore. If Sue keeps a couch-size spider in her trash room, there’s no telling what monstrosities might be found in the actual laboratory. There could be something much, much worse. For all they know, the spider was a reject project, thrown away and replaced with something much deadlier.

“Wait,” Spencer says, rising to her feet. “The lab produces waste. They’re probably not going to take the trash out the front door if this room runs alongside it. There’s gotta be a hatch somewhere.”

Only, there isn’t. The five women look carefully at each wall, but everything’s blackened and burned. Quinn gets up and bangs a fist on the metal wall three times, hard.

“Shut up.” Quinn steps a few feet to the right and bangs her fist again—same dull thud. She repeats this eight or nine times, but then, the sound changes. It’s deeper, more resounding. Like it’s hollow.

“Here.”

“You found it?” Spencer rushes to investigate and runs her fingers over the charred metal, trying to feel for anything hidden. Her fingernail scrapes against an edge that she follows, revealing a thin outline of a rectangle about the same size as the open chute. It was practically invisible under the layer of black soot. “Help me get it open.”

But she quickly discovers their fingers can’t wedge in, and they don’t have anything to pry it open. They try the last of Ripley’s arrows from the crossbow, but it snaps in half under the pressure.

Faith’s knife would come in handy right about now, Spencer thinks, or Buffy’s super strength. Aphasia probably has a crowbar under her bunk, but that won’t help them now. Something to remember for next time they try to break into a top-secret laboratory in space prison. Right now, they just have to find something long, thin, and metal that’s strong enough to…

*Oh boy. Here we go.*

Spencer walks over to Lucy and says, “Here,” prompting for Lucy to hand over her weapon. “We need it.”

Lucy glares, indignant at the idea of anyone else holding her baby. “I need it.”

“We can use it to get the chute open!” This is true. Maybe. “I’ll give it right back,” she adds.

Stepping closer than she needs to, Lucy doesn’t break eye contact as she pushes the starter housing against Spencer’s stomach.

“Help me?” Spencer looks to Vasquez, then gestures to Lucy. “Hold her back.”

“What are—” Lucy starts.

But she’s already in motion. Lifting it high over her head, Spencer slams the weight of the chainsaw against the floor as hard as she can. The engine case shatters, sending screws, springs, and bloody, bedazzled plastic bits all over the floor.

“NO!” Lucy cries and throws herself at Spencer, fist reared back and fire in her eyes. “STOP!”

Vasquez grabs her around the torso and pulls her away just in time. Ripley steps over to give her girlfriend a much-needed hand.

“Make it quick,” Vasquez grunts over Lucy’s screams of rage.

Spencer picks up the half-broken case and slams it once more, sending more bits flying across the floor. She and Quinn look at each other for a moment. There’s no going back from this now.

Quinn reaches down and gives the engine casing one more hit on the ground, cracking it open far enough that she can pull most of the engine components away. Spencer quickly removes the teeth chain from the long guide bar, rendering it safe to hold. Without a screwdriver, parts are still hanging together at the base, but at least now they have a long, flat, strong metal tool with a handle.

As Lucy continues to curse her very existence, Spencer lifts the broken chainsaw and wedges the end of the guide bar into the top of the chute door. It’s too high off the ground to have much leverage, even with Quinn’s help, and it’s still hard to breathe deeply for strength. But after a minute they manage to shimmy the metal inside, at least enough to pry it open an inch.

“We got it,” Spencer says, and they switch to pulling it down with their hands.

It comes more easily as the door opens forward, revealing the bottom of a chute slide that must lead up into the lab. It reminds Spencer of the drop-off at the post office, back on Earth where there are normal things and you don’t find yourself suffocating in a room with a dead mega-spider and multiple mass murderers.

Once the door is down all the way, Spencer walks over to Lucy and hands her the remains of the precious chainsaw. A promise is a promise. “Thank you.” She means it. Then, if it’ll help, she adds, “Sorry.”
She’s met with silence. Maybe Lucy’s out of words for her. Maybe she just can’t spare the oxygen.

But then Vasquez lets go, and Lucy wastes no time slapping Spencer across the face, harder than ever. It stings like a motherfucker. Then, before Spencer can recover, Lucy repeats the action—same hand, same side, but even more force. “You’re welcome.”

Spencer deserves it. But she’s dealt with worse today.

One by one, the women climb into the garbage chute. This one’s much shorter, not going up a whole floor, and the others are able to push Spencer through first. She’s barely able to fit her shoulders through the tight squeeze, but as the tallest among them, it’s up to her to push open the chute door at the top so they can climb out, wherever it leads.

Her entrance is squeaky and graceless, as she awkwardly bangs and booms her way out of the chute into breathable air. She seems to be in a back room or at the end of a hallway. There’s no one and nothing around, just more white walls and corners. The radio isn’t as loud in here, but Spencer can hear it’s in the second verse of Madonna’s “Sorry.” She hates that she knows that.

“Come on,” she calls down to Ripley, reaching both hands out to pull her up.

Quinn follows behind, then Lucy, who seems intent on bringing what remains of her beloved chainsaw with her. It’s the last semblance of a weapon they have left, but it’s useless to them now.

“Leave it,” Quinn says, and her sister begrudgingly complies.

Vasquez pushes Lucy up, then pulls herself through. They close the chute door behind them, taking a moment to recover in the fresh air, hunched over and coughing and stretching their sore backs.

Letting her eyes fall shut for a moment, Spencer silently promises Donna they’ll come back for her body.

Against the pristine surfaces of the very clean laboratory, she can see just how gnarly they’ve become. Buffy really did a number on them, and the fire only made things worse. Lucy’s no longer the only one covered in blood spray. Ripley and Vasquez each have swollen black eyes and blood trails from their noses. Quinn’s sporting a cut across her cheek, and all their uniforms are ripped in at least two places. Everyone is coated in a layer of gray smoke and ash. The pink in Quinn’s hair is barely visible anymore.

Looking at her own hands, Spencer can see she’s no better off. She really hopes this lab doesn’t have any mirrors.

She runs a hand through her very messy hair, or at least as far as it can go. “We ready?” There’s nowhere to go but forward.

“No weapons,” Quinn points out.

“Don’t need ‘em,” Vasquez says, cracking her knuckles.

Ripley agrees. “I don’t think that’ll be a problem.”

“I’m going back upstairs,” Lucy announces, and all eyes turn to her. “I never agreed to killing Sue. I came to save Quinn, and that’s what I did. Now, I want to go home.”

Quinn looks at Lucy suspiciously but doesn’t argue the point.
“Congratulations, princess,” Vasquez says. “Now it’s our turn. Leave if you want. But she’s gonna die tonight.”

Suddenly, a new voice behind them says, “Whoa, who’s dying?”
“Please say it’s not me,” the stranger continues. “I’m in the middle of an awesome biogenetics book, and I’d really like to finish it first.”

The five women just stare at her, frozen on the spot. Spencer sees an ID badge pinned to the white lab coat, right under a large DYAD logo, but she can’t read it from where she’s standing.

This woman seems young to be a doctor, maybe twenty-five at most. Her head is covered in long, dark, neat braids pulled back into a bundle. Her thick-rimmed glasses frame her face well. She doesn’t look particularly dangerous, but who knows what she might be capable of.

“You look like you’ve had a rough day,” she says. “I can help.”

Her voice sounds sincere, but this isn’t one of the Lewis-Burke-Robbins doctors, and Spencer’s not in the mood to meet any new people today. “Take us to Sue. Right now.”

The doctor pushes her glasses up as she exhales nervously. “Sure, Spencer, I can do that.”

Everything in Spencer’s body instinctively tightens and she takes a step backward. “How do you know my name?”

“Oh. Yeah, that’s a long story. Maybe you should ask Sue. I’ll go get her right now. Maybe while you guys take a minute to clean up? We have a shower in the b—”

“NOW!” Spencer yells, and the doctor stumbles.

“Yes, going,” she says and points down the hall.

But Spencer’s already walking fast in that direction, blowing right past her, and the others quickly follow. Vasquez shoulder-checks the doctor hard as she brings up the rear.

“Spencer, wait!” the doctor calls, but nobody’s stopping.

It’s like a maze with high, white walls and narrow hallways. There are numbered doors on both sides with small windows, but there isn’t time to check each one. The warden is bound to be somewhere more important.

Spencer turns left at the corner, following the arterial path, and reaches a locked door with another goddamn scanner. The sign on it reads, RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT, but it’s the label underneath that intrigues her—**RESTRICTED ACCESS** in giant red lettering.

Bingo.

“Open this door,” she calls back, knowing the doctor is still following them. When everyone catches up to her, Spencer takes a moment to read the pocket on the doctor’s lab coat: Cosima Niehaus. It
feels gross and weird that this woman knows who she is and not vice versa.

“Sue’s not in there, okay?” Cosima says. “Just, come with me. Please.”

“Not until you open this door.”

Cosima takes a quick glance at each of the five battle-worn women, hanging a little longer on Quinn and then Lucy. Finally, she looks into Spencer’s eyes, imploring. “You really don’t want me to do that. Trust me. Let’s just go talk—”

Vasquez grabs Cosima’s neck from behind and slams her face against the retinal scanner, breaking her glasses and probably her nose. Cosima cries out in pain as her cheek is pressed hard into the interface.

“Jenette—” Ripley says, but her girlfriend doesn’t back down.

Vasquez grunts, restraining the girl’s arms behind her back. “Hold open her eyelids.”

“Stop! Stop! Don’t…” Cosima shouts. “I’ll do it! I’ll open the door! Jesus. Just let me go.” She stops fighting against the hold, and Vasquez relents. Cosima wipes her bloody nose with the sleeve of her jacket, staining the starched white fabric. Removing her cracked glasses, she leans down and lets the scanner read her teary eyes.

Spencer feels a pang of guilt and tries to shake it off, but can’t. None of the doctors she’s met here so far have tried to harm her in any way. (Well, actual doctors. Umbridge can’t count.) After the gruesome slaughter of Graham that turned out to be for nothing and the consumption of Agent Starling, Spencer can’t stomach more violence against innocent women today. The guards—they all had it coming. That’s different. And Sue….well. That remains to be seen. But Cosima probably doesn’t deserve this.

Desperate as Spencer is for answers, she has to draw a line somewhere, or she risks spiraling into someone she won’t recognize. Just how far will she go to find the truth? The thought is unsettling, because she honestly doesn’t know. Spencer doesn’t want to lose her humanity, and that has to mean something. Murderer or not, she’s still a good person.

But then the restricted door swings open and she sees what’s hiding behind it. And now, Spencer’s no longer sure she’s even a person at all.

The large room contains a row of giant, clear cylinders maybe four feet in diameter that stretch from floor to ceiling. Each one is filled with liquid that surrounds the lifeform suspended inside—naked and curled in a fetal position, eyes closed, limbs tangled and brown hair floating freely. The bodies must have over a dozen wires connected all over, and tubes are taped in place in their mouths. The light casts a greenish tint over each one, but they’re clearly human. There must be at least ten bodies at different stages of development. Some have rotated to face away, but Spencer can see the faces in the tanks closest to where she’s standing.

It’s her. They’re all her.

Ripley steps inside next to her. “Oh no.”

“What the fuck?” Vasquez says. “What the fuck is that?”

A new woman steps out from behind the middle of the row, curious about the foreign voice in her workspace. She’s taller with wavy blonde hair down to her chin. Seeing the intruders, her eyes go wide, and she says in a thick French accent, “Spencer! Hi, um…” She moves forward with her
hands out, as if trying to casually usher them back out the door. She finds Cosima’s eyes and asks, not at all subtly, “What’s going on?”

Spencer now realizes she’s seen this woman once before, whispering quietly with Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins in the infirmary. They closed the door in her face. Not today, not again. “How about you tell me?” she says, unwilling to move from the spot.

The woman—Delphine Cormier, according to her DYAD badge—looks back and forth from Spencer to Cosima, unsure of what to do. Maybe her lab has never been invaded by a blood-covered mob of mass-murdering lesbians, at least half of whom appear to be clones of some kind. She must have she missed that day of safety training.

“I…” Delphine stammers, “You can’t be in here. I’m sorry. You have to leave.”

“WHY AM I IN TUBES?” she yells, pointing at the horror movie come to life.

“Welcome to Clone Club,” Quinn says from the back. She doesn’t sound the least bit amused.

Spencer’s going to be sick.

But as she starts to shove angrily against the white lab coats holding her back, Spencer hears familiar high heels echoing in the hall behind her.

Delphine pushes her harder now, struggling to close the door. “You have to get out, Spencer! Go!”

“We’ve made terrific progress,” Sue says, “especially in the sixteen to twenty-five band. I think we’ll have doubled our annual projections by Christmas.”

The distraction is enough for Spencer to lose her ground in the fight. Delphine shoves hard against Spencer’s side and pulls the door shut once and for all.

Sue comes into view, smiling and happy with the President closely behind. But the moment her eyes meet Spencer’s, she stops in her tracks. She looks at Lucy, Quinn, Vasquez, and Ripley each in turn, and all color drains from her face.

“Dr. Cormier,” she says carefully, in a thin attempt to hold her shit together, “you didn’t tell me you had company.”

“I’m sorry,” Delphine stumbles. It’s clear she’s intimidated, though probably more by the President than this nitwit in cross-trainers. “I…tried calling you this morning.” It’s a weak lie.

“I’ve been a bit occupied,” Sue says. “Our private meeting should have given everyone more than enough time to prepare for the walkthrough—taking out the trash, scrubbing the floors, seeing that all prisoners were returned to their cells.” The statement is so pointed, it could take out someone’s eye.

“Madam President, I apologize.”

“It’s fine,” Roslin says.

Sue doesn’t seem to think so. “Ignore another code announcement, and you’re off my ship.”

Spencer’s been so nervous about what smackdown from Sue must be coming, she momentarily forgets her place as galactic scum and speaks—without permission—to the President of Space.

“You’re Code Pink?”

Sue stares hard into Spencer’s eyes, looking deeply insulted by her very existence, and says, “The
woman has breast cancer, inmate. Show some respect.”

That’s it—Code Pink for pink ribbons. It wasn’t about Umbridge at all.

Laura Roslin takes a step forward, looking over the weary gang. “And who are you, exactly? You all look like you’ve been living in an exhaust pipe. Or possibly dying there.”

“I apologize, Madam President,” Cosima says, stepping in front of Spencer. “I believe what our indentured workers meant to say is that they’ll get back to scrubbing and mopping immediately.”

Spencer doesn’t know why Cosima’s covering for her, but she’s not going to argue the point. They might be able to get out of this alive after all.

If Sue’s been too busy getting three fingers deep into the cosmic Commander in Chief, she might have no idea Umbridge is even dead or that all the blood in their uniforms is from her army of guards. But she does, of course, know that they’re escaped prisoners. Not revealing that fact means Sue is trying to impress the powers that be and save face. And that means Sue might be willing to go along with a lie, so long as the illusion of her authority remains intact.

Spencer could probably say something to get them escorted safely back upstairs, but she isn’t ready to be locked up yet, not when they’re this close to confronting Sue. So, that means it’s the President who needs to go.

“Yes, we’re very sorry, Warden,” Spencer says, faking sincerity as much as she can. “Dr. Umbridge thought you might need some help scrubbing out your waste depositories before the President’s visit, so we came right away. We just need a few minutes with you to go over the status report before we head back upstairs.” It’s a huge bluff, but Spencer’s betting Sue wants Roslin out of here as much as they do. For good measure, she adds, “Some real nasty stuff this time. Fecal waste is up twenty-three percent this month.” Scrunching her nose, she adds in a whisper, “I think it’s from the tacos.”

Quinn joins in. “We’ve got the broken filters down the hall so you can order replacements. But we’ll need to move fast. We had to temporarily shut down the pump. It’s gonna get smelly in here soon.”

Spencer could kiss her.

“Never a dull moment,” President Roslin muses.

Sue squints, thinking it over as she looks at the gang. Finally, she calls over her shoulder, “BECKY! Get in here.”

The short blonde with glasses comes running in, wearing a white lab coat that’s much too big for her. She takes one look at the crowd of inmates in the hallway and scowls. “What the hell are you looking at? Go crawl back in your shithole!”

“Becky,” Sue says, “I’m going to walk the President back to her shuttle. Please take Miss Hastings, Ripley, and Vasquez to the lobby and wait there until I get back.”

Spencer immediately looks to Quinn as her pulse quickens. They’re being split up.

Becky looks like she’ll be happy to vent them out the nearest airlock the first chance she gets. “Yes, Warden!”

Sue continues, “Dr. Niehaus and Dr. Cormier will see that the others are contained in Room 4.” Meaning Lucy and Quinn. The scientists acknowledge the order but remain quiet. “And nobody touch anything! You’re filthy and disgusting.” Meeting Cosima’s eyes one last time, Sue points and
says, “Ten minutes.” With that, she steers President Roslin back the way they came, rambling on about her recent golf endeavors.

As soon as they’re out of sight, Becky turns and barks, “You heard her! Let’s move!”

But Spencer’s not taking her eyes off Quinn, not after what they’ve gone through to get to her.

“It’s fine,” Quinn says. “Go.”

Becky laughs, “That’s what you think, dumbass! Have fun in Room 4.” She pushes Spencer full force with both hands to get her moving down the hall.

“Hey!” Spencer snaps back.

Vasquez grabs Becky’s shoulders and slams her against the nearest wall, knocking her unconscious in one try. Nobody seems to know if they should admonish Vasquez or thank her. But their focus quickly returns to the scientists, as if to say, Your move.

“I’m not Becky’s biggest fan,” Cosima says, “but maybe a little less slamming people into walls. If you don’t mind.” She then looks at Spencer. “But hey, nice job with the whole fecal waste thing. That’s the kind of thing my sister would’ve said.” At Spencer’s confused expression, Cosima adds, “Not because she likes waste or anything! I mean, who honestly likes fecal waste. I just meant you’re quick on your feet, and she would like you. Not in a gay way, she’s not—Well, I mean, she is… She’s a con artist.” But that doesn’t make it better. “Nevermind.”

Delphine reaches over and gives her hand a squeeze, then holds onto it.

Spencer relaxes a little. “Thanks for the cover, Dr.—” She looks at the ID badge again, “—Niehaus. I know you didn’t have to do that.”

“You’re right, we didn’t. And ‘Cosima’ is fine. ‘Dr. Niehaus’ is what she calls me in bed.”

Delphine turns to look at her and smiles sweetly. “Only because you like it so much.”

Spencer pushes that aside. “I’m sorry again about before. With your face.”

“I’m not,” Vasquez says.

Spencer turns and shoots her a look. Softer, she tells the doctors, “We’re all a little on edge. We’ve killed a lot of people and had the shit beaten out of us and watched our friend get eaten by a giant monster.”

“Monster?” Cosima asks, sounding worried. She looks to Delphine, who just shrugs.

“She wasn’t a monster,” Lucy says.

Spencer really wishes everyone would fucking stop negating her points as she’s trying to save all of their lives. “And now we’re here to get Sue to talk, and then my friend here is probably gonna kill her, too.” Spencer comes in for the landing, drawing a proverbial line in the sand. “Is that gonna be a problem?”

Cosima and Delphine don’t know what to say and just look at each other. They start silently communicating with their eyes, gesturing at the door and elsewhere with little head tilts and eyebrow gymnastics.

Ripley leans against the nearest wall, smudging it with her dirty suit. “Clock’s ticking.”
“We’ll help you,” Cosima says. She sounds like her confidence has returned. “If you leave the lab intact. Our samples, files, slides—every piece of equipment and our projects all go untouched. Including the living ones. Nobody hurts the science. Or us, obviously.”

Now Spencer’s the one with a decision to make. That’s a really big ask of her today.

“Fine,” Ripley says. “Do you have any weapons?”

“Not fine!” Spencer counters, turning around. “Did you not see the assembly line of me’s in there?!”

“And we can deal with it after we’ve dealt with Sue.”

But it doesn’t make Spencer feel any better. She won’t be able to rest until she burns this place down.

Cosima sees the anger rising and steps in. “Hey, I know that was hard for you to see. I get it, believe me. But you can’t just flip a switch and make it go away. They’re alive. They’re people.” She pauses to let that sink in before continuing. “Besides, those girls are what keeps the lights on around here. They’re why you get that steady stream of tacos and don’t starve in outer space. Something has to pay the bills.”

“You SELL them?!” Spencer rages. “That’s…” But there isn’t a word for how horrible and disturbing it is. The prison is growing versions of her and selling them to the highest bidder. She’s a commodity. She’s a fucking cash crop, like livestock. She’s nothing more than that to any of them.

“And with Sue out of the way,” Delphine says, “all of that money can go to you. You could get a better lawyer, try for an appeal. Even parole.”

“I’m not going to sell clones of myself to get out of prison!” Spencer’s on the edge of tears. “What kind of fucked up facility is this?!”

Lucy’s voice cracks a little as she says, “The same one that sold fifty-six copies of me.”

Everyone falls quiet for a moment until Cosima breaks the silence, stepping forward curiously. “Are you Lucy?” Her eyes start looking back and forth between the twins. “I saw the resemblance right away, but I didn’t want to say anything, just in case. You’re kind of a legend around here,” she smiles.

Quinn rolls her eyes.

“Yes I am,” Lucy says. “Maybe you don’t know why.” It sounds a lot more ominous given that she’s still covered in blood from head to toe.

Spencer chimes in to add, “Let’s just say she’s used to looking like this here.”

“I…heard stories,” Cosima says carefully. “But scientifically speaking, it’s an honor to meet you.” She starts to put her hand out but then reconsiders, given how dirty Lucy is.

“We want to help you, both of you,” Delphine says. She seems a bit starstruck now that she knows who’s been standing in front of her. “You represent the foundation of all the work that we do here.”

Quinn’s not looking for their adoration. “Go fuck yourselves.”

“Fine, help us,” Lucy says. “We need weapons.”
“We don’t have any,” Cosima says. “But we know the layout down here and can access every room.”

Ripley’s looking down the hall, considering their next move. “What’s in Room 4?”

Delphine hesitates, then answers honestly, “The morgue.”

Spencer remembers Jessica Huang telling a guard that four was an unlucky number on her first day here. *Guess she was right.* “Get a lot of murders down here?”

“No, thankfully. It’s where we dissect the bodies that don’t make it and harvest their—”

“Yeah, I don’t think we’re going there,” Quinn says, getting in her face. “Try again.”

“Sue doesn’t want you dead, trust me.” Delphine glances over Quinn’s shoulder at Lucy. “You’re way too valuable to her. We said we weren’t going to hurt you, and we meant it.”

“No hurting the science, right?” Cosima adds. “You’re the science.”

Spencer’s not going to argue with their new insurance policy. Especially since it looks like it might apply to her, too.

“We need to go,” Ripley says to Vasquez. Nodding her head toward the still-sleeping Becky, Ripley asks the doctors, “Can you hide her?”

Cosima nods. “Yeah, we got it.”

As Lucy and Quinn grab Becky’s feet and start to pull, Spencer casually mentions to Delphine, “We also wouldn’t say no to some tampons.”

***************

DYAD’s front lobby is a simple receiving room with an empty desk and chair but no other furniture. When the main door slides open again and Sue reenters, she finds the three inmates standing inside and waiting, as directed. Spencer is front and center with Vasquez on her right and Ripley on her left.

Before the door closes, Spencer catches a glimpse of someone she recognizes on the other side of it—Greggs, the intake guard. Spencer had forgotten all about her since they don’t interact much upstairs. More than anything, it makes Spencer worry that she has overlooked more of Sue’s reinforcements. They haven’t completely dismembered her army after all.

The warden walks in with a smile on her face and both arms out like she’s thrilled to receive guests. She keeps a safe distance, given that her company is unrestrained and has her outnumbered, but she doesn’t look the least bit scared. “Sorry I didn’t have lemonade and cookies waiting. I must have missed the Outlook reminder for prisoner mayhem. Either way, I should’ve recognized your putrid blood trails in my hallway, staining my floors like wine on a wedding dress.” She stops scowling at them long enough to look around for her trusty sidekick. “Where’s Becky?”

“Something came up,” Spencer says. “We need to talk.” Now finally face to face with the woman who created this hell she’s been living in, her pulse is pounding with equal parts exhilaration and
“Or we can skip that part,” Vasquez says, cracking her knuckles, “and get to the ass-kicking. Been a long time coming.”

Sue ignores her completely and considers Spencer’s proposal. “I suppose a conversation is in order. Let’s start with why you felt you needed to make such a godawful mess and infiltrate my top-secret laboratory. You know my office hours. Becky would be happy to set up an appointment so you can come waste more of my time there with your psychotic delusions.”

And with that, Spencer Hastings finally snaps. “WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON AROUND HERE?! Why does a prison have a secret laboratory that’s making clones of people and selling them?! And why are there clones of me back there?! Why are there killer spiders kidnapping girls and eating them?! Why is everything here so horrible?!”

She wanted to keep her emotions in check and remain in control, but it’s not happening. Not even close. The tears are coming, heavy with exhaustion from everything they’ve been through. She wants to scream and collapse and run away and rip Sue’s heart out all at the same time.

Sue tilts her head and says, “I’m not sure what movie you think you’re watching, but this isn’t the big scene where the villain reveals their plan just before the good guys save the day. In case you haven’t figured it out yet, spoiler alert—nobody’s coming for you. You’ve had your day of fun with your new friends,” Sue gestures at Ripley and Vasquez, “and now it’s time for you to discover the joys of solitary confinement, where you will live out the remainder of your pathetic, useless life. We can do it the easy way or the hard way. I only have the one spare cell, so we’ll have to kill Vasquez here first—”

Out of nowhere, Vasquez makes her move, charging at Sue full-speed. The warden calmly pulls a taser out of her pocket and takes Vasquez down before she can get within five feet of her.

Ripley screams her name and steps forward to intervene, but Sue holds out a second taser with her other hand, aimed right at her, and Ripley stops. Vasquez continues to sizzle, body shaking like a fish out of water. After the first ten seconds or so, she starts foaming at the mouth. Sue lets the battery run itself out for maximum effect, leaving Vasquez unconscious and barely alive.

“Huh. Even easier than I thought,” Sue muses.

“Jenette,” Ripley cries, “I’m sorry…I’m sorry…”

“Oh, pull it together! You’re such a goddamn crybaby. ‘Don’t take Jenette, I can’t live without her’ and all this mamby-pamby bullshit year after year. Knock it off already!”

“Then stop trying to kill her all the time!”

Sue points at Vasquez’s limp body and shouts, “SHE COULD BE INSEMINATED WITH YOUR ALIEN BABY!”

“NOBODY IS INFECTED WITH ALIENS. When are you going to listen to me?!”

Sue leans closer and sneers, “That’s what any alien host would say. I should’ve left you on the No-homo where I found you.”

“Fine! Take her next.” Ripley’s voice cracks, finally crumbling under the pressure of the day’s events. “In December. Get her the hell away from here. Just…take her. Alive.” Ripley drops into a squat and sits on the floor, not taking her eyes off Vasquez.
“I’m not sure I know what you’re referring to.” When Ripley doesn’t take the bait, Sue adds, “Unless you mean that prisoner amnesty program I made up. Because that would be really embarrassing for you.”

That revelation freezes Ripley, so Spencer storms forward, ready to punch the bitch square in the tits.

But Sue points the unused taser at her and says, “Ah, ah, ah…” in warning. “You’ll get your turn.” Dropping the Vasquez taser from her left hand, Sue walks over to Ripley and bends down so they’re level with each other. She taps Ripley on the knee with the full taser. “Did she not tell you? Every year, after you picked a name from the list, I went to her and said that’s who she had to kill. Otherwise I wouldn’t let you out for Christmas.”

Spencer’s heart stops. This is beyond fucked up. The warden’s a monster.

Ripley screams, “No!” right in Sue’s stupid face. “She wouldn’t. She wouldn’t.”

“I’ve got a list of ten dead girls that says otherwise. It’s just crazy what people will do for lo—”

In a flash, Ripley springs to life, pouncing on Sue and knocking her to the ground. The taser fires but misses, and Ripley gets her ragged fingernails deep into the flesh of Sue’s cheek as she straddles her stomach and tries to strangle her windpipe. They roll on the ground like kids fighting at recess, bashing each other’s heads against the floor.

Spencer waits until Sue manages to get on top, then comes up behind them and swiftly kicks as hard as she can between Sue’s open legs. She repeats the motion five or six times before Sue relents and Ripley regains dominance, flipping them over again as the tussle continues. Spencer rushes back to a safe distance and looks for another opportunity to help Ripley. She’s not particularly keen on ending up one-on-one with a pissed off Sue while still unarmed.

“Not…on…my…ship!” Sue cries, stealing the idea to knee Ripley in the groin with each word. With the moment of advantage, Sue pulls a third taser out of her bra, pushes Ripley to the ground, and zaps her collarbone at close range. Spencer runs up to kick it away, but Sue reaches in her jacket again, and Spencer freezes in her tracks.

She must have stocked up in the Cylon room on her way back from walking the President out. Goddamnit.

Sue’s digging around in her clothing. “I don’t even remember how many I have up in here, but I’d love to find out. Wouldn’t you?” She drops the taser that just finished cooking Ripley and starts walking over to Spencer. “Maybe now you and I can finally have that heart to heart you’ve got such a lady-boner for.”
Spencer stands frozen on the spot. She’s unarmed and has nowhere to run, no back-up coming to save her, and no plan. Sue’s circling her like a tiger. A taser-stuffed-bra-sporting, jumpsuit-wearing, clone-selling, sex-maniac tiger.

Madonna’s voice is ringing out over the intercom, pleading to her papa not to preach, and Spencer tries to tune it out.

*I’m in trouble deep, alright.*

“I remember the day Rizzles dragged your boney ass aboard my ship,” Sue says. “That was fun, wasn’t it? You were all scared of space and crying for your mommy and asking stupid questions, so I, naturally, mocked you for sport.” She walks over to the desk and leans against it. “Whataya say we do it again? For old time’s sake.”

Spencer’s confused and doesn’t know what to say. She can never figure out Sue’s angle. Was Quinn right? Is Sue getting into Spencer’s head again? Already?

“No tricks,” Sue promises. She goes around to the other side of the desk and pulls out a small, metal chair, not unlike the one Spencer sat in when she first arrived. “You sit here in this chair—handcuffed, of course—and ask me anything you want. It’ll be like our own little trivia game. I’ll even answer with the honest-to-god truth, just for a splash of fun.”

*There has to be a catch, Spencer thinks. It can’t be this easy.*

The warden drags the chair more loudly than necessary to the middle of the lobby and sets it to face her. She holds out a hand as if to say, “After you.”

Spencer complies, sitting down and putting her hands behind the back of the chair.

“No monkey business, now.” Sue pulls two sets of handcuffs out of her bra and restrains Spencer’s arms and feet without incident. They’re the standard rickety Earth-variety, not the leather-lined cuffs the guards carry. They hurt.

Sue then walks over to Ripley and uses the taser wires to tie her ankles and wrists together, then repeats the task for Vasquez. Once satisfied with that job, she steps back in front of Spencer and leans down to meet her at eye level.

“So. What’s on your mind? I assume you want to start with your taco indigestion problems, but that’s not really my realm of expertise.”

Spencer blinks and searches Sue’s face, but it seems she’s serious.

Now faced with her chance, of course Spencer’s mind goes blank. But she’s been fighting all day for this opportunity, and she doesn’t want to waste it. Seeing Ripley on the floor, she starts there. “Why
make Vasquez kill people? Why did you lie to Ripley about the program? What’s in it for you?”

Sue reaches back into her jacket and pulls out a fourth taser, saying, “A word of advice—you might want to go one at a time while you’re still loosening up.” But instead of firing the weapon, Sue wraps her fingers around it, hiding it in a fist. Then, she rears back and serves Spencer a strong right cross, busting her lip and almost knocking the chair over.

Spencer screams, wincing at the throbbing in her face. Clearly Sue’s promise was a steaming pile of horseshit, but she contests it anyway. “You said…you’d answer!”

“Oh, untwist your panties, Dumbelina. You’ve done interrogations before. You know I get to punch you in the face before I have to respond to anything.”

Spencer blinks through some tears. There’s the catch. “I must have forgotten.”

“Well, I guess so,” Sue says with a little laugh. “Three questions at once is a bold open. I mean, I know you’re into the violence thing, but try to keep it in your pants and not seem so desperate. This isn’t Happy Spank Time with your gal pals. You don’t get a safeword here.”

Oh, if only I could go full Lannister on your ass. They’ll never find the body.

“But speaking of gal pals…” Sue looks at the bound and gagged women on the floor. “How about those two, huh? That magical, once-in-a-lifetime twitterpation you only find in porn. It’s beautiful, and it’s disgusting, and it’s really fun to mess with. They’re just so easy!”

Sue points to Ripley, pretty proud of herself. “Did you see the look on her face? She’ll believe anything! Amnesty program, ha! And now she thinks she—” Sue points to Vasquez now “—is the killer!” Sue laughs like she’s never been more delighted with herself in her entire life. She walks over and kicks Vasquez hard in the side. “Meanwhile, Butchy McButcherson is dumb enough to believe that her girlfriend’s been the one killing people just to see her for some holiday hanky-panky! Even I’m not that narcissistic, and I once married myself.”

What?

“But she bought it; they all bought it. Becky tells me the whole prison ate it up. I should get a Nobel prize for this.” Sue looks back at Ripley and Vasquez and laughs again. “Losers.”

Spencer has so many questions she wants to ask, but her sore face is begging her not to. How is it possible that Ripley and Vasquez are both innocent and wrong? She flinches at the pain and steadies her breath. “Sounds like Ripley’s a perfect scapegoat. Congratulations.”

“Everyone hates her!” Sue exclaims with delight. “And the more deaths I pin on her, the longer she stays in Solitary, where she can’t talk to anyone about her terrible life choices. That little ‘amnesty’ list is just the names of inmates I can’t stand. Doesn’t matter to me who she picks, but I enjoy the element of surprise. It’s like getting a present. You ever airlocked anyone, Chastings?”

Spencer lifts her eyes enough to stare daggers into Sue. “Not yet.”

“It’s my favorite holiday tradition, right up there with doing lines of fake snow and pooping logs down the chimney. You can’t imagine the rush of pushing that little red button and watching someone you despise instantly suffocate and freeze to death.” She looks away wistfully like she’s having a moment. “It’s the true magic of Christmas.”

A page from Jenny’s journal flashes in Spencer’s mind.
MARY CHRISTMAS

Followed by, STOP HER.

Spencer’s had it wrong this whole time. Beth was trying to warn Jenny about Sue, not Ripley. And now Sue’s managed to convince both Ripley and Vasquez that the other is the mass murderer to deflect suspicion from herself. Spencer’s not going to let her get away with this. Somehow.

But then, Sue’s face changes as her mood takes a turn, her eyes suddenly blazing. “And then last year that meddling, cheese breath, sloth-toed, frog fart of a woman came and shit all over my playground!” Sue’s hands fall to her sides dramatically. “She ruined Christmas!” She mimics with a gross face and terrible British accent, ‘No no no, we can’t be letting Solitary prisoners out for any reason, Miss Sylvester. How terribly silly that would be. I’d have to report you, you know.” Then she gets right in Spencer’s face, pointing a long finger between her eyes. “NOBODY ruins Christmas around here but me!” She pokes Spencer in the forehead hard, just because she can, and then turns to walk a few paces back the other way. “Soon as I’m done kicking your nosy ass, I’m gonna send that walking yeast infection to a galaxy far, far away.”

“You’re talking about Umbridge,” Spencer says, then quickly retracts, wincing again, “Wait! Not a question! Just clarifying!” She unclenches when the punch doesn’t come. The rules of this game aren’t in her favor, but if Spencer can keep needling Sue with comments, she might not need to ask questions at all. It’s worth a shot. “She didn’t seem all that bad.”

Sue leans down and puts her hands on the arms of the chair, her face uncomfortably close. “Spencer. If Hell itself opened in the middle of your birthday party and spit out a demonic, deformed, under-dwelling cave beast, and that beast ass-fucked a deep sea blobfish who has never once known the light of day, and their spawn were able to mate incestuously with itself, and that offspring consumed its own legs, defecated on your head, and then laughed at you—then, you might know what it’s like to work a single day with Dr. Dolores Umbridge.”

Spencer closes her eyes against the imagery and tongues at the taste of blood in her mouth. “Then, I guess you’ll be glad to hear she’s dead.”

But there’s no celebration. In fact, Sue barely reacts at all. She’s still inches away, squinting and trying to read Spencer’s poker face. They might be in a blinking contest now? It’s unclear. But Spencer’s not bluffing this time and she’s got nothing to hide.

“You said she sent you and your friends down here to clean.”

Spencer doesn’t waver. “Obviously I was lying. I only brought her up to see if you knew she was dead.”

Sue punches Spencer again, this time a little higher, by her temple.

“OW! I didn’t ask you anything!”

“Don’t toy with my emotions! And don’t embarrass me in front of the President! You already wrung out your maxi pads in my hallway!” She’s pointing back at the lab door. “I assume that was after you destroyed my very expensive Cylon regeneration chamber.” Another punch across the jaw. “If you’d been stupid enough to leave the door open and the President had seen there were Cylons on board, I’d be in little chunks in a bag halfway to Jupiter right now. Some unfounded bias against employing genocidal robots.” Sue handwaves it away.

“She doesn’t get it,” she continues. “None of you do. You have no idea how hard it is to find and
retain good help in today’s economy. All you jaded millennials with your pointless liberal arts degrees and avocados.” Sue scoffs, disgusted. “And now I’m going to have to sit through another soul-sucking round of interviews to replace the machines that you so rudely destroyed.”

She pauses, considering the other side of the matter. “I never liked much them, anyway. What was her name? Broomer? Booger? Maybe you did me a favor. Clearly I can do better in my hiring practices. After all, you and your little friends managed to get out somehow.”

Spencer not going to help this woman do her job.

“This is the part where you tell me how you did it. I hardly think you managed to sweet talk your way out with a little T&A show. Maybe you promised them some of Mommy’s money?”

Still nothing.

“YOU’RE SO BORING!” Sue kicks Spencer hard in the left shin. She sighs and crosses her arms, glaring down. “Fine. How about you tell me more about what’s going on with Umbridge? If I weren’t having so much fun beating you to death, I’d run upstairs right now to laugh in her cold, dead face.”

“That’ll be hard to do, considering she doesn’t have a face anymore.”

Sue does, though, and it’s positively lit up with joy. “Seriously?! You’re not just saying that?”

“If you ask me a question, shouldn’t I get to punch you?”

Sue backhands her across the cheek. “Don’t get cocky.”

Spencer moves her jaw back and forth, if only to make sure it’s still attached. Both lips are split now, and her nose is slowly filling with blood, making it hard to breathe. With each passing minute, her face stings and swells more and more.

She looks off to the side for a moment, back down the hall toward the lab. Through her haze, she thinks she sees Quinn and Lucy hiding out of sight from Sue. Spencer does have reinforcements after all. They look ready to come to her rescue, proverbial guns blazing. Quinn makes a gesture to ask if they should, but Spencer subtly shakes her head. She needs more answers first. And if Cosima and Delphine are proving trustworthy, the twins should stay safe with them for as long as possible. Spencer can handle this. For now.

Having backup gives her a new surge of confidence. “Umbridge was eaten to death by the spiders I told you about six weeks ago. They ate Dr. Lewis-Burke Robbins, too.”

Sue’s face drops. “Which one?”

But Spencer doesn’t have time to fill Sue in on their day. Everything hurts too much to be this far behind on fact gathering. She refocuses on the task at hand and goes in for a winner. “Did you really not know there were flesh-eating spiders on this ship?”

“No!” Sue cries out, ghastly offended. She pauses and remembers she was supposed to punch Spencer before answering, then rectifies it, right in her nose.

It cracks, painfully, and Spencer tries not to scream, if only to deny this monster the satisfaction.

“There are no spiders in outer space!” Sue insists. “You have no proof.”
“There are two half-eaten women upstairs!”

“Cannibals,” Sue dismisses and resumes pacing. “More common than you’d think.”

Spencer had forgotten Santana is only two rooms away. God only knows what’s happened to Buffy and Faith at this point. She doesn’t want to think about it.

“There’s a pile of thirty dead spiders in—one of the rooms. Release me, and I’ll tell you which one.”

“You think I’m falling for that? I learned waterboarding in kindergarten. Don’t think you can out-interrogate me, Harvard.”

“Georgetown,” Spencer corrects.

Sue backhands her again and hisses, “We both know that’s not a real school.”

Spencer is running out of fucks to give. “There’s also the seven-foot spider queen in your trash room. Pretty sure that’s who’s been eating your inmates for the last year. Her trophy collection puts yours to shame. But don’t worry, we killed it and burned the body. You’re welcome.”

“How convenient. Destroying your own evidence is a nice touch. Is this really what you wanted to have a big powwow about? Trying to stir up trouble with a chapter of Sherbet’s Web?”

Spencer lets that one go. “I guess I just don’t understand why a warden wouldn’t care that her prisoners are going missing.”

“No one we can’t afford to lose,” Sue shrugs. “Every vacancy is a new opportunity. I learned that in wardenning school! But you saw my little science project back there. I know you must be dying to ask me about it.” Sue leans down again to get uncomfortably close to Spencer’s beaten face. “Or maybe you’d rather hear about how…intimately…I once knew a girl named Veronica.”

The rush of blood to Spencer’s head brings a strong wave of nausea, but that could just be from the conjured image of Sue burying her face between her mother’s legs.

“Tick tock, Harvard,” Sue continues. “I’ve got a hot date in approximately forty-seven minutes. And as fun as this is, I need my hands for more important tasks this evening, if you know what I mean.”

There’s no way Sue has met her mother face to face. Spencer spits some blood onto the floor, and maybe a tooth. “Fine, I’ll take the bait.”

“Well, I need my hands for sex,” Sue states, completely misreading the prompt. “Not that you would know anything about that, what with your snaggletooth and that oily mop of shower drain clog on top of your h—”

“Tell me how you know my mother!”

Sue looks a bit taken aback. “You know, I don’t think I feel like it now,” she taunts. “Maybe if you asked me nicely.”

Spencer starts to clench her teeth in frustration, but it hurts too much. “How do you know my mother?”

Another punch.

“She went to law school with an ex-girlfriend of mine—Melody or something.” Sue looks off to the
side for a moment. “Melrose? Melanoma? I believe she was representing your case.”

The memory of an angry brunette slamming file folders in and out of a briefcase comes drifting back. Good old Angry Melanie.

Sue continues as “Borderline” starts playing overhead. “Word on the street is this loving, doting, Pennsylvania mother of two was driven to extreme measures when her youngest daughter wasn’t recovering in the local mental institution. But who can blame her? The poor girl was battling a laundry list of psychological problems—desperate for attention, next-level cell phone addiction, obsession with vast lunatic conspiracy theories, crippling paranoia, wrapped up in a narcissistic social circle hell-bent on their own destruction…not to mention very deeply repressed homosexual urges and early signs of sadomasochism. It’s no wonder she was the looney bin’s poster child!

“And then one spring day, freshly home from Wacko World, she finally snaps, murdering the only boy in town who’d touch her with his ten-foot pole. No clear motive or any good reason for disturbing a strand of his perfectly sculpted helmet-hair. She’s just a meanie-face girl!” Sue’s voice is rising as her anger escalates.

She stops pacing and looks Spencer in the eye now. “And then you just left the body, right there in the road! Did you know that a jogger tripped over it later and fell? Slipped in Tony’s brains and went right to the ground with an ankle sprain. You’re lucky she didn’t sue your ass.” The very idea that someone’s fitness was interrupted seems to cross a line with her. Sue’s upper lip curls in disgust. “It’s no wonder Veronica wanted to get rid of you and start over.”

Spencer’s blood is boiling, but that could just be her immune system in overdrive. She knows the truth—that A is real, that Toby betrayed her, that the reality of her life back home was a living hell. She’s used to people not believing her. But Sue’s two final words are ringing in her ears. “What do you mean, ‘start over’?”

This time, she can feel her cheekbones shatter when Sue’s fist connects.

“A new and improved Spencer! One that hasn’t spent years breaking laws and making trouble for everyone she knows. It’s a fairly simple process. Mommy signs a form and pays me an ungodly sum of money. You come here, and a new Spencer from my lab gets sent to Bradley.”

Spencer says the words before she can think not to. “Who’s Bradley?”

Sue uses the base of her fist to pop Spencer hard in the forehead. “The mental institution! You’d think you’d at least be able to remember that.”

Oh. Radley.

Sue shakes it off and finishes her thought. “A few weeks later, New Spencer emerges, sane and competent but with a ripe case of amnesia. Your parents can mold her into being whoever they want —the daughter they’ve always wanted.”

Spencer’s reality crashes in around her.

The Uterius…Where prisoners aren’t rehabilitated, they’re reborn....

Sue dismisses the lost and hopeless expression on Spencer’s face. “Please, you’re hardly the first child who wasn’t wanted by her parents. It’s what keeps us in business! Kat’s military commander wanted someone who wasn’t a pill-popping fuck-up. Graham’s parents didn’t want a raging homosexual, but far be it from me to tell them that ship will certainly sail again.”
It won’t, but Spencer’s not about to interrupt.

“...and Spencer’s not about to interrupt. Everyone’s so afraid of a scandal these days. Whatever town Regina Mills was mayor of used taxpayer funds to purchase a replacement they could pass off as convincingly straight. Now, as a Republican, I oppose such willy-nilly government spending. Unless, of course, it’s coming to me. Lord knows we need it. Women’s prisons are severely underfunded. I blame the arts. And Michael Dukakis.”

“But this isn’t even a real prison,” Spencer says. “It’s just a holding pen for your fucked-up science project. You’ve been selling clones of every single one of us!”

Sue slaps her hard across the cheek, feeling insulted. “Of course it’s a real prison. You’ve been living in a Level 3 incarceration center. Or did you somehow mistake this for the Springhill Suites? Turns out jail is a great cover for an illegal cloning operation, what with the built-in medical staff and supplies coming and going all the time. Everyone expects it to be a shithouse, so most of the budget’s allocated to DYAD. But that doesn’t make it any less of an actual jail. Perhaps you’ve been a little too comfortable in your various living arrangements. I’m surprised your friend Ripley here didn’t tell you just how cozy I can make it for you.”

Spencer doesn’t even flinch. The thought of living in Solitary hardly scares her at the moment. It almost sounds nice.

“Can you imagine if we made a hundred copies of her? Bursting out alien spawn all over the place?” Sue looks blown away by her own question. “Or what about everyone’s favorite cannibal, Lunchbag Rodriguez? A dozen of her could eat an entire town. Too much press; nobody’s going to pay money for that. So, no, we don’t just go making copies of everyone like a goddamn Xerox factory. Except for you and Lucy, the rest of our primes are non-violent offenders.”

Reflecting on the five names Sue’s singled out—Kat, Graham, Regina, Lucy, and herself—Spencer realizes what else they have in common: They’re the blue files in Sue’s office. This must be the connection. They’ve each been swapped out with a clone back on Earth.

But it can’t be real. It’s just not possible. Even though she’s seen it with her own eyes, it’s too horrible to accept.

Does her whole family know that’s a fake sitting in Radley? Her sister? Her dad? Her friends would be able to tell it wasn’t the real Spencer... wouldn’t they? They know her better than anyone. But even if they picked up on something, even if they thought it wasn’t just the fact that she’s pumped full of antipsychotic medication, they’d never jump to the clone-from-outer-space conclusion. It’s straight-up science fiction. They’ll never find her here.

But deep in her gut, Spencer still believes her mother won’t just leave her here in the depths of space to rot. She’ll come to her senses and undo this mistake. She’ll see. It’ll never be the same. Spencer’s her baby girl. Even though she’s a murderer, she’s still worth saving.

“Considering the hefty price tag,” Sue continues, “Mommy reeeeeeally wanted you gone. Sorry, kiddo. Not everyone gets to be loved.”

She doesn’t want to cry in front of Sue. That’s a sign of weakness Spencer doesn’t consent to. But this is all too much, and she can’t hold it in anymore. A few clean tears find their way through the clots of dirt and blood on her swollen face and drip onto the floor.

“Fuck you,” she says through gritted teeth.
“That’s a hard pass. I like powerful women who go on to accomplish something with their lives. But you know, now that you’re all broken and repulsive, maybe your girlfriends will want to invest in a new model. They’re probably tired of sharing, and it’s not like we’re short on inventory. You’re already our best seller in Europe and South Asia this fiscal year!

“We had to stop producing the Lucys a few years ago once we realized their mental instability was drawing too much attention. But if you take a Spencer and put her in a different town, she’s a normal girl who doesn’t gravitate toward crime, conspiracy, and dementia. Who knew! At this rate, I might be able to install that Jacuzzi I’ve always wanted pretty soon.”

No. Spencer’s not going to break, not yet. Not now. But she’s feeling faint and starting to slip in and out of consciousness. Her head is pounding louder and louder with each punch, though that could just be the dance beat in the background. She’s still the original Spencer Hastings, resident of Rosewood, Pennsylvania, no matter how far away they take her or how many clones they make. She’s worth something for who she is. She’s worth something to herself, she’s worth something to Quinn, and she’ll tear down anyone who tells her otherwise. If she can just survive this conversation. Right now, she can barely keep her eyes open. Sneaking a look, she sees Quinn and Lucy aren’t there watching anymore. Maybe they never were.

Digging deep, Spencer finds strength and words to speak. “Sounds like I’m pretty valuable to you.”

“No, Martha Slewgurt is pretty valuable to me.”

“You can just say ‘Martha Stewart.’” Spencer’s words are starting to slur. “I’m not an idiot.”

Sue narrows her eyes. “Fine. Yes, it’s Martha Stewart. That one intake paid for an entire remodel of this lab. Of course, nobody’s supposed to know the real Martha’s here. Real hush-hush. We don’t even have any paperwork on her. So, I guess I’m going to have to kill you, but I was going to do that anyway.”

At least Spencer will die knowing she solved the great mystery of Martha Slewgurt. So, there’s that.

“I already have everything I need from you,” Sue says. “I’ve got your blood and your gene sequence. We’ll pull some bone marrow from your corpse, just in case.” She points a waving hand toward the general area of what used to be Spencer’s face. “All this is leftovers.”

Spencer remembers when the first Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins drew a blood sample, claiming she had to run some routine tests. That’s all it took. From that moment on, the real Spencer became irrelevant.

And then, Sue hits Spencer in the gut without lifting a finger: “I don’t give a camel’s hump what happens to you. I’ve already made forty more.”

Forty.

If she hadn’t seen them for herself, she’d accuse Sue of bluffing. But then, why didn’t she find the same form in her file as Lucy did, that PRODUCT DISTRIBUTION SITES page that listed where all the clones have been shipped to? Maybe they’re still being grown and aren’t ready yet. Or maybe Sue made sure to keep any paper trail of the cloning out of Umbridge’s office. That is where Spencer found the file, after all. Somehow, Sue is always a step ahead of her.

Spencer’s feeling more helpless by the minute.

My family will come for me. The people who love me will save me.

She repeats it enough times that she almost believes it. Head hanging down, hunched forward in her
chair, Spencer screams but it just comes out as a whisper. “Someone will come for me.”

“I hope you’re not a gambling woman,” Sue replies. “Once we sent your replacement down, your mother was so satisfied with her product that she signed a Do Not Return to get twenty percent off her bill. You’re ours forever, pillow princess. And your family now has a daughter who can get accepted to UPenn like she’s supposed to. Everybody wins! Well, except you, I suppose. You’ll be dead soon. Are you perhaps interested in an hour in a ball pit first?”

Spencer flicks hair out of her face and winces at the sharp pain in her neck. “No, thanks. I guess I just wonder why the other guinea pigs don’t have this DNR form. Or did you just want to make sure I understood nobody actually loves me?”

Sue knocks a front tooth loose with her swing. This game of Twenty Questions can’t go on much longer.

“It’s probably just cold feet. If I learned anything working Black Ops in the Persian Gulf with Navy SEALS, it’s that cowards love having a way out. Graham’s parents are just the type to come crawling back, crying like babies about the ‘terrible mistake’ they made. Lucky for them, I’m happy to sell the original Graham back for twice the price. They get their dysfunctional lesbian sex-addict, now with a delightful case of prison PTSD, and I get my year-end bonus.”

If she had the energy or a functioning jaw, Spencer might tell Sue that her golden goose is now a dead goose with no legs. Thinking back to that horrible scene, she didn’t know there was anything particularly special about Graham, much less that they had this in common. If she had, maybe Spencer could’ve stopped what happened to her. Maybe she would’ve worked to keep her safe to use as leverage against Sue. But maybe not. Maybe Spencer doesn’t actually have control over anything anymore. She’s not even living her own life. A lab-grown imposter is pretending to be Spencer Hastings—living in her house, wearing her clothes, spending time with her family and friends—and nobody is any the wiser. But Spencer can’t even hold her head up right now, much less do anything about it.

“You’re not looking so good, there.” Sue sounds rather proud of her handiwork. “Ask me nicely and I’ll put you out of your misery now. I’ll bet you Beyoncé hasn’t made dinner plans yet.”

She can’t have heard that correctly. Spencer’s losing her mind.

“She’s such a beautiful creature,” Sue waxes poetically. “Graceful and fierce. Truly one of a kind. And I’ll tell you what, she just can’t get enough of the sweet and savory taste of human flesh.” Sue leans over and whispers in Spencer’s ear, “She finds you absolutely de-licious.”

Oh god. The giant spider. Sue named her Beyoncé.

Spencer’s blood runs cold as she remembers one of Beth’s messages in Jenny’s journal.

QUEEN B

“I told you,” Spencer says. “She’s already dead.”

“Wow, you just think everybody’s dead today, don’t you? You’re always so doom-and-gloom all the time. Lighten up a little! I’ll have you know that sharks can live up to a hundred years, which is a lot longer than you will.”

Wait, what? The shark? That’s Beyoncé?

“She just zooms around us in circles, over and over,” Sue says with a chuckle. “Sometimes she does
this little backflip. Cutest dam thing you ever saw.”

Sue squats down in front of Spencer and rests her elbows on her knees, lacing her fingers. The pose looks friendly enough. Maybe it’s the fluorescent lighting, but Sue’s eyes are practically sparkling. She might be about to unhinge her jaw and swallow Spencer whole. “Ask me why we don’t tell the inmates about her.” Sue’s smiling and casual, like she’s excited to tell her buddy a secret she shouldn’t.

Spencer lets her eyes fall closed as her chin drops, woozy with exhaustion, and she starts mumbling jibberish in a whisper.

“What’s that?” Sue asks, leaning in closer and closer until Spencer can sense her proximity.

Summoning all her strength, Spencer swings her head up as hard as she can, slamming into Sue. She doesn’t know just what she hit, but it’s enough to draw a scream and a new series of punches from the furious warden.

“Well, THANK YOU FOR PROVING MY POINT!” Sue’s fist pounds into Spencer’s cheek again and again. “Women and their emotions.” Another punch. “Freaking out like a bunch of whiny babies.” Again and again. “All the crying and screaming and wanting to live!” Sue gives one last right-cross and then shakes her fingers out, holding the taser in her free hand. “Imagine if everybody knew! We’d have a goddamn riot on our hands.”

You should’ve seen us earlier.

But this is all for show; Spencer knows it. Sue’s just trying to distract her from the real point of the matter. Luckily, her jaw seems to be mobile enough to still form words. Barely. “You’re feeding…the inmates…to the shark,” Spencer says, careful to make it a statement. “You’re disgusting.”

“Hey now, missy! I go out of my way to keep you and the rest of the Estrogen Armada locked up tight from the moment she arrives to the moment she leaves. For your own safety. Did you know sharks can smell blood up to a million miles away? Imagine what a cornucopia of smells seventy synced-up women must be to a beast like that. Heaven help us if you’re all in the same room together. The overpowering stench would send poor Beyoncé into a hunger-induced rage. One chomp on the ship could get us spinning like that ride at the state fair that makes everybody throw up.” Sue whirls her finger in a circle and searches for the name but can’t pinpoint it.

“We’d be way off our axis, barreling through the galaxy with no end in sight. Our stabilizers couldn’t handle it!” Sue paces again, as if talking to no one in particular. “Smelly women slamming everywhere, beds flying, absolute chaos. Massive inmate casualties, investigations, tons of paperwork.” Sue’s eyes go wide at that last, very sobering thought.

“Right,” Spencer says bitterly. “Better if we only die one at a time. Thanks for your concern.” She gently touches her tongue to the space where her front teeth used to be and spits some blood onto the ground. Her wrists scrape against the cuffs, and she grimaces. There isn’t much left she can move without immediately regretting it.

“Well, unlike you, Spencer, I’m not rude to those who are trying to protect me. Do you know how badass it looks to have a giant killer shark circling your ship? You don’t, so I’ll tell you. It’s INCREDIBLE,” she laughs with hands up. “Nobody fucks with us!” It’s the happiest she’s sounded yet today. “Not only is it reliable security, it’s free labor! And all I have to do to keep her coming back is send out a little thank-you treat before she goes.” Sue leans over close to Spencer’s face with a half-smile. “I’m a very generous person that way.” She gives a wink and then stands up straight again.
“Yeah.” Spencer blinks against the swelling that’s rising around her eyes and sniffs hard. She tastes the blood in the back of her throat, then coughs it back up. “You’re the best.”

Sue slaps her hard across the cheek with an open palm again, and Spencer heaves in pain and rage, “I’m not asking any more questions!”

“And it’s still boring!” Sue screams back. “Just die already! I’ve got plans!” Sue kicks the legs of the chair, catching a fair chunk of Spencer’s calf with her Reebok. “If I give you to Beyoncé like this, she’ll expect more whole-size, never-frozen, free range Spencers from now on, and I can’t have a snoody diva on my hands. I’d prefer to keep sending out chunks of the factory-farm, frozen-first Spencers. Better for the bottom line.”

Spencer throws up a little in her mouth at the description, turning and coughing out onto her shoulder. She never ever wants to hear those phrases again. Ever. And given all the pain she’s in, Spencer’s half inclined to let Sue vent her right now without a fight. “I thought all the clones were just for sale.” It seems strange that Sue would be playing shark trainer with a bucket of nibblets.

“Well, I can’t sell the messed-up ones, can I? Nobody wants to buy a girl with three arms, no lungs, and six eyes.”

Suddenly, memories drift back from Spencer’s very first weeks here—Buffy calling her “shark bait.” Sue herself calling Spencer “chum” that Boomer needed to move out of the hallway. Those weren’t empty words or even insults. The whole staff knew what was happening. Everyone was in on it.

They don’t even think of her as a person. She’s just…fish food.

Spencer imagines a guard wheeling a barrel of parts into the docking bay. It’s probably routine by now. Mutated, deformed, sickly versions of herself vented into the waiting open mouth of a giant space shark.

“But cloning’s a sloppy business, Pastings,” Sue continues. “They’re not all gonna be pretty. Fortunately, we got our waste levels down to just thirty-four percent last quarter.” She points a finger again and says, “That’s a record.”

Spencer’s having trouble breathing now that her nose is full of stomach acid. Her mouth falls open to let air in as a trail of saliva and blood runs out. “Great.”

Sue leans down once more to find a direct eye-line. “Have you ever seen a pile of bodies? I mean, a real mountain of corpses?”

Just today, actually. It was super.

“It’s quite a sight to behold. But it comes with problems, like any other beautiful thing in this world. Imagine if we didn’t have the facilities to store the bodies for processing! Ha!” Sue gives a little laugh. “We’d be like a cannon popping ’em out left and right. I can’t have dead girls flying out of my ship every other day now, can I? People would talk.”

So, only on Christmas, I guess.

Spencer’s not sure if she said that out loud; probably not, since she didn’t get clocked again. The pounding in her head is unbearable, but Spencer pushes through it. She’s going to say everything she needs to say to Sue, even if it kills her. “Tell that to Jenny Schecter.”

Sue turns on a dime and points a finger right in Spencer’s face, eyes full of fury. “Jenny Schecter was a satan-worshipping twatmouse. I swear, the woman just would
not stop TALKING.” Sue groans, oblivious to the irony of the moment. “If I had to hear one more Jenny Sphincter rant about her—” Sue uses air quotes, “— ‘lifelong vendetta’ against Lucy Fabray, I was going to cut off my ears and shove them down her throat. So she killed your father while you were off at a summer writing camp, big deal! Get over it! My father was swallowed whole by an anaconda in Brazil, but you don’t see me writing stupid poems about eviscerating snakes with ‘the talons of my depression’! Lucy killed a lot of people’s fathers, including her own! GET OVER IT.”

Sue calms herself a bit, maybe realizing she’s been ranting at a ghost. She turns back to Spencer and assures her, “It wasn’t just me. She made everyone crazy. Becky practically shat herself with excitement when I said she could push the button.”

Spencer’s read Jenny’s vicious rants about Lucy countless times, but she had no idea what started it all. This sounds like a legit reason to hate someone. “Jenny’s dad was one of the DYAD scientists Lucy murdered?”

Sue uppercuts her chin this time. Spencer’s remaining teeth bite most of the way through her tongue, and she cries out again.

“Oh, I’ve heard allllll about how they grew up together as the only kids on the ship but Lucy got all the attention because she was the youngest and the ‘pretty one’ and the favorite and blah, blah, blah, whine, whine, whine.” Sue mimics her in a high voice, moving her fingers like a mouth, “‘Lucy’s room was right next to mine and she copied everything I did and everyone thought it was so adorable and original and asked why I couldn’t be more like her, but really *I* was the special one’, blah, blah, blah, SHUT UP. SHUT UP! EVERYONE HATES YOU.”

The room, Spencer realizes. G36, the one Quinn was locked in. That was Jenny’s room. Lucy must’ve been too upset to mention it earlier when they were in there. To be fair, she was dealing with a lot at the time. Spencer wonders if Lucy’s hearing all this from down the hall now. The conversation went so well the first time Lucy found out Jenny hated her.

Sue’s still seething but controls herself. “Since Jenny happened to be absent during Lucy’s little slicing spree—which, if you ask me, is ample proof that there is no God—she was sent to stay with a foster family on Earth. Poor bastards didn’t know what they were getting into. Fast forward a few years to her legal spats with Racy Gherkin, she commits a few felonies, then gets sent to prison here, of all places.” Sue still can’t believe it.

“I tried to get her paroled countless times, just to get her out of my life, but nobody would represent her. Not even that fancy-pants Jeri Hogwarts. I’m sure you’ve heard of her. She probably banged your mother a few times. Always has this little blonde thing on a leash with her in court?” Sue looks at her expectantly. “Wears a leather collar? No?” She waves a dismissing hand and exhales. “You know, some days I wish we’d cloned Jenny just so I could have the sweet satisfaction of killing her over and over and over again.”

“I’m guessing she wasn’t half as pompous as you. You can’t just kill someone because you don’t like them.”

“Why not?” Sue asks. “You did!”

Touche.

“That was one person.” Spencer can feel trails of tears and blood running down the curve of her jawline and onto her neck. “You’re a goddamn serial killer!”

“I prefer ‘resourceful opportunist.’”
Sue Sylvester, the woman in charge of protecting them, is every bit as much a felon as the inmates. Airlocking a prisoner every Christmas just for sport. Offing people who annoy her at whim. Probably taking government bribes of some kind; Spencer wouldn’t be surprised. Not to mention she’s feeding actual human flesh to a space shark every month. No wonder Umbridge was trying to shut her down.

“And, speaking of opportunity, let’s not forget my favorite detail,” Sue says with a wicked gleam in her eye. “I could only get away with killing a prisoner outside my holiday schedule if I knew I could quickly replace her with someone else. I waited and waited years for that perfect chance. I suffered through her tedious office visits. I green-lighted her stupid writing class. I tuned out her self-righteous speeches in the cafeteria. And then, finally, imagine my delight when I receive an intake preview for a wiry, long-haired brunette with questionable social ties and multiple counts of excessive bitchery. Just like Jenny Schecter. A perfect swap. My moment had finally come.”

Sue takes a fistful of hair to hold Spencer still as she whispers in her ear, “That’s right, lamb chop. She’s dead because of you.”

Behind her eyelids, Spencer sees lines of ruptured veins spelling out the familiar web messages once more. She didn’t plan the murder, she didn’t push the button, but she definitely took Jenny’s place, her prison life. Spencer is at least partially responsible, simply by being here.

I killed Jenny Schecter.

The final notes of Madonna’s “Frozen” fade away over the intercom, and the room falls eerily silent as Power Hour comes to a close.

“Well, that’s my cue.” Sue checks her watch without letting go of Spencer’s hair. “It’s been a real hootenanny. You won’t mind staying put and bleeding out while I go get ready for some very important business.” She holds the taser out and fires, but it malfunctions and just clicks a few times. Sue shakes it and examines the casing, but it’s cracked from all the blunt force. “Guess we’ll have to do this the slow way.” She kicks Spencer hard in the chest, knocking the chair over with a loud bang.

Spencer’s head slams against the floor, and she coughs, trying to get air back into her lungs. But the concussion is too strong, and her body is quickly forgetting how to function.

Sue stuffs the broken taser back in her bra and notices some blood spatter on the arms of her blue trainer jacket. “Dagnabbit. Do you know how much dry-cleaning costs out here?” Walking over to the empty hallway she shouts, “BECKY! Get this mess cleaned up pronto. I can’t have dead lesbians lying around my lobby like cheap throw rugs.”

There’s a pause, then a voice comes from down the hall. “Coming, boss!”

Spencer’s on the brink of total blackout. Her vision is fuzzy, and maybe Beyoncé did hit the ship after all, because the room is spinning. Out of view, she hears the lab entrance door open and close. The warden is gone.

Spencer shouts for Ripley and Vasquez, both out of sight from this new angle, but the words don’t even escape her throat. She feels the full weight of her injuries as the blood rushes to her head, and, for all she knows, out onto the floor. Maybe it’d be better if she let herself pass out so her mind can shut down and begin to recover. But, no, that’s exactly what Sue wants: for Spencer to give up and die, right here. But she won’t. She stayed strong through the interrogation, and she’s still alive. If she drifts away now, she can’t help the others, and they’re counting on her to see this through. She has to get back to Quinn.
But a nap, just a short one, sounds really, really good right now...

The taste of blood in her mouth fades into the background as the throbbing in her head takes over. Spencer’s eyes fall closed, and the spinning world begins to melt into a blur of lines and color. Her mind fills with whispers, like echoes of voices calling to her across miles, then she begins to rise from the ground and float away.

The voices—now with cursing—come into sharper focus as her dreamscape takes a bump and a stumble. Spencer opens her swollen eyes slightly, letting in the harsh bright light of the room, and sees that she is, in fact, floating off the ground.

“Be careful! Watch her head.”

“I’m trying!”

She recognizes Quinn and Lucy’s voices and maybe the girlfriend scientists, but she’s not sure. They seem to be carrying her down the hall, chair and all. But they’re leaving Ripley and Vasquez behind, unconscious or half-dead.

“Get…them,” she says, but it’s only in her head.

The chariot pauses as they reach a closed door. It opens, then they move inside a cold room. Spencer’s chair is set down on the floor slowly but not gently enough. Everything hurts.

“We don’t have much time,” someone says. It’s bossy—Lucy.

“Here, hold this against the back of her head to slow the bleeding.”

“Can’t you stitch this up or something?”

“Not with you in the way! Hurry up.”

“Shit. Her teeth are knocked out, look.”

“That’s going to make this harder.”

“I know.”

So many voices, but Spencer can’t make sense of what’s happening or if they’re even real. Through the fog of her altered state, she hears what she thinks is the clinking of metal tools, the opening and closing of drawers, the shuffling of feet around her.

“I still can’t believe we’re doing this to an innocent girl. So much for not hurting the science.”

“It’s not like we have much of a choice.”

“I know, I know. Just, hand me that paperclip.”

Something’s happening with Spencer’s hands. She fights to open her eyes, even just a little. There’s someone in front of her, sitting in a chair. Dark hair, black uniform, being very still. As she blinks through the tears and blood, Spencer’s vision comes into focus and she sees the face more clearly. It’s...

…her.

She jerks against the restraints, reacting on instinct and fear, but she can’t move far. Looking at the
crumpled, beaten girl in front of her, it’s like looking into a mirror. Spencer wonders if the trauma to her brain was so extensive that it’s creating an out-of-body experience. Maybe she’s dead and came back to watch how the rest plays out for her friends.

“Hold still,” Cosima says.

Spencer sees out of the corner of her eye that the scientist is behind her, kneeling, trying to pick the lock. The other Spencer isn’t restrained, but otherwise, they seem to be identical. Same clothing, same chair, and a plethora of injuries. She looks awful. She’s sleeping now, but the clone must have been viciously attacked. Her lip is swollen and bloody, her nose is broken and trailing red down her face, and both her eyes are bruised black. Spencer has to assume this is what her own face looks like now. Everything starts hurting more.

After a minute of fidgeting, Cosima asks, “Okay, does anyone know how to do this? I’m not the criminal in the family.”

“Move,” Quinn says and takes over. Thirty seconds later, there’s a click and Spencer’s hands are freed. Soon after, her feet are as well.

Cosima rushes to put the handcuffs on the clone, adjusting them so they’re in the same position. Lucy rubs some ashes on the girl’s face and skin, attempting to match the tone. She looks back and forth between the two Spencers, making sure it’s close enough.

“What…” Spencer asks in her loudest, barely audible voice.

A friendly face bends down in front of her—the second Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins. “Hang in there, Spencer. We’re going to take good care of you.”

“We need to get her out there,” Quinn says.

Double-checking their handiwork, Lucy, Quinn, and the doctor count to three and lift the other Spencer’s chair to haul her away. Once they’re out of sight, Cosima and Delphine carefully lift Spencer out of her seat and put her onto a medical table. Delphine wipes an alcohol pad on Spencer’s inner elbow and starts an IV while Cosima opens a refrigerated cabinet and retrieves several labeled bags of pink fluid with yellow clips.

“Here goes nothing,” Cosima says.

It’s the last thing Spencer hears, and then she’s gone.
Spencer feels warm and tingly all over, like a fuzzy blanket is pulled snugly over every inch of her body. She’s moving in slow motion, or maybe not moving at all, but there’s a delay in her reactions. Colors splash in patches through the blackness. Memories of the day flash in and out like the dull slamming of Sue’s fist against her face over and over and over. But Spencer’s so numb, she can’t even feel the pain anymore.

“I think she’s waking up.”

“Spencer? Hey, can you hear me?”

Sound comes into focus before she’s able to open her eyes, and she can feel the cold air against her skin. The light is blinding, but a face is leaning over and blocking much of it, which helps. In fact, there are four faces. It feels very reminiscent of The Wizard of Oz, the way they’re all watching over her, waiting for her to wake up.

“Hey,” Quinn says with a warm smile.

Lucy catches Cosima’s eye. “She looks much better.”

“I know. Cool, right? It was just a theory, but I think it’s working.”

Delphine begins to switch out the IV bag for a new one. “We can’t keep her here forever. What’s your plan?”

The question is for Quinn and Lucy, but Spencer’s wondering the same thing. As her senses begin to come back, she tries testing various muscles, first moving her fingers and her face. There’s no instant reaction of pain, and the taste of blood in her mouth is gone. It could just be whatever meds they’ve doped her with. She was definitely asleep until now. It could’ve been hours. She’s feeling surprisingly refreshed.

“Sue,” Spencer manages to say. Her voice is tired and scratchy, and her mouth is dry. “Where is she?”

“It’s okay,” Quinn says, resting her hand on Spencer’s arm. “We’ve bought some time.” But her tone implies she’s not particularly thrilled with how they did it.

“If by ‘we’ you mean ‘me,’” Lucy says. Her hair is hanging limp and wet, and her condescending expression is clearer now on her freshly-showered face. Spencer almost forgot what Lucy looked like under the layers of blood. She’s changed into what might be a set of white scrubs. It’s a weird color on her. Quinn has cleaned up as well, though she’s still wearing her black jumpsuit.

A lot’s happened while Spencer’s been out. She’s scared to ask. “How?”

“We used a decoy,” Cosima says as she puts something away in a cabinet. “We swapped you out
with one of the clones so Sue won’t know you’re gone. That one’s a little younger, but we don’t think Sue will notice.” She crosses the room and gathers some tools, taking them to the sink. “We had to give you a chance to heal.” Cosima stops and looks her right in the eye. “She was going to kill you, Spencer.”

And suddenly, Spencer remembers the last thing she saw before she passed out—the mirror image, beaten and bloody, cuffed to a chair. Seeing herself so damaged was gruesome. She won’t be able to shake that picture off any time soon. “So, you killed that other girl instead.”

“She’s not dead,” Quinn says. “We doped her up to knock her out. Then we…made her match what had happened to you.” She can’t even look at Spencer as she says the words. “She won’t wake up until all this is over, and she’ll heal, too.”

Spencer thinks back to when Quinn and Lucy were hiding and watching. She’d thought they were wanting to intervene and rescue her. But now it’s clear they were just doing recon on how badly to injure an innocent, sleeping girl. One glance at Lucy’s hands reveals swollen red fingers with medical tape wrapped around them. Quinn’s seem undamaged.

And now she can’t stop thinking about what must have been happening behind closed doors while she was getting pummeled by Sue. Another Spencer, sedated and unconscious, getting beaten viciously by Lucy…

Spencer coughs and vomits a small puddle of yellow onto the floor.

Delphine quickly grabs a towel and starts to clean it up, wiping Spencer’s face first. “Must be the anesthesia. It will pass.”

Spencer wipes her mouth with the back of her hand, then finds Lucy’s eyes. “I can’t believe you would do that.”

“Somebody had to. And it wasn’t you. Not really.”

But Spencer doesn’t want to hear it.

“Do you think you can walk?” Delphine asks. “We need to get you girls out of here. Sue could come back at any time.”

“I don’t know.” But once Spencer tries, it’s surprisingly easy to get her feet on the floor and maintain balance. Quinn offers her hand to brace against, and even though Spencer doesn’t seem to need it, she takes it anyway. She turns to say something shitty to Lucy, because what she did is unforgiveable, but the words get lost in Spencer’s throat when her eyes catch sight of the mirror over the sink.

She’s completely back to normal. Clean and healed. No blood or smoke, no black eyes or broken nose, and no busted swollen lip. She instantly remembers her front teeth and moves her tongue there to check. They’re there, and they feel fine. It’s as if it never happened. How is that possible?

Stepping closer to the mirror, she starts to wonder if she is the clone and they transferred her consciousness to a new body somehow.

Oh my god. I’m a Cylon.

“Pretty good, right?” Cosima asks from behind her. “I didn’t know how fast it would work, or if it would even work at all, but the results are incredible.”
Spencer turns sharply, scared to hear the answer to her question. “What did you do?”

“Reparative gene therapy. We have plenty of your DNA on hand, obviously, and we were able to replicate a reconstructive sequence from your stem cells months ago. Sue didn’t seem to care about fixing what was broken in the clones, but we wanted to have it just in case. Now I’m glad we did.” Cosima gives a small smile before continuing. “This bag”—she points to the IV drip—“is a DYAD hormonal accelerant that allows us to rapidly speed up the aging process to any point we want. That’s how we’ve been able to grow so many teenage clones in the three months you’ve been here.”

Spencer flinches at the word *grow* but keeps listening. It’s creepy and weird and awful, but she’s morbidly intrigued by the whole thing.

“We hypothesized that we could use it to speed up your recovery by growing new tissue. In just thirty minutes of treatment we aged you approximately four months, and your broken bones mended.” At Spencer’s boggled expression, Cosima explains, “They don’t have anything like this on Earth, at least not yet. DYAD is incredibly protective of its patented technology.”

Delphine agrees. “Yes, very much so. It’s incredibly complex and potentially dangerous in the wrong hands. But today, it saved your life. The only remaining piece was the dental work, but Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins was able to remove the teeth from the other clone undamaged and transfer them to you.”

Spencer feels sick again.

To ease her mind, Delphine adds, “We’ll get her some artificial replacements soon, I promise. But that’s a problem for tomorrow. We have enough to deal with today.”

Spencer tugs at the new teeth again, feeling for any flaws or sign they’re not hers, but they seem to fit perfectly. It’s every bit as impressive as it weird. Frankly, it all sounds like science fiction, but she can’t deny these results. Her face does feel much better. There are no visible signs of any damage ever happening. But now that her life is suddenly four months shorter, she doesn’t have time to argue with the scientists’ explanation.

The only thing she can think of to say is, “Thanks.” But it’s awkward, because there’s still an innocent, beaten girl cuffed to a chair just down the hall, waiting for Sue to come finish her off, if she hasn’t already. A lot can happen in thirty minutes. Which, that reminds her—“Ripley and Vasquez?”

“They’re okay,” Cosima says. “They’re in the next room with the doctor. Oh! And we have your keys.” She runs over to the counter and picks up the small ring of three keys to Solitary, handing them back to Spencer. “Not that I know what they’re for, since you’re a prisoner with no personal property to speak of, but I’m considering this a gesture of good faith.”

“Thanks,” she says again, but she only half-means it. Now that her foot isn’t scratched up anymore, she’d rather it stay that way. Sighing, she tucks them into her left shoe. “What about Becky? I heard her voice.”

Everyone looks at Quinn. “I did it,” she shrugs.

“You killed her?!”

“I imitated her, so Sue wouldn’t know she’s gone.”

Delphine says, “We locked Becky in a room down the hall. She might still be unconscious. We’ll check on her again when we’re done here with you.”
Spencer takes in the update and nods along. So far, so good. Now, the million-dollar question. “And where’s Sue?”

“Getting inspected,” Cosima says. She looks at the clock. “In about ten minutes. She’s probably getting ready. Huge lady-boner for this woman.”

After going her whole life without hearing that expression before, Spencer’s now heard it twice in one day.

Quinn says, “That’s why she took me downstairs.”

“For her lady-boner?” Spencer asks.

“For the inspection.”

Spencer’s confused. “Wasn’t that what the President was here for?”

Lucy shakes her head. “That was for sex.”

This still isn’t making sense.

“Some bigwig is coming to investigate all the disappearing girls,” Cosima says. “It’s been on the calendar for weeks—‘CDC’ with hearts drawn around it.”

“Wait, the CDC?” Spencer’s quite alarmed now. It never occurred to her that a disease might be involved. “Do you think there’s a virus in the prison? Or some kind of flesh-eating bacteria?”

“Maybe!” Cosima says with wide eyes and renewed interest. “That would be—” Then she notices everyone’s reactions. “Terrible. That would be terrible. Obviously.” She then clarifies, “The Cosmic Department of Corrections. They oversee all the prisons off-planet. Apparently the inspector is a total babe.” Delphine shoots her a glare. “I’m not saying I think so! I don’t even know the woman!”

Lucy looks at Spencer. “Think Sue’s seen upstairs yet?”

“What’s upstairs?” Cosima asks.

“A whole lot of dead bodies,” says Spencer. “Should keep them busy for a while.”

Quinn leans against a counter. “Until we can do what?”

But no one seems to have an answer to that.

Spencer runs her hand through her hair. “Well, when the inspector sees all the bodies and the prisoners out of their cells, she’ll have to fire Sue, right? Isn’t that what we want? As a least violent option, anyway.”

Lucy shrugs. “She’s always been nice to me.”

“Well, you saw what she did to me.” Spencer looks to the others. “You said you’d help us kill her.”

“Yes, we did,” Delphine says, “Because you came barging in here like a lunatic, and it was her or us. Now that we’ve saved your life, maybe you’ll be willing to take our point of view into consideration.”

It’s a reasonable enough request, and Spencer doesn’t object. “Go ahead.”
Delphine glances at her girlfriend, as if making sure it’s okay that she speaks for them both. “Look, we don’t like Sue any more than you do. She’s crass and irresponsible and dangerous. But she’s also very easy to manipulate. There are a lot of terrible people working for DYAD. If Sue’s replaced, they could send someone much, much worse.”

It’s hard for Spencer to imagine what that could possibly look like. The guy from Saw, maybe. Or Donald Trump.

“At least with Sue,” Delphine continues, “we know what we’re dealing with. She trusts us and leaves us alone. We can handle her. I’m not sure exposing her to the authorities is the right move for us.”

Spencer’s eyes go wide. The spiders. With the DYAD logos printed on their bodies.

Of course Delphine and Cosima don’t want the truth exposed. It leads back to them.

Maybe this truce ends here and now. Spencer, Quinn, and Lucy have the scientists outnumbered, but Becky or the doctor could show up at any time. And who knows if they really took care of Ripley and Vasquez or if they took care of Ripley and Vasquez?

Spencer chooses to tread carefully. “What all do you know about the disappearing girls?”

“Not a lot, but it’s awful,” Cosima says. It sounds sincere, but Spencer’s not convinced. “I figured it was run-of-the-mill inmate violence or something. We don’t exactly get out much.” She chuckles and adjusts her backup pair of glasses. “It sounds like it’s pretty bad up there sometimes.”

“I like it,” Lucy says.

Quinn rolls her eyes again.

Spencer’s voice is losing the sheen of innocence. “So, you really don’t know anything about spiders kidnapping girls during the night and eating them? Spiders with, say, a big old DYAD logo printed on their backs? Ringing any bells?”

“Spiders?” Cosima looks surprised. “No. I haven’t seen anything but humans inside the ship since I came here three years ago.”

Delphine crosses her arms and looks at Spencer. “What makes you think there are spiders on the ship?” She sounds very suspicious, but that could just be her thick French accent.

“We saw them,” Quinn says. “We killed them. All of them.”

Delphine’s brow furrows. “But…that’s impossible.”

“I don’t know,” Cosima offers, “Sharks evolved to be space-hardy, so maybe spiders did, too.” She sounds genuinely excited by the idea.

“No, it’s impossible that you killed them all.” All eyes immediately snap to Delphine. “The babies, maybe, but not their mother. Helena’s too big. She’s too strong. I don’t believe that she’s dead.”

Spencer’s about to open a can of whoop-ass on this woman, but Cosima turns, disgusted, and says, “There’s a giant spider named after my sister?!”

“Yes!” Dephine counters, losing her cool. “She’s terrifying and unpredictable and wears a towel on her head like a stupid, blonde wig.” Her tone is quite condescending. “Trust me, it’s a perfect name.”
“Oh, screw you.”

Lucy looks at Delphine sympathetically. “She was beautiful both in life and in death. I will remember her.”

Spencer steps between them and gets in Delphine’s face. “WHY ARE THERE SPIDERS ON THIS SHIP?”

“Because I made them,” she says, sounding quite proud of herself.

The words hang in the room for a moment, and Cosima’s face drops. She clearly had no idea. “You did science without me?”

“It started long before you got here,” Delphine tells her girlfriend. “My assignment when I arrived was to continue the cloning work of the previous DYAD scientists.” She turns to Lucy and says rather nastily, “Maybe you remember them?”

“They deserved it.”

“It was a huge setback, what you did,” Delphine says. “Cost the company tens of millions of dollars. I still can’t believe they didn’t vent you right out the door, or at least put you in solitary confinement for the rest of your life, you raging lunatic.”

“Hey!” Spencer intervenes. “Maybe you shouldn’t antagonize the mass murderer.”

Delphine’s got quite the attitude now as her true colors emerge. ”But your little revenge plot didn’t slow DYAD down for long. Fortunately, Arnold Schecter kept impeccable notes in his journal. And once we got the human cloning project back on track, I was able to recreate a working arachnid prototype—with some improvements on his model, of course—and start a trial run in only four months. They’re even bigger and stronger than before. They can’t produce silk, but they’re very smart, very resourceful. They listen and learn and adapt. They’re beautiful creatures.”

“You sound like her,” Spencer says with a nod to Lucy. “And by the way, their spelling is shit.”

Quinn speaks up. “You said ‘Schechter.’” Spencer turns to see what she’s piecing together. “The room I was in, one of the dolls had a nametag with ‘Jenny’ on it. I figured there had to be more than one crazy girl named Jenny in space. Guess not.”

Spencer thinks back on her conversation with Sue. “Jenny never said anything about knowing Lucy before she came here?”

“We didn’t talk much. She just wrote all day.”

Spencer still can’t believe she may have missed a reference to their shared childhood in the diary. She read it backward and forward several times before she couldn’t take the madness anymore. Looking at Lucy, she says, “And in our many, many conversations, you tell me all about how you and Quinn are test tube twins or whatever, yet you conveniently forget to mention that you grew up with Jenny Schecter?”

“You never knew her, and you never asked,” Lucy says, mirroring some of Spencer’s anger. “I said I had known her for a long time.”

“Well, maybe if you hadn’t killed her father, she wouldn’t have turned into a raging psycho who wanted you dead.”
“She always hated me,” Lucy counters. “Even when we were children. I just wanted her to like me. I told her the terrible things her father was doing, but she wouldn’t listen. Not even to Beth.”

Spencer refocuses on Delphine. “Yes, let’s get back to discussing spiders.”

But Cosima’s never taken her eyes off her girlfriend. “You never told me about any of this,” she says, clearly quite hurt.

“I wanted to, but it was out of my hands. This was my primary assignment. Your expertise is in human genetics; that’s your assignment. To move the company forward into the future. You’re continuing the work that made other things possible.” Delphine looks at Quinn for a moment, then back to Cosima. “They brought me here to resurrect what had been lost. I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you. It’s military-level clearance. It wasn’t my decision.”

“Military?” Spencer and Cosima ask simultaneously. But then Spencer answers her own question with wide eyes. “They’re mass-producing weapons of destruction.”

“Probably,” Delphine says. “I don’t get to ask questions. But whatever it is, it’s illegal on Earth, so I carry out the work up here.”

“You’re a monster,” Spencer says, “You’re just as bad as Sue.”

“I’m just doing my job,” Delphine says, “wherever the science takes me.”

Cosima turns and starts pacing the room. “I can’t believe you’ve been lying to me all this time! And since when are you in the US military? How the hell does that even work?”

Lucy says to Spencer, as an aside, “I told you this used to be a military base before DYAD took it over.”

Spencer hears this but can’t process the sheer immoral villainy in front of her. Ganging up on Delphine, she shouts, “You didn’t think maybe growing tiny killing machines was a REALLY BAD IDEA?” She’s exasperated. All these women are dead because some old white men wanted a new toy. Did they never see Arachnophobia?

“It’s a contract job,” Delphine replies. “I don’t choose the project.”

“No, you just cash the checks,” Spencer needles. “I don’t know how you sleep at night, but upstairs, we sleep with one eye open, because your little army keeps coming in and drugging us and taking us to die.”

“First of all, it’s not ‘my little army,’” Delphine says. “All the spiders are locked up safely in their tanks. They’ve never gotten loose or hurt anyone. We don’t test them here.”

“Are you kidding me?” Spencer cries. “They came after me, and they came after Quinn, and there’s a pile of half-eaten dead girls in your trash room to prove it. Plus the giant Helen one.”

“How did she get so big?” Lucy asks. Spencer was wondering the same thing.

“It took time to get the hormonal balance right. There were some pituitary issues.”

Spencer glares. “Yeah, no kidding! And yet you didn’t kill it.”

“Helena was thriving! I wasn’t about to kill an innocent animal that showed no signs of violent behavior.”
“Tell that to my friend Paulie. She and the others are right around the corner, in pieces.” Spencer looks at Cosima now, hoping she might listen to reason.

The scientist looks from Spencer to Delphine and pauses. “You’re sure that’s what you saw?”

“Yes,” Spencer says, and Quinn nods.

“Okay. Show me. The bodies, I mean.”

Spencer’s glad to at least have one staff member on their side. “I will.” She looks at Delphine. “After you show us these tanks.”

Delphine narrows her eyes. “You know, despite what you seem to believe, you have no authority here, Spencer.”

“You’re going to take us to the spiders. Now.”

Quinn looks up at the clock. “Spencer.” It’s inspection time.

“Shit.” She wipes her sweaty palms on her clothes and paces a few steps to gather her thoughts. It’s time to make a decision. She can only go after one monster at a time. Looking back at Delphine, she says, “You swear on your life—on her life,” she points at Cosima, “that any more spiders are locked up safely and they’re going to stay that way.”

“Yes.” When Spencer looks to Lucy and Quinn to see what they think, Delphine adds, “We’re the people in this room who don’t want everyone to die, remember?”

All Spencer has left is hope and trust. “Fine.” Taking a step to the door, she says, “Come on,” and motions for Quinn and Lucy to follow.

“What can we do to help?” Cosima calls after them.

Spencer pauses and thinks a few steps ahead. “Nothing. Stay here.” She looks to Delphine. “You’re coming with us.”

She crosses her arms. “No. I’m not.”

“I just need you to open the door to the lab, then you can come right back. Try not to destroy any more lives while we’re gone.”

The exam room door closes quietly behind them, and Spencer hates that she has no way of locking Cosima in. She’s not comfortable with x-factors running loose that have a better lay of the land than she does. But short of knocking them out, she doesn’t know what else to do, and there’s already been enough of that today.

Speaking of which…

Just next door, true to their word, Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins is tending to her patients, a very achey Ripley and an equally roughed-up Vasquez.

“How are they?” Spencer says, entering without warning.

“Just came around,” she says. “They should stay here for another hour under observation, just so we can rule out any further injuries. I’m still worried about possible internal bleeding.”

“Fuck that.” Vasquez sits up on the table and flexes her various muscles to make sure they still work.
They do. “Let’s roll.”

Spencer feels sheepish about her magical treatment. It’s not fair that she got to skip over what Ripley and Vasquez are feeling now. If anything, she appreciates Vasquez’s enthusiasm even more. It feels good to have the other half of their team back.

Ripley coughs and rubs at her sore muscles. She seems slower to move, like her joints are stiff. Those tasers really are awful, as Spencer knows first-hand.

…But if these friends are awake and recovering now, chances are another friend of theirs is, too.

“Guys?” Spencer says. “I have a really bad idea.”
A small, sleek black aircraft lands in the docking bay as one very excited Sue Sylvester watches from behind safety glass. Her heart is pounding over the loud rush of air that flushes back into the room once the barrier closes. Fixing her hair one last time and making sure her best green tracksuit is zipped just right, she opens the door and walks confidently onto the tarmac with a smile. After a year of waiting, she is finally about to be face to face with the incredible, captivating, luminescent, one and only Detective Superintendent Stella Gibson.

With a hiss, the aircraft door slides open, and a moment later, she’s there. Blonde hair flowing perfectly, black blazer buttoned over an ironed white collared shirt. She’s power and perfection from head to toe, and Sue’s already feeling weak in the knees just seeing her again.

The clacking of her shoes echoes in the docking bay as she makes her way over to the warden. Her serious expression reflects her complete disinterest in being here, but Sue’s too smitten to notice.

“Warden.”

“Hello, Stella,” Sue says with a cheesy grin, holding out her hand. “It’s so great to see you again. Thank you for coming.”

“Please call me ‘Detective Gibson.’” She’s already bored. Her condescension is only magnified by her British accent. “As I told you last time.” She heads for the door without another word, and Sue follows like a lovesick puppy.

“I honestly don’t even know why they called you in,” Sue says. “Everything’s been smooth sailing. Couldn’t be better, really.”

“Obviously it’s not, or I wouldn’t be here.”

Sue swallows her awkwardness and nods to Greggs to keep her post as they board the docking bay elevator. “I run a very tight ship, Detective. Everyone knows there’s nothing I care about more than the safety of these girls. This whole death and disappearance rumor couldn’t be further from the truth. There’s a little term I’ve coined recently—‘fake news.’” They reach the top floor and begin to walk toward the door for the main entrance. “Our turnover has been perfectly normal for a Class 3 detention center. Nothing out of the ordinary.”

Gibson adjusts the sleeves of her shirt and waits for Sue to get on with it. The sooner this woman shuts the fuck up, the sooner she can get home to her cat and a bottle of wine.

“I think you’re going to be really impressed by what you see here today.” With that, Sue pushes a green button and the double doors open from the middle.

The scene that unveils makes Sue scream in horror. “MARTINA NAVRATILOVA!”

Fifteen feet in front of them is the pile of three dead Boomers—sliced up, beheaded, and guts spilled
all over the floor. The blood nearly reaches the door, spread out wide like a lake they’ll have to go
around. Just beyond the pile, at least a dozen more dead Boomers lie strewn about the cell block with
tasers scattered all around. All is still and quiet. From this angle, Sue can see the doors are open to at
least the first three cells. There’s not a single inmate in sight.

The two women stand there for a minute and take in the scene.

Sue’s frozen to the spot, mortified, unsure of what she’s supposed to do or say. This has Spencer
Hastings written all over it. That zitmonger set her up. How convenient that in all their talk about
killing inmates, Spencer failed to mention that she and her buddies went on a no-holds-barred murder
spree of the guards.

Sue wishes she hadn’t already killed Spencer so she could do it again.

Gibson’s eyes dance over every corner and detail of the scene, examining and assessing the damage.
She takes several pictures on her phone, then finally breaks the silence. “I have some questions.”

“I assure you, I will get to the bott—”

“My questions aren’t for you,” Gibson says, cutting her off. She’s already a few steps down the hall
to the right, tiptoeing carefully around the edges of the blood lake. But before Sue can catch up to
her, she stops and stares at what remains of Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins in the infirmary. Another
picture. “Just what kind of ship are you running, exactly?”

“There is a perfectly reasonable explan—”

“Stop talking.” Gibson continues down the hall, following a trail of bloody footprints.

That’s when Sue realizes where she’s going.

She never actually believed Spencer’s allegation that Umbridge was dead, so she didn’t bother
coming to investigate it. That was valuable hairspray-application time and cologne-in-all-the-right-
places time. But Spencer’s spider story seems as good as any now that Sue’s seen the half-eaten
doctor for herself.

She runs to get in front of Gibson and holds up her arms. “You can’t go down there.”

“If you’ve left anyone alive on this ship, I’d like to speak with them. I can do that before or after I
lock you in the nearest cell.”

“Dr. Umbridge isn’t here,” Sue lies. “She took a leave of absence. Something about wanting to see
the sunny beaches of Neptune before she turns one hundred and thirty-five. I didn’t have the heart to
tell the old cow that it’s a bit cold there and also that there is no water. So, I guess that’s on me. She’s
been gone for weeks. Probably not coming back. The woman can’t find her way around a lunchbox,
much less outer space.”

Gibson walks right around her. “Then she won’t mind if I look around her office. She’s a
psychiatrist; she must have quite a file on you.”

Sue’s world is rapidly escaping her grasp. Things really couldn’t be any worse. Her guards are dead,
the inmates are god-knows-where, a rotting doctor is stinking up her hallway, and now the love of
her life is looking to get answers from Umbridge, of all people. Sue doesn’t know if she wants the
bag of dicks to be alive or dead, but either way, she probably won’t be very helpful.

Pushing the door open with a loud creak, Detective Gibson doesn’t react, just stands there looking.
She takes another picture on her phone and walks back the way they came without comment.

Sue can’t see in, nor does she want to, but then temptation gets the better of her. She runs over for a look, then puts her elbow over her nose as she cries out in disgust. She holds it there as she shouts at the detective, “Nothing, really? Nothing to say?! There’s a walrus without a face in here!”

But Stella Gibson just keeps walking.

****************

Spencer’s leading the new gang of six—Quinn, Lucy, Vasquez, Ripley, and Delphine—down the hall toward the DYAD lobby when she hears muffled screams and banging behind a door to her left. She turns and looks at the others.

“Becky,” Quinn says.

They continue without further comment and reach the main door. Delphine pushes a silver button to open it, and Spencer can’t help but think about how hard it was for them to get in here in the first place. She’s glad they’ll be returning through the front door. She can’t face that terrible room ever again.

Spencer walks over to room G36 and suddenly realizes that even though they now have lab access, they no longer have a way of opening barrack doors. They tossed their Boomer head onto the web, and it’s long burned up now. The others from G1 are all smashed. They’ll have to go all the way upstairs to find another one, and Sue is sure to be up there by now.

Leaning down, Spencer lifts the flap on the door and looks inside. “Hermione? Are you okay?”

She’s lying on the bed and stirs at the sound of her name, turning to see who’s speaking. “Spencer?” She rubs at her eyes, then moans loudly as if a headache just registered. “What’s going on?”

“You got knocked out and tasered in the fight. We locked you in here to keep you safe, but now we can’t get you out. Can you do that teleporting thing?”

Hermione stretches her face muscles and shakes out her sore arms as she tries to stand. She walks over to the door and bends over to look through the thin slot. “I think so. I need to have a clear picture of where I’m going.”

“Everybody stand back,” Spencer says, and the other women move aside. She steps out of the way, herself, and waits near the door to Lucy’s room, trying not to think about what horrors might be happening inside.

There’s a loud crack! and Hermione appears in the hall in the blink of an eye. She looks run-down and tired, but at least she’s all in one piece. “It’s really quite dangerous to do that in my current state.”

Delphine blinks. “How did she do that?”

Spencer gives Hermione’s shoulder a little squeeze and quickly looks her over for injuries. “We’re glad you’re okay. A lot’s happened, but we’ll have to do a full debrief later. The ship is getting inspected. Sue’s upstairs right now talking to the inspector about the missing girls. At least, we think. And we need your help to take her down. This is Dr. Delphine the Clone Scientist who’s going to
get us back into the lab without incident if she ever wants to see her girlfriend again.”

Hermione doesn’t seem to take issue with hostages or threats at this stage in their day. “What can I do?”

“We need to get me upstairs,” Spencer says. “Not me, another me. A clone me. She can’t walk, and we’re all too hurt to carry her. I was hoping you could do that spell again.”

“I can’t apparate again, I just explained.”

“No, the one you used to float the heads out of the garbage.”

Delphine’s face says, “What?” but no one acknowledges her.

“Alright,” Hermione says. “Show me what you need me to do.”

*****************************************************************

“This is all Spencer Hastings’ fault!” Sue cries as Stella Gibson walks on ahead of her. “She’s got a killer spider and she’s been setting it loose inside the prison.”

Gibson stops and turns, her steely expression ever the same. “Who’s Spencer Hastings?”

“Some teenager we brought in a few months ago on a murder charge. She’s been blabbering on about how her spider eats people to anyone who’ll listen. Won’t shut up about it. She must have smuggled it in one of those little bags the kids use to take heroin on airplanes in their butts. You’ve seen it in the news. And now she’s using it to wreak havoc on MY PRISON.”

Sue slams her hand on the wall and immediately regrets it, gasping and nursing her palm. Her hand’s still quite sore from the interrogation earlier. Not that she feels like explaining that at this juncture.

The detective considers this theory. “Seems like a lot for a creature of that size. Didn’t you say you had a cannibal on board?”

“Lunchbag Rodriguez left a month ago,” Sue dismisses.

Gibson tilts her head back a bit. “So, you now have another inmate whom you claim is eating your staff, this time assisted by a ‘heroin rectal spider.’”

“I’M HAVING A BAD DAY.”

Gibson turns and starts walking away, her shoes clacking loudly down the hall. “I noticed.”

*****************************************************************

With all the strange things she’s seen today, Spencer shouldn’t be fazed by a beaten, unconscious version of herself cuffed to a chair floating three feet above the ground. But she is.
Hermione’s carefully guiding the girl with her wand, making sure not to let her get too high or steered off course. Once they’d fetched the clone, they left Delphine behind with Cosima, despite Spencer’s protest. Hermione was able to use her locking charm on the front door to seal them inside DYAD, so at least they’re contained until their help is needed again.

Now, with their path presumably clear, Spencer’s crew has to successfully levitate the decoy and get it down the halls to the elevator. It’s not quick work, but it beats carrying her by hand, so Spencer’s trying to be patient. Hermione is deep in concentration, clearly using all her mental strength to accomplish this task over such a great distance. It’s probably harder to lift a whole person than just the head, but Spencer’s trying not to think about that right now. Hermione’s doing a fine job.

They make it to the end of the G hall, where it intersects perpendicularly with hallway A. They’re over halfway there.

The lights are on in the docking bay now, and Spencer can see just how large the room is, even though it isn’t empty. A small, black ship sits parked perfectly within painted yellow stripes. It feels weird seeing an actual spacecraft up close and personal like this, considering she’s been on one for the last three months. This is really the first time she’s gotten to examine one from a short distance (unless you count that phone booth upstairs). It doesn’t look as cool as she predicted, like seeing a Corolla when you were expecting a Lamborghini. But, still—spaceship!

If Spencer had any piloting knowledge whatsoever, she’d consider making a run for it right now. She sighs. One problem at a time.

There’s no one inside the docking bay, which means the inspector must already be upstairs.

As they cross from one hall into the other, the door next to the docking bay opens with a loud buzzing noise. Everyone turns, startled, and the Spencer clone comes crashing to the floor as Hermione’s focus breaks.

Kima Greggs booms, “FREEZE!” She points her taser at each of the women in turn as she moves sideways across the floor. She looks much more intimidating than Buffy or Boomer ever did, and Spencer can’t help but wonder if she used to be a cop. “Everybody down on the ground, hands behind your head!”

Yep. Definitely a cop.

But nobody’s moving. They’ve got her outnumbered six to one, and she has only the single taser.

“I was just goin’ to pee,” Greggs says, exasperated, “but no, now I gotta get y’all’s punk asses back in your cells, because I can’t have just one good day.” Noticing Ripley, she says, “And how the hell did you get out of Solitary?!?”

“We’re going upstairs right now,” Spencer says. “We came down here by mistake, and now we’re going back to our cells. I prom—”

But then Greggs sees the beaten girl in the chair on the floor behind them, and she switches into high-alert mode. “What the h—”

In a flash, the chair rises from the floor and flies at the guard faster than anyone could ever throw it. The clone’s knees strike Greggs in the chest, knocking her out cold, and Hermione—arms forward, wand out—manages to stop the chair mid-air before it hits the ground, too.

She sets it down gently and releases the spell, exhaling heavily in relief and resting her hands on her knees. Grimacing, she glances at Greggs and whispers, “Sorry!” She might mean it as a joke;
Spencer can’t tell.

“We’ll take care of it,” Ripley says. She and Vasquez take the unconscious guard by the arms and drag her back into the docking bay. “Keep going. We’ll meet you back here.”

“Please don’t kill her,” Hermione says. The others turn, curious about the change of heart.

“Why?” Vasquez asks.

“Just, please trust me, okay?” Hermione’s voice is shaky.

“You already made me spare one guard,” Lucy says. “I didn’t like it.” Even without her chainsaw, she sounds intent on completing her set.

Spencer believes Lucy could saw a woman in half with a craft stick if she tried hard enough—and she would.

Hermione’s not giving in. “She knows the ship better than we do. We might need her for information. And she’s human, not a crazy robot monster like the others.” She takes a breath and says, “If you kill her, I won’t help you anymore.”

They pause to consider this. Nobody’s willing to make that trade.

“We’ll just lock her up,” Ripley says.

She and Vasquez pull Greggs toward the docking bay door while Spencer turns to the other half of her team. “You know the plan?”

Quinn lifts the clone and sets her chair upright. “We got it.”

Spencer hates splitting up again, but it’s their best chance to make this work. The door closes behind Ripley, and Quinn and Lucy break off in the opposite direction back down hallway G.

Spencer looks at her path ahead. It’s only another hundred feet to Sue’s elevator. They nod at each other silently, then Hermione resumes her magical task. Spencer follows and awkwardly watches her half-dead, toothless twin float down the white corridor, head lolling from side to side as she leans this way and that.

****************

Sue and Detective Gibson retrace their bloody steps until they reach the start of the cell block. Marching at full speed, Sue powers down the long hall, looking inside every open cell for someone, anyone. But they’re all gone. Her inventory of criminals has simply disappeared. For a moment, she wonders if that British witch-girl managed to Houdini her entire population elsewhere, but it seems like a stretch. She’s not that good. They must be here somewhere.

Around cell 15, Gibson stops and looks down toward the far end, squinting a bit. “What’s that?” She steps over another body, making her way toward a large, dark object in the distance.

Sue turns to look, but she has no idea what that thing is. “It’s our…um.”

“It looks like a phone booth.”
“That’s right,” Sue stalls, desperately checking cells for a distraction until she can figure something out. “You’re exactly right.”

“Why install a phone booth in the middle of your cell block?” She’s still walking right toward it. Sue cuts past her and turns around so she’s walking backward in tandem with Gibson while blocking her path. “It’s great, you’re gonna love it. I’ll show it to you right after we find Spencer Hastings.” Sue trips over a Boomer leg in her path but recovers.

“Perhaps they know where she is.” Gibson comes to a stop in front of cell 10, the only one with a closed door, and Sue looks over, startled, to see someone’s actually there.

It’s Aphasia and Mack. Not two of the brightest bulbs here, but they might still be useful. Right now, Sue’s just glad to see anyone alive, even inmates who don’t generate a profit. She was starting to wonder if this was one of those viral situations where only one percent of the population survives. Not that she’d be surprised if one of these rabies-ridden animals brought a vicious space disease onto her ship. Nor would it surprise her to be mysteriously immune to the plague that wipes out humanity.

She bangs on the bars, waking up Mack and drawing Aphasia’s attention from her daily hour of staring at the wall.

“What?” Aphasia snaps back.

“Where is everyone?!”

“How should we know? That’s your job,” Aphasia says. “We don’t know shit.”

“Yeah,” Mack says, crossing her arms on the bed. “We don’t know shit.”

“Oh, I don’t believe that for a second,” Sue says, “and neither does Detective Gibson, here.”

The esteemed visitor takes a step forward and stares the two girls down. “Which one of you is Spencer Hastings?”

“Pssh,” Aphasia says, looking away as her eyebrows rise. “That girl needs Jesus.”

Mack shrugs. “Never met her.”

“She used to live here!” Sue cries.

“Lots of girls used to live here,” Mack says. “Somehow they keep ending up dead. You know anything about that, Sue? Because I’m not feeling like the ministration here truly values my safety.”

Sue ignores her and looks up at Aphasia. “What a coincidence that all the other inmates are gone, my guards are dead, and you two are sitting here like nothing’s happening. You don’t think this looks a little suspicious?”

“If there’s a party, we didn’t get an invite. I think the detective would agree that we’re the last two people you should be looking at. Given the circumferences of our alibi behind this locked door and all. Wouldn’t you say, Detective?”

Gibson raises an eyebrow at Sue.

“Don’t play games with me, you little asshole,” Sue says, pointing a finger at Aphasia. “I know you’re up to something. I’m not stupid enough to believe that just because it’s closed doesn’t mean you can’t get it open.”
She grabs the bars and gives it a yank, but it doesn’t budge. She takes out her key ring and finds the master, sliding it into the lock. But when she turns it, the door still won’t open.

Now Aphasia’s the one looking smug. She pulls an old Newsweek magazine out from under her pillow and flips through it casually as Sue kicks the door a few times.

“Fine. We’ll be back.” Sue pumps her head forward threateningly, biting her lip for effect. “I’m sure Detective Gibson would love to read through your very long and detailed file. It’s like *Moby Dick*.” She considers her analogy. “If *Moby Dick* were written about an African-American girl instead of a white man, and it took place in space instead of on the ocean, and instead of chasing a wh—”

“WE GET IT.”

****************

Phase One: Complete.

Spencer and Hermione circle back to the T-intersection on the lower level, where Ripley and Vasquez are waiting.

“Someone’s here,” Ripley says. “There’s a government ship in the dock.”

Quinn and Lucy are just arriving at the rendezvous, themselves. “Probably the inspector,” Quinn says. “We should get up there.”

Spencer fidgets a bit, but she can’t be a part of the next stage in the plan. “Good luck.”

The two clones, now dressed in navy P.M.S. uniforms, head for the stairwell door. Quinn opens it and Lucy stands there, eyes filled with wonder. “What is that?”

Quinn turns around, eyebrow high. “A flight of stairs?”

Lucy’s face lights up. “Stairs can fly?!” She finds Spencer’s eyes. “I found a stairs!” she beams. “Come look!”

Spencer laughs, “It’s okay. I’ve seen them. Go on, now. You can do it.”

“You’ll need to show me how they work,” Lucy says to Quinn as she steps through the doorway. “I’ve never flown before.”

Spencer tries not to laugh but can’t hide her doofy smile. Quinn is thoroughly unamused by the naïveté and trudges on up, trusting Lucy to watch and follow. After all, it’s not rocket science. It’s stairs. A moment later, Spencer hears the confident pitter-pat of feet passing the first landing and continuing up. Sisterly bonding, complete.

*Always a first time for everything*, she muses. Even on days like today.

****************
Sue’s almost running as they talk, trying desperately to look busy and important and plan-having. She has no idea where to go to get out of this mess. Doing a few laps in circles sounds good. They’re almost out of the cell block now; she could take Stella back to her office and kill time there. Maybe show her some jazzercise moves. Or better yet, finally seduce her. It’s hard to arrest someone when you’re doing the horizontal mambo, and Sue is nothing if not a great dancer.

“Aside from living together,” Detective Gibson asks, “is there a deeper connection between Spencer Hastings and the inmates we just spoke to?” They step over the pile of Boomer pieces and head back in the direction they came.

“Spank buddies. And I guarantee they know more than they’re letting on. They know where Spencer is.”

“Don’t you? I assumed we were on our way to talk to her now.”

Sue stops in her tracks. Her eyes gloss over momentarily, searching for something to say. “She’s dead. Eaten by her own spider. Did I not mention that?”

“No.” They stare at each other curiously for a moment. “Show me the body. I’d like to examine it.”

“Well, there wasn’t anything left to examine, I’m afraid. Just a pile of hair on her uniform, like a creepy death wig. It was weirding out some of the other inmates, so we burned it. I figured the spider was living in her hair and burned right along with it, but I see now that I was mistaken.”

The detective’s clearly not buying this. But before she can question Sue further, she hears incoming footsteps.

They both turn to see two very-much-alive guards running toward them in quite a hurry.

**************************

“LET ME OUT OF HERE! I’M GONNA KILL YOU!”

The thuds of Becky pounding on the door echo throughout the DYAD facility.

Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins takes her time walking toward the source of the noise and then bangs her hand on the door a few times, herself. “Shut up!” When the girl complies, the doctor holds a keycard up to the reader and scans it. Cracking it open just a bit, she peeks her head in, looks at Becky and says, “Seriously. Calm the fuck down.”

“YOU CALM DOWN!” Becky shouts. She grabs the edge of the door and tries to pull it wide enough to escape. Turns out she doesn’t like supply closets much. “I was locked in here!”

The doctor ignores the comment and lets her pass by. “You’re welcome. Try not to lock yourself in closets next time.”

“Screw you!” Becky yells in her face and storms off in the direction of the cloning chamber. “Screw all of you!” She makes a left down the hall toward the trash chute and slips out of sight.

Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins hears the distant beep of a door opening, which is weird because there aren’t any locked rooms in that direction. But she has better things to do than babysit Sue’s odd
Sue Sylvester is wigging the fuck out.

“Warden! There you are.” Lucy Fabray slows down as they approach. “We’ve done a full sweep of the cell block and searched all the rooms on this level like you ordered, but there’s no sign of Spencer Hastings.”

“And given the state of Dr. Umbridge and Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins,” Quinn says, catching her breath, “we feel we should stay close to protect you. If Hastings planned the jailbreak, she could be gunning for you specifically, ma’am.”

Sue’s at a loss for words. She looks back and forth between the two girls. Even with different hair colors, the resemblance is more striking now that they’re wearing identical clothing. But why they’re dressed like guards and pretending they want to help is completely baffling. She considers outing them right here and now, but that could be exactly what they want—to make her look bad in front of the detective by showing how easy it is to escape and impersonate an officer. Sue’s not going to give them the satisfaction. She’ll play along, see what they think of that.

“Well, thank goodness you two are safe,” she says as sincerely as she can. Where Lucy’s concerned, Sue actually means it, so it’s only a half-lie. Quinn Fabray can go fuck herself.

Gibson turns to Sue. “If you already know Hastings is dead, why did you send your guards to search for her?”

“She may have faked her own death for all we know!” Sue says, saving face. “It was a really bad wig.”

Gibson looks at the two girls and reads their matching name tags. “Thank you, Officer…Boomer. Both of you. I didn’t realize Sue hired a pair of sisters to work for her.”

Lucy gives her the million-dollar smile. “It’s so nice getting to see her every day. I hate being separated from my family. I’m grateful to Sue for giving us the chance to be together here.” The cheerful frosting of her tone is only barely covering the murderous insinuations underneath.

Sue’s looking for a way out of this conversation. She says, “Well, that’s enough Kumbayah,” and starts walking in the direction of her office.

The other three follow closely, keeping pace. Quinn stays in the back and sneaks in glances behind. No sign of her friends, or anyone else for that matter, which is a good thing.

Sue reaches the office door first and walks right in. The others hear her scream before they can see why. They catch up and peek around her to examine the scene for themselves.

There, between the desk and the door, Spencer Hastings sits cuffed to a chair, bloody and beaten unconscious, but very much alive.
With Hermione right behind her, Spencer takes the stairs two at a time and listens carefully at the door. Lucy and Quinn are long gone by now, but she still needs to make sure they’re elsewhere before she and Hermione reenter the second level.

“Oh!” Lucy says cheerfully, “You’ve already started interrogating her!”

Sue looks at Lucy, then at Quinn, then at Lucy again, then at the detective, then at Spencer, then back to Gibson. But they’re all looking at the severely beaten conversation piece. Spencer’s chin is resting against her chest and lifting ever so slightly with her shallow breaths.

“What’s going on?” Gibson asks. “Who is this girl?”

“I’m so sorry, Warden,” Quinn says with wide, innocent eyes. “We must’ve gotten our orders confused. If we’d known you had Spencer Hastings here, we would’ve been evacuating the escaped prisoners like you said. Should we go do that now?”

“Uh,” Sue stammers. “Well…”

“Evacuating?” Gibson asks.

“Venting them out the airlock,” Quinn says, like it’s obvious. “Standard protocol for major offenders.”

Gibson looks at Sue and back to Quinn, shocked. “According to whom?”

Lucy smiles. “Our wonderful onboard training!” She sounds as pleasant as a summer day. “We have
“Is it?” Gibson asks, looking at Sue with renewed interest. There’s a sparkle in her eye that says, “And this, you flaming bag of rat shit, is precisely why I got out of bed this morning.”

“Thank god you’re alright.” Hermione’s hands are on the bars to cell 10 as her face rests against them in relief.

Aphasia’s standing in the middle of the cell. It seems telling that she isn’t coming any closer. Something’s wrong. Spencer stands off to the side to give them space and keep an eye out for trouble.

Mack sits up, looking a lot better than the last time Spencer saw her. “Did you find Quinn?” Her voice is heavy with worry.

“Yes, she’s fine,” Hermione assures them both. “She’ll be back as soon as it’s safe. What’s important now is that you two are okay.”

It feels like a natural place to enter the conversation, so Spencer begins approaching the cell. She hears Aphasia laugh softly to herself, “‘My knight in shining armor.’ That’s what you want me to say, right?”

Spencer pauses awkwardly and then begins again in reverse. She sees Hermione stand up straight, stung by the comment.

“I don’t know. Maybe, ‘I’m glad you’re alright, too’?”

“But I’m not alright!” Aphasia snaps. “You can’t just lock me in here like a damn child!”

Hermione takes a step back and braces herself. “I was protecting you.”

“I don’t need your protection! I can take care of myself!” Aphasia’s still just out of Spencer’s view, but she can imagine the look on her face. “You know I got, like, a hundred weapons in here.”

“Maybe I don’t want you to have to use them.”

“But that’s not up to you! Don’t you get that? You don’t get to control everything all the time.” A pointing finger appears near the bars. “And just because I get you shit does not mean you control me!”

“I’m not trying to control you!” Hermione’s crying. Spencer can hear it in her voice. “Forgive me for not wanting the horde of armed guards to attack my girlfriend.”

“You know how I feel about being able to get outta here! Did you think about how it felt when everybody else ran off together and I was just left here alone?”

Spencer hears Mack say something unintelligible, and Aphasia quickly tells her to shut up.

Hermione wipes her eyes on her sleeve. “I’m sorry. You’re right. I just…needed to know that when I came back, you’d be here.”
“And what if you didn’t come back? Sue’s key couldn’t even open that door. You don’t lift that spell, I’m stuck in here forever.”

“Oh, don’t be so dramatic,” Hermione says, exasperated. “They have saws! They could just remove the bars.”

Spencer’s interest is piqued enough to butt in now. She steps into full view. “Wait, Sue was here?”

Aphasia jumps a little, startled. “Damn, girl, you been standing there the whole time?! Again? That’s rude.”

Spencer puts her hands up in surrender and walks back out of sight. “Sorry.”

Aphasia refocuses on her girlfriend. “Sue’s not looking for you. She wants Spencer. She thinks she killed everybody. I didn’t tell her shit.”

“Where’s Lucy?” Mack asks.

“She and Quinn went after Sue,” Hermione says. “We have a plan.”

“Oooh, A PLAN!” Aphasia makes a face and waves spirit fingers in the air. “Do we get to help this time, or should I just sit here on my ass until you decide you need me to get you something? You got a headache, baby? I got some Aleve. That shit lasts for twelve hours.” The bitter sarcasm in her voice fills the entire cell. Peeking around to look for Spencer, she adds, “I bet you need another heavy-flow. I remember how you do.”

The sad part is, Spencer really wants to take her up on it.

********************

Sue’s mouth falls open for a second, but she doesn’t know what to say. She already corroborated Quinn and Lucy’s little acting gig, so that ship has sailed, but she’s not going to stand here and be incriminated by a bunch of bimbos.

“Guards!” she shouts, retaking control of the conversation. “Clean up the mess in the entryway! I want every inch of that floor scrubbed and shined like a baby on its wedding day.”

“Shouldn’t we be going after the escaped inmates?” Lucy asks.

Sue’s holding her hands by her face in frustration. “Fine, yes, just go away!”

Quinn looks at Detective Gibson. “Would you like help carrying inmate Hastings to your ship?”

“What?!” Sue balks. After swearing she wouldn’t, she did reveal all her secrets downstairs, just like the villain in a movie. And that makes Spencer a sleeping time bomb. Sue wonders why the hell Becky didn’t kill her off an hour ago like she was supposed to. And now Lucy and Quinn are setting Sue up to take a fall, but she’s not going down without a fight. “She’s not going anywhere.”

Gibson examines Spencer’s swollen face, fresh bruises, and lips crusted with blood. Someone clearly did a number on her. “She’s the leading suspect in a multiple homicide. I need to take her in for immediate health care and questioning.”
“She can get cleaned up here.”

“Your doctor no longer has a face,” Gibson counters.

“SHE’S NOT LEAVING!”

“I have no choice. Guards, please escort Miss Hastings to my ship. Leave her cuffed.”

Sue scowls and kicks the desk hard, which she immediately regrets. Picking up her trophies one at a time, she starts throwing them across the room like a child having a tantrum, growling in rage with each crash. One of them clocks the Spencer clone right in the back of the head.

The other women jump and duck out of the way. They begin looking at each other, confused and unsure if they should intervene.

“Warden,” Detective Gibson starts, but it’s useless over the noise. “Is this really necessary?”

Sue holds her arms out and sweeps them across the shelves, taking down every picture and prize in her collection. The racket is deafening. She’s clearly having a mental breakdown, now yelling and even starting to cry a little. The scene has become very uncomfortable for the others, but nobody knows what to do or say.

Sue stomps across the room and screams, “AHHHH!” in Quinn’s face, then again in Lucy’s, before stomping back over to her desk. Still screaming, she takes out her keys and unlocks the drawer that Spencer never got to search. Sue reaches in, pulls out a revolver, and shoots the Spencer clone in the head. A second later, with one final roar of emotional rage, she then does the same to Stella Gibson.

Quinn grabs Lucy by the sleeve and takes off down the hall as a bullet just barely misses her shoulder.

****************

Hermione doesn’t know what to say to Aphasia’s mean-spirited comments. “I had no idea you felt this way.”

“You could’ve asked, instead of just locking me in. I’m always here for you. You don’t need a spell for that. I’m not the one who disappears all the time.”

“Well,” Hermione spits back, “you’ll be glad to know I don’t have to do that anymore now that Umbridge is dead. Though, maybe I should just leave anyway, since you don’t even want to talk to me.”

Spencer’s head turns at Umbridge’s name. “What do you—”

Suddenly, a loud, sharp boom sounds from the opposite side of the ship, then a second time. Spencer hasn’t heard it in a long time, but it’s unmistakable.

Gunshots. Two of them.

“Hide!” Hermione shouts as she and Spencer take off running toward cell 1.

“ARE YOU SERIOUS?”
Aphasia bangs several times on the bars, but the girls are long gone.
A third gunshot sounds, and Spencer’s terrified.

“TIME TO DIE!”

It’s Sue, echoing in the distance. Not being able to see her makes it scarier, somehow. She’s mad as hell and larger than life. And armed.

Spencer and Hermione make their way quickly down the corridor. The giant blue TARDIS gets larger and clearer as they approach. But before they reach it, Quinn and Lucy come tearing around the corner, taking a wide angle to slip between the TARDIS and the cell 1 bars without slowing down.

“RUN!” Quinn shouts, and Spencer and Hermione instantly change directions and take off north again.

A moment later, there’s a loud thud behind them and a weird moaning noise.

Hermione stops and looks back. “Hang on!”

Lucy and Quinn slow to a stop, as does Spencer. They’re no longer being followed. Sue and her maniacal screams have disappeared.

The group stands next to cell 10, which appears to be empty and still locked. But then, Aphasia’s mattress moves slightly and lifts as two sets of eyes peer out. Mack and Aphasia are hiding in the black hole. It’s like a Criss Angel illusion.

Spencer squints and blinks, trying to make sense of it. Their bodies are just…gone. But at least they’re safe.

Hermione quickly backtracks toward cell 1 to investigate, wand extended. After a moment, she looks down and calls out, “It’s okay! Hurry!”

The three girls jog down, hearts pounding in their chests, and see Sue passed out cold on the ground next to the TARDIS with a gash on her head. She must not have known it was there and crashed right into it. Spencer checks for a pulse. She’s passed out cold but still alive.

Quinn picks the gun up off the floor. She checks the chamber to verify there are still three bullets left, then spins it back into place.

“Be careful with that,” Spencer says. It’s intimidating how comfortable Quinn seems with the weapon. And also incredibly sexy, but in that way where she kind of hates being turned on by it because it’s bad. Like smoking. Which, she hasn’t forgotten, Quinn does as well.

“I detest those things,” Hermione says, eyeing the gun. “They’re reckless and dangerous.”
Quinn’s fiddling with the top of her uniform, trying to get the heavy revolver to stay in her bra, but the elastic isn’t strong enough to support the extra weight. “I don’t think your fire-throwing stick is any safer.”

“It doesn’t shoot unless I tell it to, literally. It takes knowledge, talent, and skill to wield, unlike your macho Muggle weapon.” But it seems Quinn couldn’t care less, and Hermione doesn’t push the point any further. Watching the clumsy display as Quinn jams the gun in between her breasts, she adds, “At least be sure the safely is on.” She sounds equal parts tired and annoyed.

“Safety,” Quinn corrects, trying one last attempt in her left foam cup, but it falls back out. She gives up and unzips her uniform to her waist, folds it down, and tucks the gun into the back of her underwear. This reveals the black bra and flat stomach that have only been in Spencer’s dreams. No wonder the bra couldn’t hold the gun—it’s already packed with Marlboro Lights.

Not that Spencer’s looking at Quinn’s bra, except that she is.

She almost lets out an audible gasp. This is the first time she’s seen Quinn like this, yet it seems oddly familiar. She’s seen Lucy in far less. But it’s different (and making Spencer’s stomach twist into knots) because it’s Quinn. Spencer can see the waistline of black boy briefs with white lettering. They match her bra perfectly.

Spencer really misses having underwear.

Quinn catches her watching and holds eye contact as she slowly zips the uniform back over her perfect—

Spencer pulls herself away. “So! Now what? Where’s the inspector?”

“Sue shot her,” Lucy says.

Spencer and Hermione shout in unison, “What?!”

“Right in the head. Barely any blood at all.” Lucy sounds wistful. Her P.M.S uniform has only a little spatter on the sleeve.

“I think she was a detective,” Quinn says. She then adds, “Sue shot you, too.”

Spencer’s face goes white as a sheet. “WHAT?!”

Being punched repeatedly in the face was one thing, but Sue putting a gun to Spencer’s head and pulling the trigger...It shows how close she really was to dying today. Instead, someone else died in her place.

Spencer feels consumed with guilt from the injustice and selfishness of her actions. The plan was never for the clone to die—hell, it wasn’t her idea to use the clone in the first place—but the end result is the same nevertheless. Another innocent life lost. And what kind of life did this girl have? Grown in a lab, kept in a tube, put to sleep, beaten senselessly, and shot in the head. A pawn in a deadly game she never agreed to play.

Spencer wonders what the girl was like—if she was anything like her, or would’ve been. If they talked similarly. If they liked the same kinds of books and music. If they had the same taste in... anything. Anyone.

There may be a dozen more like her downstairs, but Spencer’s not naïve enough to believe they’re all exactly the same. If knowing Quinn and Lucy has taught her anything, it’s that your actions and
experiences—not your DNA—define who you are. And now this girl will never have the chance at a real life off the ship, however fucked up it may have been at the start.

Spencer’s on the brink of fainting. Her knees start to give out, and she tries to smoothly transition to sitting on the ground, but it’s a hard fall. They haven’t eaten all day, fueled only by adrenaline and determination and fear. It’s catching up to her as the hours stretch on.

She buries her hands in her hair and rests her elbows on her knees. “Where did she even get a gun?”

“It was in her desk,” Quinn says. “In a locked drawer.”

Spencer shuts her eyes and curses herself for not bashing it in with her sledgehammer when she had the chance. They could’ve been so much better today with a gun in hand—defeated their enemies more easily, persuaded people to do what they needed.

Saved Donna.

Or maybe it all would’ve gone horribly wrong. They could’ve punctured a window and been sucked into space. One of her friends could’ve been accidentally shot, or Spencer herself. Right now, she’s picturing what she must look like with a bullet in her skull. It’s fucked up that she can go see it for real, just a short walk away.

Hermione asks, “Why did she kill the detective?”

“She didn’t say,” Quinn replies. “Maybe she didn’t want to be arrested for murder.”

Spencer exhales and closes her eyes. “That, and she couldn’t afford to let me go. I know too much. She talked a lot while she was beating the crap out of me. I guess most of it was true, or at least close enough.” She looks over at Sue and fixates on the blood in her hair. “I guess she thought if she killed me, she’d have to kill the witnesses, too. Even a cop. And you.”

Their plan has quickly gone to shit. They just wanted to get the inspector out of here. That’s all. Take control of the situation and control the outcome. Sue was always going to fail the inspection, but they hoped that by pushing suspicion to Spencer, the clone would be arrested and taken away, unable to implicate anyone or confess to any crimes. They felt bad sending an innocent girl away with no idea what was happening to her, but the police wouldn’t be able to charge her without proof. At the very least, it would buy the real Spencer more time to figure out their next move. And it would keep Sue here and in charge, which is what Cosima and Delphine want. It was a good plan. But now, instead, there are two more dead bodies, all for nothing.

Leaning back to lie down on the floor, Spencer rubs her eyes and starts thinking out loud. “Okay. The detective’s dead. Sue’s managed to knock herself unconscious. And there’s a dead version of me sitting in her office. Which means she thinks I’m dead.”

Everything’s on fast-forward in her mind as the movie plays out several possible endings. There doesn’t seem to be one yet where she, Lucy, and Quinn all make it out alive. They can’t let Sue remain in charge now. She’ll kill them the moment she wakes up.

“Are we sure there aren’t any guards or staff that we haven’t locked up? Nobody’s left on Sue’s side? I really can’t handle any more surprises today.”

“I haven’t seen any,” Hermione offers.

Lucy gives a small, contented smile. “My work here is done.”
But her eyes seem distant, and Spencer wonders how conflicted Lucy feels about Sue firing a bullet at her. It’s no secret they have a special bond. Lucy’s been defending Sue all day. It must feel horrible to have someone you care about and trust try to kill you. Maybe today is the end of an era for the prison in more ways than one.

Spencer asks Hermione, “Will you go get Ripley and Vasquez? We need to move Sue before she wakes up.”

“I can lift her myself.”

But Spencer shakes her head. “No.” She’s still scared by the memory of the unconscious clone floating eerily off the ground. “We’ll do this the old-fashioned way, okay? Please.” Envisioning the path ahead of her friend, she adds, “Don’t tell the DYAD people anything.”

Hermione nods, “I won’t,” and starts walking down the hall, not looking particularly thrilled to be on this task. Spencer watches her slow down as she reaches cell 10, look inside, then keep walking without a word.

Spencer turns her attention back to her current companions. She hasn’t been alone with Quinn and Lucy since that horrible day in the bathroom. The circumstances are substantially different, but it’s still awkward and uncomfortable. At least, it is for her. Time for an escape plan.

“I need to pee. Be right back.” Standing over the warden’s body, she considers her options and then kicks Sue hard in the temple. “Just in case,” she says and walks off.

Even with all the guards presumably dead, it feels weird moving around the prison by herself. Where the hell IS everyone?

The bathroom’s still empty, and she’s able to take care of her business without incident. But there’s a faint rumbling noise in the background that she can’t quite place. As she listens harder, she can pick out the rise and fall of voices. Yelling. Very angrily.

She cleans up and washes her hands quickly, making her way back to rejoin the two sisters. She sees Ripley and Vasquez approaching from the other side of the TARDIS, but Hermione’s not with them. Looking in the distance, Spencer sees her stopped down by 10. Hopefully, healing some wounds.

“Hey,” Ripley says, catching up to the group. She looks Quinn and Lucy over. “We heard what happened. Are you okay?”

“We’re fine,” Spencer says, though she means it only on a superficial, “We’re alive” level. “We need you to lock up Sue. Please.”

Vasquez gives a half-grin and a small laugh, looking all too happy to help. “About time.”

“We can’t kill her yet,” Spencer adds. “Someone might come asking questions or looking for the detective inspector woman, and we’ll need to have an authoritative face. The President could come back, for all we know. Right now, a raging lunatic Sue is better than no Sue at all.”

“Fine, let’s put her in here.” Ripley gestures toward cell 1.

Lucy steps forward angrily. “Excuse me? No. That’s my home.”

Spencer raises her eyebrows. “Fun idea—I thought maybe you’d want to put her somewhere else.” Reaching into her shoe, Spencer pulls out the ring of three keys and offers it to her friend.
Ripley’s eyes regain a bit of their light. “Best one I’ve heard all day.” Taking the keys, she then grabs Sue’s feet as Vasquez takes her arms, and they carry her away in the direction of Solitary.

As the three younger women are left alone again, Quinn gazes back down the hall at the carnage of dead Boomers strewn here and there. “You’ve had a day.”

“Yeah.” Spencer doesn’t know what else to say.

Quinn nods, a little uncomfortable. A lot of people died in her name today. “And now a prison full of angry criminals are on the loose with no guards to keep them from killing us or each other.”

“It’s our ship now,” Lucy says forcefully, startling the other two. “I’ve killed everyone on it before, and I’ll do it again.”

“Well, hopefully it won’t come to that,” Spencer says. She’s seen enough death for one day and thousands more. “We might want to start thinking about what our next move is.”

She feels exhausted just saying the words. She doesn’t want to make any more decisions, not right now. They’ve finally reached the end, at least for today. Quinn is rescued, the spiders are dead or contained, and they’re no longer in any immediate danger. They can deal with Sue and the other inmates tomorrow. Spencer just wants to curl up with Quinn on that familiar top bunk, strap them in with the seatbelt, and let the horrors of the day melt away to memories. They won, and now it’s time to rest.

It sounds like Quinn agrees. She lights up a cigarette and says, “Let’s deal with the rest tomorrow.”

They sit in silence and second-hand smoke, minds drifting in and out, resting their tired bodies until there’s adequate reason to move them again.

About ten minutes later, Vasquez and Ripley come back, lightly jogging down the hall.

“We may have a problem.”

**************************

Ripley leads Lucy, Vasquez, Quinn, and Spencer down the hall that runs alongside the west side of the cafeteria, passing the place where Boomer tasered Spencer a few hours ago. As they reach the back, the charred flesh smell from the trash chute gets stronger, as does the density of smoke in the air and the rumble of voices in the distance. Quinn coughs once as they reach the clearing, but otherwise they travel in silence.

Spencer’s worried to hear what issue Ripley and Vasquez had locking Sue up, but it doesn’t look like they’re going to Solitary. Ripley crosses past the trash chute and reaches out with one hand to open the door to the kitchen, holding a finger to her mouth with a silent, “Shh.”

The group walks softly into the long, wide space riddled with metal countertops and shelving units and dish racks. There seems to be no shortage of trays or cans of tomato paste, or, unfortunately, giant cans labeled BSM. Spencer’s never been in here, but it does seem to be emptier than she expected, canned goods aside.

They wind past the sinks and cross to the far side. The voices in the cafeteria are loud now and
getting clearer. Ripley edges the group toward the window where inmates return trays to be cleaned, making sure to keep everyone out of sight. They’re just here to listen. And the leading voice is one Spencer doesn’t need to see to recognize.

“Frankly, I don’t know why you’re objecting.” It’s Vee. “I think we’re being more than fair.”

“It’s fucked up!” someone cries out.

“So’s your face,” another voice snaps back, “but you don’t hear me complaining!”

Spencer hears a slap, and chaos breaks out in the aftermath. It sounds like a struggle, maybe a fistfight, with yelling on both sides until the unmistakable voice of Jessica Huang booms over the noise.

“EVERYONE STOP HITTING AND LET THE PANTHER WOMAN SPEAK.”

That mostly does it, and Vee is able to regain control from there as the room quiets down.

“Ladies! Ladies. I realize it’s a new way of thinking. Sue’s been filling your heads for years with nonsense, telling you you’ll be going home again if you just keep your head down. Make no mistake about it—none of us are ever going home again. This is our home for the rest of our lives. And it will only be as good as we make it, so it’s up to us to make it good. I believe that we can. I know that we can. We’ve broken the law, but we are not broken.”

Spencer raises her eyebrows, rather surprised by what she’s hearing. Vee sounds on point. Maybe this could even be the start of a new alliance between th—

“Which is why it’s necessary that we all contribute to the new order in a meaningful way. We each have something to share. We each have a skill. We have a connection.” Her tone of voice darkens as she continues. “And as I’ve explained, those of you who don’t bring something of value to the table will be dealt with. No more freeloading.”

Spencer looks at Ripley, but she’s watching for Lucy's reaction.

“And what the fuck do YOU bring to the table?” an angry inmate asks.

Spencer was wondering the same thing.

“Because all I see is a bossy motherfucker who just put a big-ass target on her back. You better sleep with one eye open, bitch.”

“What I bring,” Vee says, “is structure. Leadership. Experience and order. I have plans to get more luxuries for everyone on board. Quality food. Comfortable clothing. Actual bedding to sleep on. Entertainment items. Television. Even the possibility of short visits back to Earth before anyone notices you’re gone. And you can earn it. You can earn a better life.”

“Bullshit!” a few inmates yell, along with a few more related obscenities.

Spencer whispers to the others, “How the hell is she gonna do that?”

“Join us,” Vee continues, undeterred, “and become part of the most powerful women in this prison. We control the weapons, the food, and the way out. We are the future of the Uterius.” Her tone shifts again. “Fight us…and there’s nowhere for you to run.”

A mix of applause and boos rises in the cafeteria. Without seeing who's cheering and who's
dissenting, it's hard for Spencer to grasp the scope of what's happening in there. “Who's 'us'?”

But Ripley just turns away, brow furrowed, and shakes her head, indicating she doesn’t know.

“Tastee, Poussey,” Lucy says confidently, counting them on her fingers, “Suzanne, Kat, Johanna, Violet, Nichols, Sarah Connor—the hot one. Probably others. Not Graham anymore. One down.” She doesn’t sound the least bit sorry about what she’s done.

“Could she have a majority?” Ripley asks.

Lucy shakes her head. “No. I have at least twenty. A has the rest. But the few who haven't picked a side yet won't be going to Vee.”

Spencer has no idea what they're talking about, but she sure as shit didn't miss that middle part. “‘A’? Who the fuck is A?” The question of her goddamn life. Lord. “And what sides?”

Vasquez, Quinn, Lucy, and Ripley all look at her like she's just said she's never heard of Abraham Lincoln or doesn't know where babies come from.

Lucy offers them a reassuring, “She's with me,” like Spencer's just being an idiot.

The longer they talk about this, the more she's starting to feel like one. “I am?”

“Of course, you are. Didn’t I promise to keep you safe?”

What, during our orgies? Spencer wants to say but doesn’t. Some safety clause this is. Lucy stood by and watched while both Sue and Aphasia came after her today.

When Spencer doesn’t reply, Lucy quietly walks over to her, not breaking eye contact, and doesn’t stop moving until their faces are inches apart. It’s a familiar situation, those long hours of dominance and submission, and Spencer’s pulse begins racing.

In the blink of an eye, Lucy’s hand finds Spencer’s throat. She doesn’t squeeze too hard, just lifts Spencer’s chin and examines her plaything. Spencer doesn’t fight back, just closes her eyes and waits for whatever is going to happen next. She really wishes Quinn wasn’t seeing this.

After ten very long seconds, Lucy leans in and whispers in Spencer’s ear, “Besides…I already have you trained.” She releases her hold as suddenly as it began and then walks away to sit on a counter on the far back wall.

Spencer shivers, trying to shake it off, and avoids eye contact with everyone there.

The awkward moment ends abruptly—much to Spencer’s relief—with the distant sound of the cafeteria doors flinging open. A hushed silence spreads through the crowd, and the fugitives look to each other, wondering what their next move is. Spencer dares to peek around the corner slowly to see what’s going on, and all eyes are on one woman.

Aphasia, pointing a double-barreled shotgun right at Vee. Hermione is following closely behind, wand in hand but at her side.

Vee turns her body to face the intruder and straightens up, not the least bit concerned to have a gun aimed at her head. “I was starting to worry about you two.”

“Yeah, I bet you were, bitch,” Aphasia spits, readjusting her aim. “Time to die.” She thumbs the hammer to arm it with a click and grits her teeth.
“No!” Suzanne shouts and slides in front of Vee, waving her arms. “I can’t let you do that!” Her voice sounds brave but her eyes are closed as she’s flinching in anticipation of the pain.

“Guess you’re as stupid as you look,” Aphasia says and takes a step closer, now aiming at Suzanne’s head.

For a moment, Spencer wonders how the hell Aphasia ended up with such an old-timey weapon in outer space. Maybe she, Quinn, and Mack held up a few stagecoaches before they upgraded to banks. Then, Spencer remembers the consequences of a shotgun shell piercing the walls of the ship, and her panic kicks into high gear.

“WAIT! STOP!” She trips over various pots and pans as she throws herself over the open counter into the cafeteria. There’s a rustle of shuffling as the whole room shifts to look in her direction, as well as a few choice comments about her limited intelligence. Everyone’s facing her now, including Aphasia. And her gun. “Don’t shoot!”

“Girl, what the fuck are you doing? Mind your own damn business!”

Spencer’s hands are high in the air. “We’re on a spaceship! One hole in the hull, and all our oxygen goes. We won’t be able to stop it.” When that doesn’t work, she tries, “If you fire that gun, everybody dies.”

Vee doesn’t argue the point and sits down on the nearest bench, glad the attention is off of her for the moment.

“Pretty sure they’re gonna be the only ones dying today,” Aphasia says. “Unless you keep flapping that trap. I got enough bullets for all three of you.”

Hermione steps closer, looking hurt. “A,” she says, and reaches for Aphasia’s arm, giving it a light squeeze.

After everything that happened back in Rosewood, there will never be a day when mention of ‘A’ doesn’t set Spencer on edge. But this isn’t her high school tormenter. They’re friends. Kind of. Aphasia did try to put a staple through her face this morning. But if Aphasia is in fact the leader of the rebellion against Vee, Spencer can live with that. Provided she gets ‘A’ to put the goddamn gun down.

“Hey, I hate Vee, too! But we can talk this out.”

Vee raises an eyebrow and smiles wryly. “That’s sweet.”

Spencer ignores her. “Whatever is happening here, let’s just talk. Nobody has to die.” But Aphasia isn’t budging.

Vee looks surprisingly calm, given the circumstances. Like this is just another a typical day, staring down the barrel of a shotgun. “I wouldn’t be so sure.”

The other fifty inmates are watching like it’s a tennis match, looking back and forth and waiting for something to happen. Instead of fearing imminent gunfire, they look quite entertained. Some are even smiling.

Aphasia is clinging to the weapon like her life depends on it, trembling slightly in her rage as she maintains her aim. “But it’s all her fault!” She’s talking to Spencer but not letting Vee out of her sight for one second. “Quinn, the others, everything! She did it. And now she’s gonna die.”
Spencer drops her hands without meaning to. “What? What about Quinn?”

There’s movement on her left as Rosa Diaz slaps Sameen Shaw hard on the shoulder without saying a word. Shaw then turns and punches Diaz square in the jaw, knocking her to the ground.

“What the fuck?” Rosa recovers and holds a hand to her bloody lip. “Fine, let spiders crawl all over you. Whatever.”

Shaw snaps back at her, but it’s lost in the high-pitched wailing of a joint Maritza-and-Flaca freakout. They’re flapping their hands and lifting one foot at a time, as if tip-toeing on hot pavement, while making a noise that could shatter glass.

Poussey says, “The fuck is that?!”

Spencer turns, eyes wide, to see movement by the far kitchen door—the one near the garbage chute. A swarm of spiders is flooding into the room, too many for Spencer to even begin to count.

All at once, everyone in the cafeteria begins screaming. Not more of the shrill, horror movie kind of screams, but the lower-register angry roars of felons who aren’t afraid of anything except a massive swarm of spiders.

Everyone starts running and climbing up on tables, but Spencer knows these monsters can scale furniture without issue. The consensus of the mob is to retreat, with one exception—Lexa’s in the middle of the room stomping around with a scowl, chanting, “Jus drein, jus daun! Jus drein, jus daun!” with every dramatic kill.

Why she’s chanting about putting juice down the drain, Spencer doesn’t know, but she gives Lexa credit for being the only one charging toward the action.

Ripley, Vasquez, Quinn, and Lucy are shouting and rummaging in the kitchen, and Spencer can only assume they’re fighting for their lives. She wants to go help them, but everyone is yelling and high-stepping, pushing and climbing over each other. There’s too much chaos blocking her path.

Suddenly, Nichols collapses to the ground, unconscious, and Big Boo hurries over to her. She smashes the spiders gnawing on Nicky’s ankles, and quickly lifts and throws her girlfriend over her shoulder in one move. It’s harder to navigate the crowd with the extra weight, and the spiders are moving much faster than she can run. Boo’s kicking and stomping, but she can’t see what’s down there. Then, she slips, and Nichols falls, hitting her head on the bench before slamming to the ground.

“Help!” Spencer cries out. “Somebody!” But there aren’t any authorities left to assist them. They’re on their own. “Weapons!” Looking around frantically, she keeps yelling, “Weapons! Somebody get weapons!”

Idgie shouts, “I got it!” and takes off running for the door.

Spencer barely knows her but appreciates that someone is concerned for her safety. She watches Idgie push the door open and bolt, running down the hall as fast as she can. The escape draws attention, and soon other women head for the exit, too.

But Hermione is already closest, and she wastes no time beating them to it. Once safely on the other side of the door, she slams it shut with a flick of her wand.

The horde of angry women bang and push on the large double doors, but Spencer knows by now—when Hermione locks something, it’s not opening. She can’t help but smile a little, knowing how
futile their efforts are.

And then suddenly, it’s not funny anymore. It’s not funny at all.

...Hermione just locked us in with hundreds of killer spiders.

And in that moment, Spencer is smacked by a possibility she hadn’t considered: Hermione may have been the villain all along.

The noise in the room falls away as Spencer’s world moves in slow motion. Off to her left, Corky collapses to the ground, unconscious. Violet is trying unsuccessfully to beat away her girlfriend’s tiny attackers before she screams in pain and succumbs to the venom, herself. An inmate Spencer doesn’t recognize is passed out nearby with a dozen spiders on her neck, chewing and wriggling as a river of blood trickles slowly across the floor. Any moment now, a tiny pair of fangs will find its way to Spencer’s ankle, and she’ll be paralyzed, unable to stop herself from being eaten alive. There are just too many of them. And now, there’s nowhere to run.

They’re all going to die in this stupid, smelly cafeteria/preschool. Because Hermione apparently wants them to.

But WHY?

It just doesn’t make sense. Is Hermione working with DYAD somehow? Or with Sue? Has she been a double agent this entire time? Why wasn’t this revealed down in the lab? Is this why she and Umbridge were enemies, because Umbridge wanted to stop the spiders and Hermione wanted to help them? Is this why Hermione was so insistent that she wasn’t able to open the doors on the lower level, because she’d tried it before? What profit does she make from this massacre of inmates?

And possibly the most interesting question, how does Aphasia fit into all of this? Has Hermione been playing her the whole time? Maybe Hermione wants no part of this war against Vee, so she’s rebelling specifically against Aphasia’s decisions? Spencer’s been quite swept up in their epic romance, and now the illusion of the perfect couple is shattering.

Hermione has left her true love to die.

But Aphasia’s not dead yet. In fact, she’s using her shotgun to pummel Vee across the face.

They’re trading blows in the eye of the storm as chaos swirls around them. Maybe Aphasia’s rage is really about Vee, or maybe she’s working through the betrayal. It doesn’t matter much. Aphasia looks like she’s going to kill Vee either way. Just, hopefully not with bullets.

This whole space thing is too bad, because Spencer would really love to blast the shit out of some spiders right now.

“Give me the gun!” She ducks out of the way as they continue attacking each other, but Aphasia isn’t surrendering.

“Back the fuck off!”

“GIVE ME THE GUN.” Spencer does feel bad for yelling at her friend, so she kicks Vee hard in the leg for good measure.

Vee stumbles but regains her footing and glares at Spencer, annoyed.

“NO.” Aphasia rears the gun back like a baseball bat, swinging hard and landing a solid hit to Vee’s
skull. She falls to the floor, face-first and out cold. “IT’S NOT LOADED, OKAY?” Aphasia huffs and catches her breath, then spins the shotgun in her hand like a drill team exercise. “I’m not stupid.”

Oh. “Hermione’s gone,” Spencer starts. “She locked—”

“She got a plan.” Aphasia stomps hard on several approaching spiders. She slams the butt of the gun on the ground to take out a few more and doesn’t appear to be concerned with anyone or anything else.

Spencer can’t spare a moment to stop and think about what the bigger picture could be here. She’s still surrounded by hundreds of monsters. This is light years beyond that night in the cell when they came for Faith. It’s even scarier than battling the giant one—Helena or whatever—because they’re everywhere at once. She’s standing in a sea of women, screaming and cursing and running as they lash out all around them. This is beyond a riot—it’s war.

“Whoa! Hey!” a voice calls out behind her, and as Spencer turns, she sees everyone’s moving strangely now. Starbuck bumps into her, and the momentum lifts Spencer clear off the ground as she starts floating away. That’s when she realizes everyone is floating. All of the people, anyway. It takes a moment to confirm it, but the spiders seem to be staying on the ground.

Now several feet above the danger, a few inmates start laughing with glee and hold hands to keep each other close and safe. Spencer sees Ripley and the others start to push themselves out of the kitchen one by one and make their way to the higher ceiling in the cafeteria. She calls out to Quinn and pushes off a table for leverage, sailing across the room and catching Quinn’s elbow with her right hand. It feels reminiscent of their first night together in zero gravity. Spencer sailed across to Quinn, and her heart never looked back.

With no way to slow themselves down, they spin together for a moment before Spencer accidentally kicks Root in the face. They manage to get away before she can retaliate, and fortunately, Shaw didn’t see what happened.

“You okay?” Quinn asks over the noise, squeezing Spencer’s hand.

“Yeah. I think so.”

Spencer sees Aphasia swinging again to hit Vee—now hovering, unconscious—but she can’t quite make contact. Lunging forward with nothing to brace against, she’s just striking out. The harder she tries, the more ridiculous she looks.

Seeing the shotgun reminds Spencer of what Quinn has tucked safely away. “Don’t use your weapon, okay?” she calls out. “Don’t let anyone know you have it.”

Quinn doesn’t seem to have an issue with that. “What the hell’s going on?” she shouts, looking around at the very bizarre scene.

“I don’t know.”

They take a moment to survey the carnage. Prisoners are bouncing off each other, trying to maintain a safe distance mid-air. The spiders have started climbing up the walls and making their way onto the ceiling. It looks like they’re unable to release whatever hold their tiny spindly feet have on the surface, so they’re waiting for someone to drift close enough to climb onto. The inmates seem safer than they were five minutes ago, but this is merely a stopgap until they can figure out a real solution. They can’t float here forever.

Spencer and Quinn look for some sign of what the hell they’re supposed to do next. The bodies of
Nichols and Violet are caught under a nearby table. Each woman is now missing a few sections of her extremities. Corky’s floating near the ceiling on the east side but not moving. It’s only a matter of time before a few spiders make their way over for a free meal. Suzanne is in a very strange fistfight with Aphasia, but neither’s able to put much force behind their punches, so it’s more of a face-shoving and hair-pulling match. Ripley and Vasquez are pushing hard off the ceiling to hit the floor with maximum force, but the spiders move away from the incoming feet before they can strike. Suddenly, Chloe O’Brian and Lexa cry out almost at the same time, one near the ceiling and one near the floor, reaching for various body parts in pain. Kat’s hiding under a table in the far corner, crying. Some of the women are trying to fight, but the majority are too busy trying to stay afloat and arguing with each other. What began as a unified front is quickly disintegrating into Every Woman For Herself.

“Stop killing them!”

A distinctive voice pierces through the din. Spencer looks behind her, but she already knows. It’s Lucy.

Clarke swims through the air to mash a spider against the ceiling with her fist. “What makes you think they can understand us?”

“I’m not talking to them!” Lucy punches Clarke in the jaw, sending them both spinning in midair. “Leave the spiders alone!”

Lucy shouts her message again to various women in her vicinity, but no one’s backing off, not even her so-called loyal followers. It’s a lot harder to take her seriously when she’s back-flipping like a circus act.

Clarke recovers and reaches out to steady the spinning Lucy. Then, she pushes off toward the ground to join Lexa, who is still fighting even after being bitten.

“Sorry, Luce,” Dark Willow says. “Look around. It’s them or us.” Holding her arms out, she aims her hands at the floor from fifteen feet above and lets a fireball rip. It whooshes through the room loudly and explodes, burning a small group of spiders to a crunchy, blackened crisp. But the strong threat makes the others scatter and move at a faster speed than before, and now no one seems to be able to get the timing right to crush them.

Dark Willow sees what she’s done and looks back at Lucy sheepishly. “Whoops?”

As inmates go crashing into the kitchen area, the commotion knocks the various floating food stores into the open space of the battlefield. Cans and boxes scatter the air and interfere with the fighting. As the occasional package gets ripped open by a swinging arm, bits of breakfast find their way out among the fray.

Aphasia tears away from her power struggle with Suzanne to chase after a more important target. “MY WAFFLES!!”

Spencer hangs in mid-air, watching her friend struggle to catch the floating squares and hold them all in her tiny grasp. Eventually, Aphasia realizes she can hold more in her mouth than her hands, and the bulk of the escaped waffles are saved from a most uncertain fate. If nothing else, Aphasia is ever loyal to what she loves most in this world.

Suddenly, there’s pounding on the cafeteria door. “Let me in! I got help!” It’s Idgie. But she’ll never get in this way.
“Come on,” Quinn pulls Spencer’s hand, “let’s get out of here.”

“She locked the door!”

“Not the way we came in!”

Spencer suddenly feels very stupid. But even if they make it out, are they going to leave their friends in here to die? Their options feel limited. One thing’s for sure, though—she’s not going to let go of Quinn’s hand until she absolutely has to.

Pushing off the ground, they float toward the front door and catch the handle to steady themselves. Spencer calls out to Idgie, “Go around to the back! We’ll meet you there.”

Quinn and Spencer use the door to propel themselves, still hand in hand, and zoom past the crowds of inmates struggling to stay alive. They pass over the counter they’d hid behind earlier and make their way toward the back door of the kitchen.

But it’s already open. And instead of Idgie coming through, it’s a buzzing swarm.

Bees.

*Idgie went and got her BEES.*

Spencer screams and flails her arms, batting them away from her face as they whiz by. There’s a reason why Spencer has avoided that class like the plague: to never face this exact situation right here. Knives, Zombies, even Group Therapy—there are a lot of scary classes in this prison—but none has shaken her to the core as much as the thought of motherfucking Bees.

Dozens of black and yellow winged beasts flood into the room, terrorizing the inmates, who can’t seem to do anything but flail and scream like Spencer. Hovering in midair, the women have no leverage to get away other than to push off of each other, which is only adding to the fear and frenzy. Spencer sees Quinn isn’t bothered by them, but then, Quinn isn’t really bothered by anything that isn’t related to her.

Idgie comes floating in the back door, bringing up the rear of her battalion. She coasts right past Spencer to the window linking the rooms and calls out after her swarm, “ATTACK THE SPIDERS!” She holds her arms out, pointing, as if they can understand. “DON’T HURT THE GIRLS! GO KILL THE SPIDERS!”

Spencer and Quinn are absolutely dumbfounded. Pulling on the counter to accelerate, Spencer comes up behind Idgie and screams in disbelief, “THAT’S NOT HOW BEES WORK.”

“YOU DON’T KNOW THAT,” Idgie retorts, arms held out wide. “YOU’VE NEVER COME TO MY CLASS.”

But yeah, Spencer is pretty fucking sure that bees aren’t on *voice command*. You can’t train them like dogs to heel and fetch and bite burglars in the balls. And even if Idgie were some kind of bee charmer, they don’t eat spiders. If anything, it’s the other way around. There is no helping to be done here. Her friends, enemies, and everyone in between are freaking the fuck out, slapping and screaming obscenities as they get stung, while the spiders are going largely ignored by all.

Tastee’s got a bee stuck in her hair that she can’t get out. Octavia is trying to smash one by clapping her hands around it, and she learns a painful lesson when she finally does catch it. Spencer sees someone tall she doesn’t recognize, then realizes it’s Sophia. She’s swinging her wig around like nunchucks.
River Tam, meanwhile, is floating upside down, making air-angels without a care in the world. At one point, she pauses to reach out and catch a bee with a precise, jabbing pinch of her forefinger and thumb. Slowly, she brings the bee close to her face, examining it, then lets it go and watches it fly away.

The various couples are trying to find each other in the swarm, like pushing through the winds of a tornado. The only saving grace, Spencer realizes, is that there are far fewer bees than spiders, so hopefully the women will be able to eradicate them soon. Good intentions or not, Idgie made a bad situation worse, like breaking someone’s arm to distract them from the pencil in their eye.

Spencer feels a stinger in her forearm and curses. “How did you think this would help?!” She, Idgie, and Quinn are still hiding in the kitchen. There’s a lot of scary shit out there.

“They always do what I say!” Idgie insists, looking out at the plague she’s brought on everyone. “STOP STINGING THE PEOPLE! GODDAMNIT!” She slams her hand on the counter, fighting back frustrated tears, then turns to Spencer. “Well, what the hell have you done to help, huh? You high-class, hoity-toity girls can’t even stand the sight o’ bugs.” She’s masking her embarrassment in bravado, just like Hanna would. “At least I DID something.”

“I knew not to bring A SWARM OF BEES!”

An older inmate named Lucille Bluth is hovering nearby, calmly looking at the madness around them. She shakes her head and says with a grim expression, “They don’t allow you to have bees in here.”

But Spencer knows Idgie is trying. And she’s right—there has to be something Spencer can do.

She has a moment to think now that they’re mostly out of harm’s way. The three of them are squatting and holding onto the steel racks under the window, with just a few inches of space between the floor and their shoes. Their faces are level with rows and rows of red, yellow, and green plastic trays, bouncing slowly up and down in their slotted compartments. It’s weird seeing all the kitchen utensils, cans, and dishware moving around freely like that Fantasia segment where Mickey tries to clean up the house with magic and it all goes to shit. That cartoon scarred Spencer as a child. Using your intelligence to get ahead and then watching it escalate beyond your control…it gave her nightmares for weeks. From time to time, she still has visions of being buried alive by her textbooks.

On the plus side, the kitchen isn’t actively trying to drown them.

“Where’s Aphasia?” Quinn asks.

Spencer peeks over the edge to look for the hair-pullers in the middle of the room and finds Aphasia and Suzanne are still going at it. Their hair is completely mussed and sticking out in every direction, and their uniforms are ripped in various places. Spencer calls out Aphasia’s name before motioning for her to come over.

Begrudgingly, Aphasia pushes Suzanne away hard and uses the force to propel herself toward the kitchen window. “Crazy bitch,” she says as she gets some distance. She starts to fix her hair then suddenly curses and swats at a bee on her chest with way more hand motions than necessary to shoo it along.

Spencer reaches out to Aphasia as she makes her way over and pulls her friend into the safe zone.

Aphasia soars over the counter and steadies herself, then looks at the three women in turn with a panicked expression. “What the hell is all that?! That bee just bit my fuckin’ titty!”
“They didn’t want to hurt anybody!” Idgie snarls. “They never sting me!”

You sound like Lucy, Spencer thinks.

“THAT BEE JUST BIT MY FUCKIN’ TITY!” Aphasia moves closer to Idgie with each word. “MAYBE I’LL GO BITE IT BACK.”

Idgie’s face is on fire. “MAYBE YOU SHOULD BITE MY ASS INSTEAD!”

“Okay, okay, whoa.” Spencer tries to calm them both down, but it’s hard with only one free hand. She reaches across Aphasia’s chest to hold her back as Quinn pulls on Idgie’s shoulder and tells her to let the issue go.

Looking to Idgie, Spencer says, “Maybe you should go out there and keep trying to control your little friends. Okay? We’ll get some more help. Actual, real help.”

“Fine.” The one word is loaded with Southern attitude. Idgie makes a face at Aphasia, then moves to find the right angle and pushes off the floor like it’s the deep end of a swimming pool. Rocketing into the cafeteria, she screams, “TAWANDA!!”

Spencer hasn’t met an inmate named Tawanda, but she hopes she and Idgie are happy together.

“Don’t worry about her,” Quinn says to Aphasia.

“Yeah,” Spencer says. She looks into Aphasia’s eyes. “We’re going to kill the bees, okay? We will kill all the goddamn bees.”

“And the spiders,” adds Quinn.

“And Vee,” Aphasia says.

Spencer hesitates. “Still on the table. But we need weapons. Do you have anything else under your bed?”

There’s that familiar, irritated face again. “You ain’t stole enough from me today? You know I’m still mad. What happened to everything I already gave you⁈”

“Please just go get them.” Spencer conjures her most desperate expression. “It worked, right? We got Quinn back.”

“Despite the fact that I was coming back in four hours anyway,” Quinn mumbles around the cigarette now between her lips. She digs her Zippo out of her bra and lights it. The exhaled smoke moves strangely in the absence of gravity.

“We got her back early and safely,” Spencer reminds Aphasia, “all thanks to you. And now you get to be the hero again by saving all of those people.” The angry commotion in the next room comes into sharp focus. Spencer adds, “Except maybe Vee, who is terrible and deserves whatever happens to her.”

Aphasia rolls her eyes with a sigh and tuts, annoyed. “You a real piece of work, Saltine.” She pushes off the counter, sailing through the cloud of smoke toward the back door. It’s still wide open, and Spencer’s keen to close it before a third plague of venomous animals comes bursting in. At this point, she wouldn’t be surprised if locusts rained down on them.

As Aphasia reaches the doorway, Spencer shouts, “Hurry!” But her voice is drowned out by the sea
of voices in the cafeteria. She peeks over the counter again and sees her friends swatting helplessly against the many tiny critters all around them. Jessica Huang’s kicking ass with a meat grinder and a rolling pin, but Sophia seems to be the most successful at protecting herself, as she’s now using the wig like a shield.

This gives Spencer an idea.

One at a time, she starts pulling the plastic lunch trays out of the rack and hurling them like Frisbees toward the inmates. “Lexa! Shaw! You guys! Use these!”

Quinn starts helping her once she catches on, and soon the entire battalion is defensively armed. However, most of the women don’t seem to understand they can protect their faces and are instead just thwacking the bees and spiders with the trays. It’s slow-going and the squishing noises are terrible, but they’re at least making headway.

A few minutes later, Spencer hears a loud clang! from beyond the back door. Releasing the counter, she and Quinn follow Aphasia’s path and peer cautiously into the hall.

It’s Hermione. Spencer’s pulse quickens, not knowing if she’s facing an ally or an evil mastermind.

Hermione’s wand is pointed at the garbage chute. “It’s jammed shut, permanently. I made sure they were all out. And none escaped through the main doors on the other side. If we can keep them in here and kill them, it could finally be the end of this madness once and for all.”

“Good thinking,” Quinn says.

Spencer sighs with relief. Hermione is still on her side. Of all the people on this ship to be pitted against, Spencer was not looking forward to fighting a motherfucking sorcerer.

“I knew you cut the gravity,” Aphasia says proudly. She pushes hard against the door frame to fly right into Hermione, landing with a kiss. “You always know right where that G-spot is, don’t you?”

Hermione blushes and rolls her eyes at the cheesy comment. “Yes, you’re very clever.”

“Weapons?” Spencer prompts. “People are dying?”

“Go,” Hermione says to Aphasia. “It’ll be faster than if I get them one at a time from here.”

“Get what from here?” Spencer asks, but she’s ignored.

Quinn tells Aphasia, “I need a can of hairspray.”

“Cool.” Aphasia turns back to Hermione, kissing her one more time with a hand on her cheek. After a few seconds, she pulls away and uses the latch from the chute to push off in flight, disappearing around the corner.

Spencer looks at Quinn incredulously. “You’re really worried about your hair right now?” The fact that Quinn’s hair looks great despite the day’s events is irrelevant.

Her non-girlfriend returns the glare, one eyebrow up, and reaches into her bra, withdrawing her Zippo.

OH.

“Stay alert,” Hermione tells them. “I put a Repelling Spell on the window behind you so the spiders wouldn’t follow you out, but it’s still a good idea to watch to be sure they don’t escape. It only works
on small objects, and many of the spiders are quite large.”

“So, we just guard the door?” Spencer asks, clinging to the frame four feet above the ground. “That’s your plan? We have to do something.”

“I am. You’re floating, aren’t you?” Hermione lets that sit for a beat and then adds with some attitude, “You might want to duck.” Extending her wand toward the open hallway, she cries out, “Accio dodgeballs!”

Spencer frowns, confused, and Quinn doesn’t seem to get it either. But about six seconds later, a red rubber ball comes flying around the corner and almost takes Spencer’s head off. It zooms past them, crashing into the food shelf through the open door.

Spencer lets go of Quinn to shield her face from the onslaught. “Jesus!”

A second one comes, then another, and another. Yellow balls, green balls, blue and more red, then a few black ones. At least twenty fly into the kitchen before it’s done. Once she has recovered from the unexpected assault, Spencer recognizes the dodgeballs from one of the gyms they searched earlier today.

Hermione seems pleased with her latest contribution. “That should do it, don’t you think?”

Spencer wants to give her crap for scaring her so, but the truth is, it’s a pretty excellent idea. “Come on,” she says to Quinn, retaking her hand to head back inside.

The balls are wreaking havoc on the kitchen, bouncing wildly and destroying everything in their path, but Spencer and Quinn are able to redirect them one at a time into the cafeteria.

“HEY!” Spencer calls into the war zone. “WHAT DO YOU SAY WE KILL THESE FUCK—”

An orange dodgeball smacks her right in the face, painfully interrupting her call to arms. Now her entire cheek stings, again. Spencer can only take a steadying breath and chalk up her new bruise to the kind of day it has been.
The rubber balls bounce loudly off the walls, drawing the attention of the inmates one by one. They stop shoving each other long enough to see what the commotion’s all about and then head for the new equipment that’s entered the ring.

Tastee says, “Oh, hell yes,” and shoves past Sarah Connor to get a blue one. Catching it with two hands, she holds it above her head and slams it down toward the floor as hard as she can. It bounces, propelling up toward the ceiling to smoosh a spider lurking there, then continues to bop back and forth like a pinball. It remains stuck in this loop until it eventually hits Shay in the back of the head and changes course entirely.

The trays are quickly forgotten and cast aside, spreading out and filling the air like a strange art exhibit. Soon, at least a dozen prisoners are armed and slamming rubber balls from floor to ceiling, punching errant shots in new directions and sending the spiders and bees scattering. Dark Willow continues to sling fireballs toward the ground, not holding anything back. Spencer sees Johanna is quite the dodgeball wizard, as is Alice. Both women seem very comfortable in large arena warfare. River Tam has integrated the sports element into her floating killet routine. She’s making quick work of eliminating spiders by using geometry and spin moves to maximize her attack from the near corner. Quinn, however, seems to be the most excited of all and is aggressively hurling dodgeballs overhanded with a lion’s roar.

The scene is now as loud and chaotic as ever, but the inmates have regained the advantage as they sling fastballs this way and that, shouting war cries and counts of kills. Spencer barely hears the clanging of the 7pm dinner bell over all the screaming. The entire cafeteria is a battle zone, though it’s unclear who’s winning. It’s unlike anything Spencer’s ever seen. PE was never like this back home.

Then, a blast of bright red light zooms past her, over and over, and Spencer sees Hermione’s back with them, firing her Stupefy spell.

“Here!” a friendly voice calls out behind her.

Spencer turns to see Aphasia soaring in from the kitchen. Her arms are loaded up with new weapons: a large mace, a giant axe, a sword that looks like Excalibur itself, and two guns—one that Spencer doesn’t recognize, but the other might be…a tranquilizer gun? Tucked in between all that is the hairspray for Quinn and a giant, green butt plug. Aphasia’s only barely holding on to everything, and Spencer knows there’s no way she could’ve carried them all with the gravity on.

Quinn sails over and slides the aerosol can out of the mix as her momentum carries her away. “Thanks.” She shakes it vigorously and withdraws her lighter, holding it up as she approaches the far corner of the room. A cluster of spiders is huddled there, implementing a “safety in numbers” strategy, but Quinn’s not scared to take them on herself. She flicks the Zippo wheel and aims the can behind it. “Time to die.”
The instant she fires the spray into the open flame, a circular tunnel of fire carries into the corner and engulfs the spider herd. Tiny squeals of pain mix into the smoke cloud as small, flaming bodies stagger out. But the kickback from the can simultaneously sends Quinn flying backward in a spinning somersault.

“Quinn!” Spencer cries out, but she can’t get there in time.

Fortunately, Clarke happens to be in Quinn’s direct path, and they collide without injury, slowing Quinn down enough to get her bearings and hook onto the nearest arm she sees.

Unfortunately, it’s Idgie’s. She immediately slaps at Quinn’s reach, shouting, “DON’T YOU TOUCH ME, BEE KILLER!” As her body freely rotates in the air, Idgie looks out at the open room with tears in her eyes and cries, “I’m gonna kill ALL you motherfuckers!”

A few women nearby are inspired by the display of confidence and holler back in support, not realizing the intent.

Weapons still in hand, Quinn recenters herself upright and looks around for another potential target.

Spencer, meanwhile, still hasn’t selected a weapon of her own, and Aphasia’s growing impatient. Even now when it’d be technically weightless, she’s not sure she wants something heavy like a sword. If she can’t control her momentum, she could accidentally slice Quinn in half. Besides, it hardly seems like appropriate (or effective) gear for fighting spiders. None of the choices do, except maybe Quinn’s makeshift flamethrower. Spencer would love to have her sledgehammer back right now. It’d be great in zero gravity.

“You didn’t have any bug spray?” she asks, only half kidding.

Aphasia stares at her, arms still full. “Shut the fuck up and take something.” When Spencer reaches for the mystery gun, Aphasia pulls back and tightens her hold on it. “That’s mine.”

Spencer considers her options and doesn’t like any of them. She’s still pretty worried about collateral damage from friendly fire. She’ll behead a friend with that giant axe before she’ll behead a spider.

“Hurry up!” Aphasia says, right before a yellow dodgeball blindsides her. The mace slips out of her grasp, but Spencer’s able to reach out and grab it before it floats too far away. She tucks it back into Aphasia’s right elbow like nothing happened at all. Aphasia closes her eyes and exhales, trying to contain her rage.

Reaching forward, Spencer grabs the item that she believes could inflict the most damage to the spiders while presenting the lowest potential risk to her peers and to herself. The large flared base of the butt plug, maybe three inches in diameter, is caught behind the staff of the giant axe, and she has to wiggle it to coax it out. When it comes loose, Spencer holds the shaft in her fist and raises it by her head in attacking position, bringing the base down hard into the palm of her left hand.

Sure, this’ll do.

“You weird,” Aphasia mutters, making a face.

“You brought it!”

“For Rosa! I was supposed to bring it to her at dinner. Girl just wants to pass the time.”

Now Spencer’s the one making a face. She really doesn’t want to think about where this might have been. “I’ll be sure to get it to her when I’m done.”
“Mmhmm. You better wash it first.”

Aphasia shoves most of the other weapons back toward the kitchen with a single releasing motion, but they float off in entirely different directions than intended, thankfully not harming anyone at such low speeds. She’s holding on to her strange black gun with the giant pod sticking out of the top. It looks semi-automatic, but Spencer hasn’t seen one quite like it before, even in movies.

“Do you really thi—” she starts, but she’s cut off by the sharp, loud rapid-fire Aphasia’s aiming at the ceiling.

Looking up to see just how quickly their air is being vented out into space, Spencer is surprised to see no holes at all—just splatters of pink and orange on the ceiling, covering what must be the shriveled bodies of dead spiders.

It’s a paintball gun.

“TAKE THAT, MOTHERFUCKERS!” Aphasia shouts, letting another long string of pellets fly like she’s John McClane. She misses more spiders than she hits, but as they try to run away, they’re slowing down in the paint, and errant dodgeballs are finishing the job. As the balls bounce back and collide with inmates, everything is slowly being marked with fluorescent paint. The spiders that manage to evade the shots are tracking tiny blue and yellow footprints all over the ceiling.

With Aphasia covering the upper targets, Spencer decides to divide and conquer by taking the low road. She fumbles her way toward the nearest table and finds a place to hold on that gives her full range of motion. Fingers wrapped tightly around the shaft of the green buttplug, she aims the large flared base toward the ground and slams downward, smashing several in one go. It’s a surprisingly effective weapon, and she makes quick work of mashing all the beasts within her reach into mush.

After Spencer clears the immediate area, she works her way down the bench toward the other end and continues killing there. A purple dodgeball smacks her right on the ass, and Regina slams into her floating legs at one point, but otherwise she’s able to carry out her task without disruption. It seems like endless work, killing only a few at a time when there must be a thousand, and her arm is getting tired. Her muscles have weakened without a daily four-hour texting regimen. But she’s making progress. Every crushing blow gets her one step closer to her end goal.

Spencer wants every single one of these smug little bastards to die screaming.

There’s a sharp pain on her right ankle, and Spencer slaps at it, hard. The dead bee falls out of her pant leg to the floor.

She’s gonna kill all of those little fuckers, too.

Then, with a deafening clang, the giant axe crashes down on the table just inches from her face. She screams and flails in midair, trying to scramble away from the deadly weapon, and looks up to see who’s holding it.

It’s Lucy.

“WHAT THE FUCK?!” Spencer pushes against the bench with her foot to launch herself up toward the ceiling, and her legs barely escape the lateral follow-up swing. She has to quickly redirect herself out of the range of Aphasia’s rapid fire, but Spencer’s more concerned with keeping her limbs than ruining her uniform. That is, until three paintballs hit her in the thigh. “OW!”

A few inmates reach for the nearest trays and finally start using them as shields, this time blocking the spray of paint pellets.
Lucy pushes off the ground and soars up toward Spencer, rage in her eyes and battle axe in hand, rearing back to strike again. “STOP…KILLING THEM!” she cries and swings the axe around as hard as she can, but it’s slow enough that Spencer is just able to move away in time.

She catches an orange dodgeball that’s heading in her direction and uses an overhead motion to launch it right at Lucy’s face, striking hard.

Lucy screams and releases the axe to cover her nose with both hands. A few drops of blood slip through her open fingers; it’s probably broken.

Spencer uses the opportunity to kick at the floating axe, catching the flat side of the blade with her heel and sending it away from her assailant. Then, she pushes off the floor as hard as she can to get the fuck away from the injured mass-murderer. Spencer’s just slugged the proverbial hornet’s nest—with which would be really great to have right now—and she can only pray that Lucy will back off now and not seek vengeance.

It’s unlikely.

As Spencer moves toward the front entrance, she sees she wasn’t Lucy’s first target. There’s a headless body floating nearby—god only knows who. One of the Sarah Connors is sliced in half across the midsection on the other side of the room. As flying dodgeballs hit the split torso, more guts and blood are pushed out into the air, floating in strange gelatinous puddles.

Spencer’s heart races and saddens, simultaneously. She knows Lucy values the lives of animals above humans, but she never thought she’d go so far as to attack the other inmates the same way she took out the guards. She definitely didn’t think Lucy would come after her this way. Not after promises of protection and fighting side by side all day.

Lucy catches up to her weapon and locates Spencer in the madness of soaring colored balls and paint splatter. The distance between them is closing fast, and Spencer can only grab on to the limbs of nearby inmates hovering near her to propel herself away.

Then, she hears someone yell, “EXPELLIARMUS!” and the axe goes flying out of Lucy’s hands in the opposite direction, hitting the wall with a crash and bouncing off. Just as quickly, there’s a loud “STUPEFY!” and Lucy’s zapped unconscious before she’s aware of what’s happening.

Hermione soars over and grabs Lucy’s arm before she can float away. She aims the wand at Lucy’s face and says, “Episkey.”

For a moment, Spencer wonders what kind of terrible thing Hermione’s just done to her, but the blood quickly recedes into Lucy’s nose on its own and there’s the slightest shifting of cartilage under the skin. Her nose is healed, just like that.

It’s fucking bizarre.

Hermione asks, “Are you alright?” When she doesn’t get a response from the dumbfounded Spencer, she adds, a bit testily, “There’s no reason to just let her bleed.”

Spencer swallows and nods, “Yeah. Yeah, I’m fine,” even though she’s not really at all. Another stray dodgeball clips her in the shoulder to remind her of that. “Thanks.” Spencer wipes nervous tears from her eyes with her free hand. Her right one is still clutching the sweaty, gut-covered buttplug with a trembling grip. This day needed to end hours ago.

Hermione starts swimming over to Lucy. “I’ll take her home.” She looks around at the madness and adds, “Finish this. Please.” A minute later, they’re through the back door and out of sight.
Another of Dark Willow’s fireballs blazes past, mere feet from where Spencer’s floating. Tastee, Poussey, and Suzanne seem to have found the weapons Aphasia discarded, and the loud clang of the axe and mace against the floor fall in rhythm with the angry roars of the other survivors. A few dodgeballs are still crossing the room, though they’re moving more slowly now as the women are running out of energy. And from the looks of it, there might not be many spiders left, though it’s hard to tell from Spencer’s angle. Maybe they’re all dead, or maybe the inmates have just given up.

But it doesn’t matter either way. Spencer’s numb. She can’t hear the buzzing of the bees anymore, but it could just be that her ears are ringing too loud. Her body and mind are completely spent and past their breaking point. She aches all over. She’s weak and scared and tired. Everything hurts.

She hangs in midair for what must be several minutes, though she’s having trouble tracking time. It occurs to her that she may have been bitten by a spider at some point, too. Spencer’s no stranger to the disorienting effects of the venom. Frankly, some sleep sounds fucking lovely right now.

And then, without warning, Spencer falls five feet to the ground, banging her knee on the edge of a cafeteria table before slamming to the floor. She cries out, joining a chorus of shouts among the thunderous sound of falling corpses and clanging weapons. The dodgeballs bounce a few times and roll away harmlessly under the benches.

Not that she isn’t grateful for all the help and clever ideas today, but Spencer wishes Hermione’d had the decency of giving her a goddamn heads up before restoring the gravity.

Rubbing her aching knee, Spencer sits up and tries to acclimate to the blood flowing properly through her body again. She has been through the goddamn wringer today.

“Did we get ‘em?” someone asks from the other side of the room, maybe Tastee.

No one answers but everyone looks around, surveying the battlefield. It’s very quiet and still for a moment.

“I think so?” Poussey says cautiously. She’s the first one to try to stand up, and she wobbles a bit, holding on to the closest table, but manages to get her footing.

Clarke rises next and stamps one more spider with her left heel. “Yeah. They’re dead.”

Everyone quietly looks around the room, a little uncertain.

“Wait!” Suzanne shouts, pointing at the back wall, and Aphasia fires off a stream of paint bullets in a massive display of overkill.

They all fall silent again. Then, Ripley says, “I see one,” and picks up a nearby yellow dodgeball, firing unsuccessfully, but the remaining Sarah Connor is on the rebound. “There,” Ripley says with a sigh. “Now we can—”

Shaw stomps hard on one crawling across the bench, then sits down without a word.

“Hang on,” Starbuck says, moving toward the back corner of the room where a critter is crawling up the wall.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” Rosa Diaz says, rolling her eyes.

Shay leans over to rest her hands on her knees, exhausted. She sees something covered in green paint
crawling across her shoe and steps on it. Then, Starbuck squashes what is hopefully the final spider, smearing neon orange stains on the already ruined wall.

One by one, the survivors slowly get on their unsteady feet. A few of them vomit a little, but that’s not unusual in the cafeteria on any given day. Of the sixty or so inmates on board, it looks like most of them made it through, but it’s hard to ignore the dozen bodies littering the floor. Then again, only time will tell if they are dead or merely unconscious.

Spencer notices Vee face-down across a table in the back of the room, just as Suzanne runs over to check her pulse and tend to her. Spencer selfishly hopes Vee never wakes up. Something about that woman just doesn’t sit right with her.

Covered head to toe in paint and spider guts, friends and cellmates begin to find each other and offer handshakes, high fives, hugs, and playful shoulder punches. Poussey and Tastee are reenacting their finest battle moves and laughing, while Ripley and Vasquez appear to be celebrating in a more... hands-on way on the table behind Joan Watson. Clarke runs over to help Suzanne care for Vee, removing the uniform from a nearby corpse and bundling it like a pillow under Vee’s head. Root is examining Lexa’s bitten ankle, somewhat against the will of the patient, and Quinn has taken on the gruesome task of matching up halves of sliced bodies, aided by a seriously grossed out Kat.

Aphasia approaches Spencer and points toward the door with her thumb, “I’m gonna…. ” She takes off running in the same direction Hermione left with Lucy moments ago.

Spencer nods, then resumes taking inventory of the room. The earlier tension from the rivalry is gone, replaced by the bond of women who survived a battle together. Between this and the earlier skirmish with the Boomers, they’ve had quite a day indeed.

But then she hears sniffling behind her, and Spencer’s eyes fall closed in honor of the women who met their end in this horrible way. She turns to see Big Boo wiping her face with her forearm, not taking her eyes off the mangled body of Nichols stuck between the legs of a cafeteria table.

“I’m gonna fucking kill whoever is responsible for this,” Boo says to her dead friend, sniffing hard between breaths. “Somebody’s gonna fucking die.”

She’s not the only one in tears. Idgie’s so upset that all her bees were murdered that she screams a string of sobbing, incoherent expletives and storms out of the room. “SCREW ALL OF YOU! every last one!”

Shay watches her go and then looks back at the concerned faces near her. “She’ll be fine.”

“What was all that, anyway?” Poussey asks the room as she smears some paint off her jumpsuit. “Space spiders?”

“I’ve seen them before,” Clarke says. “They came after us one night.”

Spencer whips around. How did she not know that someone else had seen them? Granted, she and Clarke have never spoken before tonight, but still. Wouldn’t she have heard something? Maybe she should have conducted interviews with the prisoners before mounting her assault to get Quinn back. Too late now. “What happened?”

“They wanted me,” Octavia says, tightening her grip around Aphasia’s mace. “They came in the night. We killed them all.”

“Apparently, you didn’t,” Tastee taunts.
“The fuck do you know?” Octavia fires back, and the room quickly dissolves into petty arguments again between the two sides. So much for their post-war peacetime.

A few women start pushing and shoving, sliding in the paint and scrapping awkwardly. Most everyone seems too tired to put much force behind it, other than Shaw, who just walks around the room silently punching people.

Over the sound of cursing and insults, Spencer hears Vasquez say, “*What’s she doing here?*”

Turning to look, Spencer sees Becky’s face peering through the window between the kitchen and the cafeteria. Becky gasps and says, “Oh shit!” before quickly moving out of sight in the direction of the back door.

*Wasn’t she supposed to be locked up down in the lab?*

Vasquez looks at Ripley, and they both take off running after Becky with Spencer right on their tail.
Short Live the Queen

Chapter Notes

Here’s the map of the Uterius and the character photo index.

It takes less than half a lap around the perimeter hallway for Ripley to catch up to Becky. Reaching out her hand, she grabs Becky’s hair and yanks her to the ground as the girl lets out a horrible scream and a string of expletives that stops Spencer in her tracks. They hear the pitter-patter of more footsteps behind them, then Quinn appears beside Spencer. Ripley pins Becky’s arms behind her back and holds her steady as her partner approaches.

“How the fuck did you get up here?” Vasquez asks.

“How aren’t you DEAD?” Becky fires back. “You should all be spider food by now!”

Spencer steps up next to Vasquez. “You know about the spiders?”

“Of course I know about the spiders, dumbass. THEY’RE MY SPIDERS. I’m the spider boss, BITCH.”

Some spit sprays across Spencer’s face, but she’s more bothered by the two words coming back to haunt her.

**QUEEN B**

The message was never about Beth or even the Beyoncé shark outside.

It was Becky.

Working side by side with Sue, she was allowed in the lab, and she must’ve had access to this secret project the whole time. Maybe Sue knew about it, maybe she didn’t. But Becky’s always had free reign to move around the prison, so she could easily be behind this. Spencer can’t believe she didn’t consider her a suspect earlier.

“You’re such an idiot, Bee-stings,” Becky scowls. “Go back to Rosegood and fuck your girlfriend’s chainsaw until you’re DEAD!”

Spencer doesn’t know how to respond to that.

“Vee’s gonna come for me any second now,” Becky assures them, “so, WATCH YOUR BACK, BITCHES.”

Vasquez, Spencer, and Ripley exchange worried glances.

“You work for Vee now?” Spencer asks. “I thought you worked for Sue?”

“KEEP UP, BEANSTALK. WE’RE IN CHARGE NOW. We’re partners.”

Becky pulls hard against Ripley’s grip, but she’s severely outmatched. Neon paint is getting all over...
Becky’s back and hair as she struggles. Her glasses are slipping down her nose, and her red forehead is showing tiny beads of sweat. Even with that scowl, she’s not nearly as intimidating as she probably thinks she is. It doesn’t help that she’s a full foot shorter than most of the women standing around her.


“You bet your flat ass! She promised if I helped take out some of you losers, I’d be the new boss, too. Sue Sylvester can suck it. I’m nobody’s BITCH!”

“Clearly,” Spencer agrees, slipping into good-cop mode. “Well, then it’s a good thing Vee’s dead. Now you’re in charge all by yourself.”

“She’s—” Quinn starts, but Spencer holds out a subtle quieting hand.

Becky’s eyes bulge. “Vee’s DEAD?”

“You didn’t see her on the table in there?” Spencer points back behind them. “Your spiders ate half her leg.” It’s a bluff, but it could work.

“Yeah, it was bad,” Ripley says, meeting Spencer’s eyes with a small nod. “She bled out before they could finish her off.”

Quinn sees the play they’re making and adds, “She left you all alone.”

Spencer appreciates the backup and crosses her arms with renewed confidence, raising one eyebrow at Becky. With no power player to hide behind, Becky’s going to break.

Or, at least she’s supposed to. Instead, her face lights up with pure joy. “Seriously?! That’s AWESOME! Now I get to run this place by myself!” Becky looks around her, as if admiring her new empire. “And now you’ll work for ME!” It seems lost on her that she’s in no shape or position to do any such thing. Her glasses are falling off her red, sweaty face, and the more she struggles against Ripley’s grip, the more she winces at the pain.

Spencer looks around to see if anyone else is buying an ounce of this crap. Doesn’t look like it.

“So, boss,” she offers, “tell us about how you got started on this journey to prison leadership. Rumor has it you’re the one who airlocked Jenny Schecter.”

“Yeah!” Becky sounds very proud of herself.

Spencer pauses awkwardly, waiting for a tale to unravel. After five seconds of silence, she gives up. “Okay, I guess that settles that.”

It’s not the thrilling confessional moment she expected, but at least now she knows for sure that everyone’s stories line up. Spencer’s glad to have this murder mystery wrapped up neatly once and for all. Because no matter how this whole mess plays out with the spiders and the clones and everything, after all the drama around it, it would’ve been absolute bullshit to never find out who really killed Jenny Schecter. Just shoddy storytelling, really.

“Who knew about that? Just you and Sue?”

“And Jenny, HA HA,” Becky adds, laughing at her own joke.

“And your spiders, of course.” Spencer’s happy to contribute to the grand narrative. “So they’d
know how powerful you are."

Becky squirms against Ripley’s hold. “That’s right!”

Spencer can picture Becky bursting into some secret room in the lab and jumping up and down as she screams, “I killed Jenny Schecter! I killed Jenny Schecter!” It’s a weird image, but it fits. After all, the late great Elizabeth proved spiders of that intelligence level can write down things they’ve heard. Maybe after Becky’s excited proclamation, the evil ones came to send a warning to Jenny’s cellmates, just like they’ve left other warnings these last few days.

But now they’re dead, and Becky’s going to get what’s coming to her. Justice for all.

Vasquez steps forward and leans down close to Becky’s face. “You’re not in charge here, shit stain. You’re gonna follow Schecter right out the airlock after I squash you like a fucking bug.”

“Oh yeah? Just try it, rug muncher!” Becky kicks her foot toward Vasquez but misses by a lot. The move sends her glasses to the floor, cracking one lens.

Vasquez steps hard on the frames and twists her foot, destroying them quite thoroughly. “Oops.”

Squinting and frowning, Becky shakes her angry head. “YOU’RE GONNA PAY FOR THAT!”

Spencer’s trying to piece together exactly how this all went down. There are still gaps in the sequence that led to a pile of dead girls at the bottom of a garbage chute. But before she can press Becky further, shen hears people approaching up ahead, behind Ripley.

Inmates trickle around the corner up by the front door of the cafeteria—Shaw, Lexa, Regina, Starbuck, Alice, and more, at least two dozen women. They look somewhat lost, unsure of where to go. No one’s in a hurry to get back in a prison cell. They head in her direction once they see something’s happening.

“This looks fun,” Root says playfully. She and the others stop a few feet back, wary of getting in the way of whatever Ripley is doing to Becky.

“Where’s Lucy?” Dark Willow asks.

Spencer’s not feeling the least bit sympathetic after Lucy tried to slice her in half. “She’s taking a time-out.”

A ripple of anxiety makes its way through the crowd as they murmur to each other and shift uncomfortably, displeased with Spencer’s answer. She needs a distraction, fast. “But good old Becky here was just explaining to us how she helped Vee kill all our friends in the Mess Hall.”

Lexa steps forward with vengeance in her eyes. “An unforgiveable attack on my people. Blood must have blood!”

She raises a fist and charges at Becky with a growl, but Vasquez moves quickly and manages to stop her. Shaw steps in and pulls Lexa back by the shoulders, rolling her eyes the whole time.

Spencer’s half-inclined to just let them duke it out Fight Club style, but she does need whatever information Becky’s holding first. Probably. “Tell us what you did for Vee.”

“She sucked my tits!” Becky cries.

But Spencer isn’t deterred. “Huh. If you don’t have any useful information, I guess we don’t need
you alive.” She looks around and offers to the group, “Dibs, anyone?”

The whole circle around them closes in a step or two, and Becky immediately changes her tune. “I unlocked the doors! Vee told me who she wanted dead, and I let the spiders out and showed them who to kill and opened the door!”

“They can’t just crawl through the bars?” Tastee asks, like Becky’s an idiot.

“Their victims can’t,” Spencer says. “The spiders took advantage of zero gravity to float them out.”

“Damn,” Tastee concedes, “that’s real smart.”

Rosa Diaz asks, “The guards never noticed a girl floating down the hallway?”

Something Spencer’s been wondering, herself.

“DUH,” Becky says. “They weren’t there.”

“Where were they?” Quinn asks.

Spencer tries to anticipate what the answer might be. If the inmates have ever been left unattended, other than this afternoon’s Code Pink, this is news to her.

“They were too busy playing their stupid Code Red dodgeball tournament!” From Becky’s tone, she’s clearly harboring some resentment about this.

“Dodgeball?” Regina asks.

“In gym 8?” Spencer remembers seeing a set-up in there that looked fairly recent. It must be where Hermione summoned all the equipment from.

Maritza raises a hand anxiously. “Oh, I got a doctor’s note saying I have to sit out from all high-impact activities.” She looks at Flaca and says, “I spent way too long on these nails.”

“Word.”

“You don’t get to play!” Becky yells. “It’s for employees ONLY.”

Quinn’s eyes narrow.

Spencer asks, “This is an ongoing thing? Every Shark Week?”

Becky scowls again. “While you losers are busy bleeding all over your beds, Raven turns off the gravity and we get to have some real fun. My team is only twenty points behind Buffy’s in the tournament. That’s why I’m so mad they don’t let me play anymore!”

Spencer couldn’t care less about Becky’s dodgeball career, yet she has no choice but to keep following this trail. “Why not?”

Becky’s face falls and her voice gets suddenly quiet. “I threw up one time from spinning too much. I didn’t mean to. It just happened.” Then, the fire returns as she cries, “But I’m a dodgeball champion! I could take everybody out in five seconds! I keep telling Sue to put me back in, but she says it’s not safe.”

“Sue plays dodgeball?” Ripley asks.
“She’s the referee, dummy!” Becky scrunches her nose. “All the guards are too busy playing with their balls to notice I’m not there. And now they just look STUPID because they can’t do their jobs. Sue’s gonna bench them for sure. Then I’m gonna be the dodgeball CAPTAIN.”

Root says, “Then I suppose killing innocent women was all worth it in the end!”

Whether Becky knows all the guards are actually dead now remains to be seen. Spencer’s too stunned by this whole revelation to bring it up. All this death, all this fear, over a stupid PE game? (Dodgeball in zero-gravity does sound amazing, but not enough to kill a bunch of people over.)

Millions of miles away from Earth, the same high school dynamics still apply. Spencer knows first-hand that getting bullied will drive people to do all sorts of crazy things, and this is no exception. It’s amazing that Becky got away with this for almost an entire year.

Why did Sue never investigate it? Spencer overheard her on the phone trying to rationalize a few of the deaths, but did she not even care what had happened? Maybe Sue was okay with some guard-on-prisoner violence. It helps ease Spencer’s guilt about all the reciprocation that took place today.

Despite the shock and sadness that all of this was caused by exclusion from a children’s game, of all things, Spencer’s feeling quite smug and proud for finally ousting the villains once and for all. The other inmates should be grateful she came on board when she did so she could put a stop to the murders, since Sue clearly wasn’t going to.

Raising her voice so everyone can hear, Spencer announces, “Now that Becky has confessed to assisting in the murders of the ten missing girls, she’s gonna tell us how Vee chose her targets.”

“SUCK MY NUTS,” Becky shouts.

But Chloe O’Brian answers like it’s obvious. “The Order of Sin.” Everyone around her nods and mumbles in agreement.

“The what?” Spencer asks, looking around the group. Whatever Chloe just said, it sounds terrible.

“Vee’s enemies,” Lexa says. Her serious stare is deeply unsettling. “The rival clan.”

“Clan?” Spencer says before she can stop herself.

Rosa shoots Lexa a condescending look. “She means ‘gang.’ There’s no such thing as prison clans.”

Spencer’s mouth falls open, but…yeah. Of course there are gangs in prison. Even in space. I’m a fucking idiot.

There’s an awkward silence, then Starbuck cracks a cocky smile. “You’ve been here, what, a whole month, Shit Girl?”

Becky starts to laugh obnoxiously loud and doesn’t stop even when Ripley yanks hard enough to rip some of her hair out.

Starbuck keeps egging Spencer on. “And nobody came calling? Yikes. Even O’Brian got tapped, and she’s been here four days. Guess you weren’t even good enough for the Pastels.” She makes a face that says, Wow, that is really embarrassing for you.

Lucy Diamond turns to Starbuck and says, “Oh, like Lucy would ever want your drunk ass.” Then she adds, “and I do mean both Lucys.”
Spencer’s not sure if Lucy Diamond’s defending her or not, but she’ll take it. “I’ve actually been here three months,” she says for the second time today. Looking around, she repeats, louder, “THREE MONTHS, EVERYONE,” then faces Starbuck again. “Thanks for noticing.”

“She noticed your tits,” someone says behind her, and the others laugh.

Spencer looks back at Lucy Diamond and balks at one point in particular. “…Your gang’s called the Pastels?” Even for the Play-Doh crowd, that seems incredibly…fluffy. Not very prison-gang-like.

“It’s two words,” Alice says. “Past Hells. Lucy says remembering the pain in our past can make us stronger in the present.”

*Oh. Clever.*

The earlier conversation in the kitchen comes flooding back to Spencer. Lucy mentioned “her girls” and that Vee and Aphasia “had the rest.” These must be the gang lines. But…why did no one want her? She’s not used to being a social outcast, especially when it comes to tight groups of women. Surely the other inmates wanted her to join them, right? Spencer’s cool! She’s fun! She’s not at all an obsessive, neurotic, overly talkative and paranoid conspiracy theorist. She’s the life of any party!

Well. Okay, maybe not.

Still, she’s smart! She’s valuable! Maybe there was some sign and she missed it. Maybe there was an invitation she never received. Maybe in all of her cell transfers, a note got passed but she’d already moved on and nobody forwarded her mail. There has to be something.

But she shared a bunk bed with Aphasia for a goddamn month, so there were plenty of chances to invite her in. It’s more than a little insulting that Aphasia never did. Not that Spencer would’ve necessarily said yes. She still thinks Aphasia’s a nutcase. A multi-lingual, waffle-loving, Rubiks-cube-solving nutcase. And she’s under the impression that Aphasia was never too keen on her, either. Maybe that could’ve changed. It would’ve been nice to receive an information packet so Spencer could at least give the offer proper consideration. Maybe there were scholarships she could apply for, or essays to write.

But because Aphasia passed her over, she became sloppy seconds for Lucy’s Spank ‘n’ Sparkle crew, which does not sit any better with her. Nor does the fact that she’s been adopted out of pity. Or even just for sex.

*Wait, was that her initiation? That first time with Lucy?*

*Oh god. It’s like a sorority hazing gone very, very wild. But wait a second…*

…Now that she’s thinking about it, maybe Vee is the one who tried recruiting her. Vee did offer up that test of getting Hermione’s file from the office. And she gave that speech in the cafeteria earlier about everyone having a skill and something to contribute. That was Spencer’s opportunity to show her worth to the big boss lady. Maybe if Spencer had met Vee’s expectations, she’d have been offered a key to that kingdom, like Becky was. Maybe she could be in a power position right now instead of being not just on the bottom, but on the outside. Though, now that she knows Vee is behind all the killings, Spencer feels even better about not placing her allegiance there.

*The Past Hells it is, she sighs to herself.*

“So,” Spencer starts, then hesitates. It’s weird talking about all this gang stuff without any of the supposed leaders present. “Some of you are in The Sins, which I assume is Aphasia’s group?”
“That’s right,” Octavia says. She holds up her hands, making a C with one and an O with the other, though Spencer has no idea why.

Then, several other people hold up the same sign—Vasquez, Root, Shaw, Joan Watson, two girls Spencer doesn’t know, Starbuck, Rosa Diaz.

And Quinn.

That knocks the wind out of Spencer’s chest, but she hides it. “Not very many of you.” Still, it looks like a tough group of smart, no-nonsense women who don’t take any shit. Now Spencer’s mad again to not have been invited.

Quinn drops her hands, and the others take the cue to do the same. “Raven’s with us, too.”

“And Hermione,” Joan Watson adds. “So was Katniss.”

Quinn nods. “We had more—Aeryn, Vause, Paulie, Stacey.” She looks pointedly at Becky. “Before someone decided to kill them.”

Becky sneers, “You don’t scare me, Jeffrey Dumber.”

“Then I guess you don’t know me that well.”

“Jesus,” Spencer says, running through her mental list of the murder roster. It’s all of them. “No wonder Aphasia hates Vee so much. I would, too.” Being in this Order of Sin or whatever is basically Death Row.

“It’s retaliation,” Root says. “Most of us were with Vee before Aphasia arrived.” She glares at Lucy’s crew and says, wryly, “Not everyone has a Play-Doh kink.” Root refocuses on Spencer. “If I’m going to get my hands dirty, it needs to be for a worthier cause. Aphasia brought one to the table.”

Starting a Madonna dance troupe? she wants to say. Spencer looks at the small group of women. “So, you defected? Starting a third gang.”

“Upsetting the great equilibrium of space prison,” Root says with a whoopsy-daisy expression.

Spencer pauses for a moment, looking over the faces of the inmates, then Becky, and she has to ask—“If you all knew it was Vee this whole time, why didn’t you say anything to Sue about it?”

“What makes you think we didn’t?” Shaw asks in her overly intimidating way. Root gives her a subtle look to stand down.

“Or maybe,” Octavia says to Spencer, “you really mean, why didn’t anyone talk to you about it?” The truth of it cuts Spencer to the core. “We don’t know you. We can take care of ourselves.”

Root tries to keep things friendly. “We didn’t go to Sue because we had no proof. Prison politics is complicated. Aphasia doesn’t want an investigation. Nothing that might draw attention to her ties in here,” Root explains carefully. She still has a mixed audience. “We need more time. But we have a plan.”

Starbuck rolls her eyes and mutters, “Where have I heard that before?”

“Even though Vee’s been killing you off one by one,” Spencer says. “You’re just waiting.”

Root narrows her eyes, like she’s annoyed Spencer’s not understanding her. “It’s a calculated risk.”
“You’re not a ‘calculated risk,’” Spencer counters, “you’re people!” She knows Root means Aphasia is protecting Hermione above all others, but it still seems stone-cold that a leader wouldn’t stand up for those who’ve sworn allegiance to them. *Does loyalty have a different definition up here than on Earth?* “And you’re fine to just play a waiting game, knowing you could be next when that Code Red sounds.”

“Of course it’s not fine,” Root says. “But we swore an oath to fight for a cause, and that’s bigger than any one person. We know what we signed on for. Not all fights are bees and dodgeballs in the cafeteria. Some fights are even worth dying for.”

There’s weight to her words, and Spencer wonders what this woman’s backstory is. Is she part of this supposed Wizarding War that Aphasia told her about? What else could it be?

Spencer doesn’t know what to say. There’s clearly more going on here than she can understand, and who is she to tell a soldier their cause isn’t worthwhile?

“Aphasia’s doing the best she can,” Root says gently. “We know what she’s about.”

“Waffles?” Spencer offers flippantly, just to break the tension. The Sins don’t laugh, but everyone else does.

The levity of the moment provides an opening for new voices to join the conversation.

Lucy Diamond offers with an arrogant smirk, “Maybe you’re all just easy to pick off. Vee’s too smart to fuck with Lucy.” She squints as her brow furrows. “The other Lucy. Not me-Lucy.”

Spencer realizes that’s true—none of the victims have been from Lucy’s group. She points around the circle cautiously. “You guys are all in the Past Hells?”

Shay, Lucy Diamond, River Tam, Dark Willow, Lexa, Clarke, Moriarty, Alice, Regina, Chloe O’Brian, Sophia Burset, Flaca, Maritza, and the lone remaining Sarah Connor all acknowledge by crossing their arms, raising hands, or stepping forward out of the ranks. There are ten more girls with raised hands behind them that Spencer doesn’t even know the names of yet. It’s a much more intimidating presence, just from the numbers alone, and Spencer has to assume that Faith and Santana would be shoulder to shoulder with them if they were here. Probably Idgie, too. Maybe even Mack, if she was willing to break from her bank-robbing trio. That girl does love her some Lucy Fabray.

The only inmate present who hasn’t expressed a side is Ripley, but it’s probably hard to establish gang relations from Solitary, especially when everyone is terrified of you.

Spencer’s trying to process this new lens on the world around her. Lucy’s influence has an even wider reach than she realized. Only a fraction of these women are in the Play-Doh Funhouse class. There are representatives from at least a dozen cells, which is over half the prison. Women that Spencer’s never even talked to before. But they all seem to know exactly who she is.

This is some serious mafia-level shit. How does one girl control this many people without any executive power?

*Oh my god, has Lucy fucked every single one of these women??* The crazy thing is, it feels entirely plausible.

Assuming it isn’t just a sex thing, Spencer can’t help but think—if joining Aphasia’s gang is a death sentence, maybe some of these women only pretended to pledge loyalty to Lucy to stay alive. It’s not a bad tactic.
Spencer chases a train of thought down the rabbit hole, wondering how far she would go—sex aside—in sucking up to Lucy in her stupid class if it meant protection from Vee and the spiders. Or what that would even look like, considering Lucy’s position on violence against animals. It certainly didn’t help Faith when…


“That a problem?” Regina asks.

Spencer’s mind is racing. “Then why would Vee send the spiders to take her last night?”

Before anyone else can answer, a new voice sends chills up her spine. “Because I needed you to be scared, Spencer.”

She whips around, heart pounding out of her chest, and sees two dark eyes staring back at her like they’ve just risen out of Hell itself.

It’s Vee.

But even worse, she’s surrounded by her pack of loyal minions—Tastee, Poussey, Suzanne, Johanna, Kat, Jessica Huang, and a few other women Spencer doesn’t know. Big Boo’s standing on the end, carrying the lifeless body of Nichols in her arms. The redness in her face gives away that she’s been crying, and now she looks angry enough to rip someone’s chest open.

Vee’s sporting a bruise on her forehead from when Aphasia knocked her out, but she’s recovered now and more than ready to throw down. Fresh drops of blood are dripping from her wounds to the floor. She has fire in her eyes and more than a few dead spiders in her hair. Her hands are empty, but Spencer has no doubt those fingernails could slit her throat. At the very least, there are enough cronies here to hold Spencer down while Vee cracks her sternum open with her boots.

This isn’t going to end well.

“So, tell me—” Vee begins. She and her gang move forward together in a V-shaped formation (how appropriate), slowly approaching Spencer like a tank about to mow her down. When Vee’s only three feet from her target, she holds up a hand, signaling for the others to stop behind her. But then she takes three more steps forward to position herself right in front of Spencer’s eyes. Staring dead ahead, Vee breaks out into a wide, eerie grin and holds it without blinking. “Are you scared yet?”
“OH MY GOD, THEY SAID YOU WERE DEAD!” Becky screams. The piercing voice cuts through the terror of the moment.

Jessica Huang smiles and gives a soft laugh. “Silly elf. This is very embarrassing for you.”

Vee shifts to stand at ease, giving herself room to breathe while she handles this distraction. “Not quite,” she tells Becky. “But you will be. Right after our friend Miss Hastings.”

“Say what?!” Becky sputters.

“You’ve been sharing our private conversations with the enemy.” Vee squints in disapproval. “I need people I can trust. That’s clearly not you.”

“But I didn’t tell them anything! These losers were saying they wanted to KILL you!”

“I was lying!” Spencer yells back at Becky. “I just wanted you to talk! You’re the one who was excited she was dead.”

“It’s the truth,” Ripley offers.

Vee considers this version of events. “I’m sure there are a lot of people here who wouldn’t mind seeing me dead. Everybody wants power, even way out here. Sometimes we’ll do just about anything to get it. You know, I always thought that would make for an interesting book. Several noble families all vying for power, killing each other off to take over the throne. It’s almost like a game, isn’t it? You could make a whole series out of that if you drag it on long enough.”

“I’d read it!” Becky says.

Vee looks down at her. “Shut up.” It isn’t flippant, it’s a command.

The word Lannister pops into Spencer’s mind, taking her back to cell 1. “Last night, why settle for scaring me when you could just kill me? Why bring Faith into it?” She hopes there’s safety in numbers and that if Vee tries to take her out right here and now, enough people would jump in to defend her.

“Because I don’t want you dead if you don’t need to be, Spencer. I was hoping you’d seek me out on your own once you learned how much power I have here. You’re smart enough to know it’s important to be on good terms with those who can make things happen. But the closer you became with Lucy, the less I was willing to wait. Eventually, I intervened to get you out of there. It was for your own good.” But her smile doesn’t reach her eyes, and something doesn’t feel right about this.

“Faith is big muscle with a big mouth,” Vee continues. “There is…some value in that. But she’s largely expendable. Besides, women like her just see you as another hot piece of ass. From what I’ve heard just a few cells away, Lucy sees you in a similar light. But you and I both know your best
feature is your brain. I need smart people on my team. Girls who can see the big picture. Problem solvers. People with skills.” Vee searches the roster of faces in the crowded hallway. “Where’s Aphasia?” she barks.

The inmates all look around wondering the same thing themselves.

Suddenly, a loud voice comes booming from behind them, back at the start of the hallway. “YOU WILL LEAVE HER ALONE!”

Spencer hears the angry footsteps marching before she sees the mop of hair bouncing in time. Hermione’s got her wand raised and cuts through the crowd, looking meaner than ever. She passes Spencer and stops about ten feet away from Vee, in between the groups of onlookers.

“Be careful, little girl,” Vee warns. “Wouldn’t want you to poke your eye out with that thing.” A beat passes. “Where’s your girlfriend?”

“You don’t want her, not really. You want me.” Hermione sounds quite confident in the face of danger. She drops her arms to her sides, wand and all. “Here I am.”

Vee pauses to consider the girl’s words. No one seems to know exactly what’s happening here—A deal? A trap? A sex proposal? The tension in the overcrowded hallway is palpable.

“Just like that? With everybody watching?”

Hermione doesn’t deny it.

Vee’s chin rises and her eyes narrow as she considers her options. After appearing weak during the battle, reparation of her street cred (space cred?) depends on how she handles this. “Why now?”

“Because I know you’re a woman of your word. And if I give you what you want, you’ll leave Aphasia alone, and all of her people. Permanently.”

Tastee chimes in, “More like, I’m gonna end you permanently.”

Hermione raises her wand again, this time at her taunter, but then looks back to the boss without lowering her weapon. “Well?”

Vee crosses her arms with a smile. “You know, it’s so funny you should say that.” She looks to her comrades, who seem to be in on the joke. “I remember Aphasia coming to me with the same kind of idea just a few months ago.” She asks Big Boo, “You remember that?” and her whole gang nods.

Turning back to Hermione, Vee steps forward to deliver this history lesson. “Aphasia set up a meet around Thanksgiving. After-hours, very hush-hush. I think you were out getting caught again,” she adds, toying with her enemy. “She said she’d get something for me, something really good. And if she did, would I leave you alone, once and for all? That was her offer. See? Déjà vu. You two are just a bunch of lovesick jailbirds, aren’t you?” Vee’s gang laughs to themselves. “It was a good deal, and I accepted. So, I’m afraid I can’t take you up on your offer, Miss Granger, as I am a woman of my word. You’re off-limits to me now.”

Hermione wasn’t expecting this. Her wand arm sags slightly with the weight of Vee’s words. “What did she steal for you?” She sounds afraid to ask.

“A keycard. Swiped off the doctor during a routine check-up, if I’m not mistaken. That girlfriend of yours sure does have quick and sticky fingers.” Vee bites her lip, suppressing a giggle at her own loaded comment. “Thanks to her, I’ve had full access to DYAD for months. Through Becky, of
Spencer’s eyes go wide and immediately find Quinn. *Oh no.*

Tastee whispers, “*What’s DYAD?*” to Poussey, like she missed some notes in class.

Suzanne looks up and points toward the ceiling, squinting hard, as if she’s developing a very complex thought. “Sounds like…math that can kill you.”


“That’s the prison life, ain’t it?” Poussey offers. “Do Years And Die.”

“Aw, das tight!” Tastee laughs, and the two exchange a complex high-five. As the laughter fades, so does her smile. “And kinda depressing.”

Right now, Spencer would be quite grateful for the assurance that she’s still got years to go. This new information has hit her like a ton of bricks. The spider killings trace back to *Aphasia.* Not intentionally, of course, but the fact remains. Aphasia was trying to protect Hermione, and as a result, almost half of her gang is dead. Much like how Spencer tried to protect Quinn, and now Graham, the detective, and sixteen guards are lying in pieces all over the prison. So many good intentions, so much death.

Vee ignores her cronies and resumes her story. “Poor little Aphasia didn’t even know what she was handing over. Maybe she didn’t ask because she didn’t want to know. All that mattered was getting my attention off of you. She gave me the key to the kingdom, quite literally.” With a wicked smile, Vee asks Hermione playfully, “Did you know there’s a secret laboratory on this ship?”

The other inmates start asking each other about it, but no one seems to know anything. Spencer sees that those who do are keeping their mouths shut.

Hermione straightens up slightly as she lowers her wand. “I was just visiting it earlier. It’s where the thousand spiders came from. But we fought and we won. We killed every last one of them. I understand if you missed that, since my girlfriend knocked you unconscious. Fairly early on, as I understand it.”

Spencer bites her lip and tries to hide her immediate reaction of, *Damn!* Hermione isn’t afraid to throw down with the prison puppet-master.

*That makes one of us.*

Vee just smiles. “Believe me, I knew all about them long before you did. DYAD’s been on this ship longer than you’ve been alive. As a matter of fact, they’re the reason I’m behind bars in the first place.”

Spencer can’t help herself. “How?”

That gets the whisper train moving again as confused inmates look to each other for answers.

“Embezzling,” Vee says. “They didn’t like that I was skimming a bit off the top for a rainy day. Not enough to affect profit shares, of course. Just a little boost to what was, frankly, a shameful warden’s salary that I never should have accepted in the first place. But I guess twenty years ago I didn’t fully understand or appreciate what I’m capable of like I am now.”

“You used to be warden?” Spencer gawks. “Here?”
“You must be newer than I thought. Yes, I was in charge before Sue came in and turned this place into the pathetic excuse for a prison that it is now. You’d think she was trying to run a community college with all of her ideas about classes and rehabilitation, and that godawful Madonna noise.” Vee turns to Suzanne and says, “Honestly, I think it’s taken years off my life,” then resumes the history lesson.

“When I was in charge, this prison was a booming business built on commerce—supply and demand. We had a reputation. We got things done. And after dinner we listened to real music like Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday and Bobby Brown. Sue lets her emotions get in the way of her job. Giving prisoners special treatment. Do you know Lucy was only nine years old when we locked her up?”

Spencer’s expression asks the question for her: “We?”

“That’s right. I was in charge when she had her day of…” Vee looks at Suzanne. “What did she call it? Paint-By-Numbers? Painting the walls with blood as she counted her victims. One, two, three, four…”

Jessica Huang leans in. “Four is very unlucky.”

“I would’ve put her in Solitary if it hadn’t been full.” Vee says it loudly enough that all the Past Hells can hear her. “Even as a child. She was very unstable and still is. And Sue treats her like a spoiled brat—special clothes and Spanish lessons and all the paint she can drink. But I promise you, that’s going to change very soon.”

Shay’s fed up with the speech. “Shove it up your ass.”

But Vee isn’t fazed. She addresses the entire group now. “Mark my words, Sue Sylvester isn’t going to be warden much longer. I’ve tried to be civil. I could’ve killed her off years ago, but that isn’t really my style. I appreciate a sense of decorum, even in a place like this—especially in a place like this. I know the system; I went through proper channels and procedures specifically to avoid an all-out coup. I filed complaints against her for nepotism and negligence and unethical practices from the moment she took over, but nothing changed. Nobody cared what I had to say anymore.” She pauses before continuing. “Then, not long after she took over, certain inmates Sue didn’t like began to disappear at Christmastime.” She looks at Ripley now. “It took me a few years to see that it was a pattern, not a coincidence. They were all aligned with me. I learned too late that she had you doing her dirty work.”

“No,” Ripley shakes her head. “It wasn’t me. Whatever she told you, it’s not true.”

The onlookers all murmur, amused she would try weaseling out of this. Everyone knows she’s guilty. It’s common knowledge.

“They were good soldiers. I miss them. Catra, Carmilla, Lena,” Vee says, “Xena, Kennedy, Theo Crain…”

“I’ve never killed anyone, I swear.”

“It’s true!” Spencer says. She recognizes those names from Ripley’s file but had no idea they had been aligned with Vee. “It wasn’t her.”

Ripley turns sharply at this, scared of what Spencer’s about to say.

Suddenly, Spencer remembers the last lie Sue told Ripley—that Vasquez was responsible for the murders. She must think Spencer’s about to sell out her girlfriend to the mob. “It was Sue,” Spencer
clarifies. “She was blaming Ripley and got all of you to believe it, but it wasn’t her. Trust me. Sue told me herself before the spider attack. She had no reason to lie to me. She was proud of what she'd done, how she'd duped all of you.”

Ripley’s expression softens with relief, and she joins back in, turning back to Vee. “You know Sue hates you. She must’ve been trying to weaken your position here. I have no reason to come after your people. I don’t even know those women. You have to believe us.”

“Perhaps,” Vee says. “I knew the administration would never stand for in-house murders, especially from someone supposed to be in Solitary. And on Christmas. I wanted to come after you so badly, but then I’d never get what I wanted. I didn’t just want Sue dead or dismissed, I wanted her disgraced. I wanted her to lose everything and spend her life behind bars, as I had. I wanted her to suffer. So, I stayed out of the way. I told my girls to keep their eyes open, and we stayed quiet and bided our time. I wanted the administration to see Sue’s incompetence for themselves without distraction. But instead, they turned a blind eye, time and time again. ‘She’s just having a tough year,’ they insisted. ‘She’s still the right choice.’”

“More like ‘the white choice,’” Tastee mumbles.

“No matter how many prisoners disappeared,” Vee says, “they kept letting it slide. But I guess that’s the perk of becoming the President’s personal sex-kitten.”

Spencer winces at the image.

“So, yes,” Vee says, “I finally decided it couldn’t go on any longer. I chose to step in and help speed the process along, to my advantage, of course. Some inmates are more…expendable than others. I’ve been curious to see just how many girls need to go missing before the powers that be pull Sue’s plug once and for all. I’m still counting.”

“You’re a monster,” Hermione says. “And you always have been.”

No one else knows what to say. It’s a lot to take in. Spencer can see that all the inmates around her are processing this revelation as well. But if what Vee’s saying is true, it does sound like a smart plan. Spencer knew this whole thing couldn’t really have been about dodgeball. Vee used Becky for her own gains, just like she wants to use everyone else in here for one thing or another.

Vee takes another step toward Spencer, refocusing on her with a sigh. “But now I hear you, of all people, have managed to solve the Sue problem for me, once and for all. So, I guess I owe you a line of gratitude, Miss Hastings. I’ll let you and your friends live. For now.”

“I assure you,” Hermione says, “it’s the other way around.”

“Make no mistake, girls, I’m the one in charge now.”

“And me!” Becky cries. “You promised!”

“I’m going to restore this ship to greatness again. Those who join me will have everything their hearts desire. Those who stand in our way will be shown the door. I haven’t checked the weather today, but I think it’s a bit cold outside. We don’t have room or food to spare for dissenters. You can stay and work and contribute, and help me make this ship the envy of the galaxy. Search your hearts, ladies, but I think you’ll find there’s more to gain by joining us than following Lucy or Aphasia out the airlock. The Uterius is ours.

“And I do believe DYAD will be much more accommodating this time around. They’re at the very heart of my rehabilitation plan. I haven’t been able to pay them a visit myself lately, of course, but
Becky’s been a fantastic inside person. That keycard gave her access to all kinds of things—files, information, the high-level-clearance door with the thousand spiders behind it, as you mentioned.” She makes it sound so casual.

“From what she tells me,” Vee nods to Becky, “some of the scientists don’t even know about it. They’re too busy working on much more interesting things. DYAD’s strength is its diversification. It helps them remain relevant in the most cutting-edge scientific research markets. And I’ve always felt that, like any good company, their best product”—Vee looks right at Spencer with a smug expression—“is their people.”

Spencer’s heart stops, stunned.

She doesn’t just know about the clones—she knows about me.

Hermione doesn’t take the bait and stands steadfast in her offer, bringing the conversation back. “And I’m offering you one of the best people on this ship—me.” To show she means it, she holsters her wand in her bra. It sticks out from her jumpsuit at an angle, resting on her collar. “I will pledge loyalty to you and your girls. I’ll do your bidding and make your runs. And the war on Aphasia and the Sins ends.”

“What does your girlfriend say about that?” It’s a fair question.

“She doesn’t know. This is between you and me.” Hermione chokes back the slightest hint of emotion. “But she’ll accept it. She’ll have to. I’m true to my word.”

The wheels are turning in Vee’s mind. Spencer can see that she’s considering it. But the offer itself seems crazy. Spencer’s seen how strong the connection is between Aphasia and Hermione. She’s seen how much it tears Aphasia apart to be off-limits to her love. How is ripping her heart in two, if even for her own good, supposed to make anything better around here? But then, Spencer wonders if cutting this bond could bring peace to the ship after all. With Sue out of the way and Vee appeased, maybe the violence would finally end. No one else needs to die.

Vee takes a step forward and resumes her commanding tone. “You will follow my orders, no questions asked. You will acquire off-ship items at my whim and return them to me within twenty-four hours. If you fail to acquire any item I request, there will be steep consequences, ones your friends may not survive.” She takes a deep breath, not breaking eye contact. “And you will end your relationship with Aphasia. No more contact, of any kind. If we need something from her, one of my girls will handle it. You and Aphasia are over. And all these witnesses”—Vee motions to their audience—“will make sure you keep your word, or the next body out the airlock will be hers.”

Silence hangs in the corridor as the forty women watching this unfold collectively hold their breath.

Hermione’s eyes water, but she doesn’t brush the tears away. With a sniffle, she steadies herself and stands up straight. Holding out a hand toward Vee, she says, “Agreed.”

A gleam of victory shines in Vee’s eyes. Hermione looks smaller now somehow, much as she’s trying to be brave. She’s clearly devastated and trying to hold her shit together. But she just sold herself to the devil, right here in front of everyone. Spencer can’t imagine what the rest of Hermione’s prison sentence is going to be like, but she has to respect the unconditional love that’s behind the sacrifice.

Eyes locked on Hermione’s, Vee confirms, “Agreed,” and extends her hand.

Poussey, Tastee, and Suzanne are already snickering and laughing to themselves, like they can’t
believe they’ve managed to reel in such a big, stupid fish. Or maybe they’re just thinking about all the candy bars and Cheetos they’re going to request soon.

In the center of the room, Vee grips Hermione’s trembling fingers, sealing the deal. A second later, Hermione squeezes tightly and grabs Vee’s forearm with her free hand, twisting hard and closing her eyes. There’s a loud CRACK! and Vee and Hermione vanish in an instant.

“VEE!” Becky cries out, but it’s lost in the ruckus of the rest of the group.

“Shit!” Poussey yells, both hands on her head as she looks around in panic. “Shit! Shit! Shit!”

The rest of Vee’s gang jump back in fear and shock, cursing and yelling loudly, unable to believe what they’re seeing. Sure, Hermione vanishes all the time, but she’s never taken anyone with her before.

“WHERE THE FUCK DID SHE GO?” Tastee shouts at Spencer. “WHERE THE FUCK DID SHE GO!”

“I DON’T KNOW!” Spencer yells back over the chaos that’s erupted in the hall. The other women in Aphasia’s and Lucy’s gangs don’t seem to know what to make of the disappearing act either.

Then, without warning, a second CRACK! silences the crowd as Hermione reappears in the exact same spot. Her hair is mussed and she looks a little dizzy, but she stays on her feet and pulls herself together.

Reorienting herself, she turns to face Vee’s group, wand extended. “Would anyone else like to suggest that I break up with my girlfriend?”

“Where the hell is Vee?” Suzanne yells with tears in her eyes. It’s taking Kat, Poussey, and Tastee’s collective strength to hold her back.

“A nearby desert moon, where she’ll likely freeze to death once it gets dark, provided she can breathe long enough to see the sun set. Honestly, I don’t think she’ll last an hour.”

Holy crap, Spencer thinks. Hermione isn’t fucking around.

“Bullshit,” Johanna says with a step forward, but she keeps a safe distance, whatever that might be.

But Hermione doesn’t back down. “Possibly. Maybe I took her to another prison ship and left her to rot in one of their high-security cells. She’ll have starved to death before anyone realizes she’s there.” She lets that idea hang for a moment, then says, “Or she could just be floating cold and lifeless in space. I guess you’ll never know. Either way, she’s gone and she isn’t coming back.”

Spencer has to admire the witch’s handiwork. Whatever she did to Vee, it only took thirty seconds, and now everyone is too scared to go anywhere near her. A stroke of brilliance, and a terrifying one at that.

As the truth of Hermione’s statement settles in, the peanut gallery gradually falls quiet. None of Vee’s girls know what to say. They’re in varying states of emotion—sadness, disbelief, fear, rage.

Suzanne’s not hiding her tears. She struggles to find her words, holding a hand out and balling it into a fist, then opening it again, over and over. “If you…truly…hurt her…I will end you.” Her voice trembles and cracks with the final two words.

“No,” Hermione says, rejecting the notion. “The violence ends now. It started with Vee, and it ends
with Vee.” She turns slowly in a circle to make eye contact with every inmate one by one as she speaks. “We just fought together and survived a war. If we can take on a thousand spiders and win, why can’t we put aside our quarrels and find a way to live together, peacefully?” Her voice is growing stronger as she makes her impassioned plea. “I’m not a dictator. I’m not saying you have to fall in line behind me or Aphasia or anyone else. But no matter where your loyalties lie, the cycle of killing has to end. If it doesn’t, it won’t stop until we’ve all paid the price.”

“Oh, you’ll pay the price, that’s for damn sure,” Tastee says, stepping up and pointing a finger-gun close to Hermione’s face for a moment. A few agreeing murmurs trickle through Vee’s crew.

All goddamn day Spencer’s been fighting and risking her life for an end to what’s been happening here. If Hermione’s found a way to reach that goal, Spencer doesn’t want to let it slip away.

“She’s right,” she says, and all eyes turn to her. Realizing just where she entered the conversation, Spencer clarifies, “Not that,” and points to Tastee. “Hermione’s right. We can make this work.” She looks to her friends. “We run this prison now, right? We’ve killed all the guards. Sue’s locked up in Solitary. We took out the spiders. This place is ours now.” A chill runs up her spine at the very thought.

Lucy Diamond speaks up. “What about that lab or whatever? D’you kill all them, too?”

“Not exactly. But—”

“What about Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins?” Kat asks.

“One of them was eaten,” Spencer says. “The other two are fine. One is down in the lab right now with the scientists.” As soon as Spencer realizes she left herself open to the question, she freezes, and it comes.

“Where’s the other one?”

It’s Starbuck.

Shit.

Spencer replies as normally as she can. “Um. She’s probably down there by now, too.”

“You don’t think she’s with Raven?”

Spencer’s heart pounds, and she feels even more anxious standing in the center with all eyes on her. “Uh…she could be?” Spencer never asked to be in the middle of whatever this domestic love affair triangle is. She’s no homewrecker, and she didn’t want to know about any of this. Now she’s going to get the brunt of Starbuck’s react—

But Starbuck just pushes through the crowd and takes off running, calling back, “I’m gonna make sure they’re okay!”

Spencer’s mouth falls open and closes again, then opens once more. “…Okay.”

“What,” Tastee says, “you didn’t know they all bangin’?”

At this point, Spencer doesn’t know why she would assume any two people in this prison aren’t having sex.

She tries to refocus on the task at hand. “The DYAD employees are downstairs. I don’t think they’ll
get in our way as long as we don’t get in theirs. They just want to be left alone, which is fine by me. We can work something out.”

Dark Willow doesn’t seem so sure. “The same scientists who made the bajillion killer spiders? Yeah, they sound like super reasonable people who would be happy to abandon their life’s work for no good reason whatsoever.”

“I agree,” Hermione says. “The risk is too great. We have to be sure.”

“We outnumber them,” Spencer says. “We’ve destroyed all their specimens. We can destroy their research, too. And we can monitor their work. If they start back on any dangerous projects, we can stop them.”


“No! No more killing. Nobody else dies.”

The inmates quietly consider Spencer’s proposal. Women from opposing gangs cast glances at each other, wondering if this hokey-pokey world-peace horseshit even seems possible.

“So…who’s in charge now?” Shay asks the room. More wandering eyes.

“Lucy,” Regina offers.

“Not gonna happen,” Root says. “Hermione melted the Wicked Bitch of the West.” She gives a warm smile to her friend. “I say we give her a chance. She and Aphasia have earned it.”

“Oh, hell no,” Tastee shouts. “She’s gonna disappear us all to that desert planet! I hate sand!”

“I’m not,” Hermione says, and her tone conveys her sincerity. “I did mean one part of my deal with Vee. I want a peace between us.”

But it’s clear that the wound is still too fresh for any of them to take Hermione at her word.

Ripley adds her two cents. “Not everyone here is a member of one of your ‘gangs.’ We need a solution that’s fair to everyone.”

“We’ll elect a council,” Spencer says, suddenly feeling like eighth grade Treasurer all over again. “Everyone gets a vote. We can choose five or six representatives to be in charge of decisions that affect the whole group. Okay? We’ll do this right. Not just along gang lines.”

Spencer had to navigate a lot of social hierarchies in Rosewood, but gangs were not one of them. Still, she’s glad to see heads nodding on Lucy’s and Aphasia’s sides of the hall, and Vee’s side isn’t protesting. It’s a step in the right direction.

Ripley asks, “What do we do with her?” She’s been holding on to Becky for quite some time now and wants to be done.

Spencer looks at the snitch and considers their options. “Well, we can’t trust you.”

“YOU’RE the one who lied about Vee, MAPLE SHITS.” She’s not wrong.

“Fine,” Spencer relents. Looking back at Ripley, she says, “Wasn’t there one more empty cell? Down the hall. You still have the keys, right?”

Vasquez nods, “Yeah, we got ‘em.”
Becky struggles hard at the thought of going to Solitary. “I’m gonna kill you! You’ll never get away with this!”

“Pretty sure I will,” Spencer says, arms crossed. “Enjoy your stay.”

And with that, Ripley and Vasquez escort the squirming, yelling, former assistant past Vee’s shell-shocked flunkies and out of sight behind the cafeteria. Spencer can hear Vasquez’s voice in the distance as they pass the trash chute, “Maybe we should just chuck her down there?”

With the excitement finally over and no guards to boss them around, nobody seems to know what to do next. They’re still covered in paint and blood and spider guts, and in desperate need of a wash. Showering in groups would be most efficient, but Spencer’s not about to suggest it. Lord knows somebody else will.

“So, now what?” Sarah Connor says. “We just pretend like none of this happened?”

“Yeah,” Quinn says. “I guess so.”

Suzanne is still miles and miles from okay. “How am I supposed to do that?” She’s trembling, but at least her crying has slowed enough that she can form sentences.

“Come on, girl,” Tastee says, resting her hands on Suzanne’s shoulders. “Let’s go get you cleaned up.”

“I need a drink,” Rosa says. Everyone hums in agreement with that.

Spencer looks around at the tired faces. “Let’s all go back to our cells and clean up and get some rest. Tomorrow morning we can meet in the—” but then she remembers the current state of the cafeteria. That’s the last place any of them want to be right now. “—in the library and we’ll figure out our next steps.” She waits for some kind of confirmation or dissent, but they’re all too tired to argue. It seems like a fine enough plan.

One by one, the inmates disperse, with Aphasia’s group leading out first and the others following.

Hermione makes a point of saying to Vee’s girls before they leave, “We meant it when we said we want a truce. This is a new start for all of us.”

Kat mutters, “Whatever,” but doesn’t put up any more of a fight; neither do her counterparts. Most of them don’t even want to look at Hermione right now. Spencer can’t blame them.

After they pass and the hallway empties, Spencer notices Hermione hanging back to speak with her privately.

“Where the hell did you take Vee?” Spencer whispers, figuring that’s what this is about. She still can’t believe that whole thing really happened.

“I’ll explain later. I’ve got to go find Aphasia. She was tending to Lucy to make sure she didn’t wake up alone. I’ll tell them everything that’s happened.”

“Okay. I’m going to make sure Becky and Sue are secure.” With that, Spencer starts down the hall in the opposite direction, then pauses and turns back to say, “Hey—thanks. For everything.”

Hermione nods once with a pursed smile. “You’re welcome.”

There’s clearly much more behind her tired eyes, but Spencer doesn’t push. Without another word,
Hermione Granger turns away and quickly retreats after her true love.
When Spencer reaches the solitary ward, Vasquez and Ripley are alone. She can hear Becky banging on the door to the cell on the right and yelling obscenities while her jailers peek through the small window.

“Shut the hell up already!” Vasquez says.

Becky’s neighbor, Martha Stewart, is complaining about the noise as well, loud enough for Spencer to hear it from thirty feet away. Sue must be in Ripley’s old cell, she realizes—the one at the end of the hall.

“Hey,” Spencer whispers as she catches up to them. Right now, with Sue thinking she’s dead, she doesn’t want to poke the bear by informing her otherwise. “Everything okay here?”

“Rock solid,” Vasquez says and pulls on the door to show it’s sealed shut.

They move further down the hall out of earshot, stopping in the open space where the stone-cold body of the dead blonde guard still lies. Spencer tried to ignore it when she first passed through, but now they’re only standing three feet away and it’s starting to smell.

“Sue’s alive?” It’s worth checking.

“Unfortunately,” Ripley says. “But you said she might be useful. We’re hoping for your sake that she is.”

Spencer appreciates the change of heart. She knows it must be hard for them to walk away, especially after the taser attacks earlier.

Vasquez asks, “What should we do with these?” She holds up the Solitary keys as well as two DYAD keycards she must’ve found on Sue and Becky. They’re almost identical, but one has a small strip of silver hologram along the left edge. “You can’t trust any of those clowns.” She gestures in the general direction of the cell block.


“Can’t. We’re leaving. Now.” The two women look even more tired than Spencer feels.


“The inspector’s ship,” Ripley reminds her.

Right. Another dead body on her conscience.

“Should still be there,” Vasquez says, “fueled up and ready to go. We’re finally getting out of this shithole.”
Spencer nods as she takes all this in. Much as she doesn’t want them to go, she’s not going to stand in their way. These two deserve the free ticket out after everything they’ve been through. “Yeah, sure.” She takes the items and fumbles for a moment, then puts them into her bra, using the keycards as a buffer between the metal keys and her skin. Her feet aren’t getting torn up any more today.

Relatedly, Spencer makes a mental note to ask Hermione to conjure her up some goddamn pockets. She briefly considers asking to hitch a ride with her friends, but in her heart she knows she has nowhere to go, anyway. She would just be a third wheel, and these women have every right to a peaceful retirement alone. Instead, she offers them a hopeful smile. “Good luck. And thanks for all the help today, with Quinn and everything.”

She only just met Ripley a few hours ago, and now she’ll likely never see either of them ever again. At least, she hopes she won’t, for their sake. It’s strange feeling sad about that after being so afraid of meeting Ripley.

As a bonus, Christmas is finally safe again for all the bad little girls of space prison. Hooray.

“Thanks for getting me out,” Ripley says. It’s not a particularly heartfelt moment, but it’s an honest one. She looks like there’s something else she wants to say. After a beat, she goes for it. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to take the cat with us.”

Spencer’s brow furrows. “Umbridge’s?” She can’t bring herself to say ‘Miss Lady Meowsers?’

“We found it in the atrium when we came back up for a Boomer head. It was lapping blood off the floor. Probably starving, poor thing.”

Spencer pushes aside the image of a bloodthirsty cat. No wonder Lucy was looking for it. It sounds like the pet of her dreams. Maybe she should borrow a copy of *Pet Semetary* from River’s Book Club.

“We put it in the Interrogation room to keep it out of harm’s way,” Ripley says. “I had a cat, back on the *Nostromo*. It’d be nice to have one again.”

“Yeah, sure,” Spencer happily agrees. *Take that creepy-ass thing out of here.* “One less mouth for us to feed.” Technically, the cat isn’t hers to give away, but Lucy doesn’t have to know. Spencer can say the spiders ate it. She’s on a new mission to ensure the *Uterius* is pet-free from now on. No more hungry beasts.

She looks around at their surroundings, verifying the path is clear. “Most of the girls are probably back in their cells by now, or busy having freedom sex in the showers. You probably have the best chance of getting downstairs without being seen if you take the east hall to the elevator in Sue’s office.”

Vasquez says, “Anybody who tries to stop us won’t live to tell about it.” It’s not a joke.

Ripley offers a sincere goodbye to Spencer, then squeezes Vasquez’s arm as they start toward the far hallway.

Spencer watches them go for a moment, thinking about how lucky they are to have made it through all this alive. Just from what she’s heard today, it sounds like Ripley and Vasquez have a lot of catching up—and clearing up—to do. She wishes them well, wherever they’re headed, and hopes they’re able to find peace somewhere, somehow. Maybe even a place where they aren’t used as leverage against each other in a two-way fake murder holiday scheme. But hopefully a place with toothbrushes. Weapons and toothbrushes and no blackmail, if that isn’t too much to ask out here in
It’s been so long since Spencer’s seen a man, she’s a little thrown by the very sight of him.

He’s right outside the TARDIS, standing in front of cell 1 with his hands on the bars and talking to someone inside—presumably Lucy. It’s the same man Spencer saw the day she met Donna.

Donna...

She’s been so distracted by all of the other crazy shit happening that she managed to forget a woman’s face had been eaten off in front of her. A woman who risked her life to help these people she didn’t even know. Spencer’s pretty sure she said her last name was Noble. Even if she made that up, it still seems fitting.

“Yes, that is definitely one of the finer specimens of this species I’ve ever seen,” he says, quite mesmerized. “Boy, would I love to get my hands on you…”

And with that, the bubble of sympathy is burst. Her Fuckface CreepMonster Detector goes off, and Spencer wishes she were armed again. Heavily. Maybe she could catch up with Vasquez and Ripley for a joint-effort smackdown of this douchebag.

Spencer stops at a safe distance away from the stranger but tries to make up for it with volume. “What’s going on here?” Nobody scares her anymore, not after today, but she’s a bit apprehensive of what’s behind door number one. For all she knows, Lucy could be standing there naked and bent over, taunting him with her overflowing volcano of sexuality, and Spencer does not have any patience left today.

“Ah, hello again, lesbian prisoner!” the spikey-haired man says, stepping back to face Spencer. “My new friend Lucy here was just showing me some of her outstanding paintings. It’s quite the collection, really—famzels and tribbles and plopmuks—I haven’t seen a purple speckled glistnit in, oh, at least two hundred years, give or take.”

He sounds like he means every word, though Spencer’s certain that most of what he just said was not words.

“Yeah…” Spencer says, “…they’re great.” She steps toward him and eases up on the edge in her voice. “You’re Donna’s friend.”

“Would you believe she locked me in a swimwear closet? Took me the better part of an hour to create a lockpick out of stray pins and a wad of bubble gum. Shame it didn’t work. Didn’t have any gum left after that. But I’m alright, don’t you worry about me. And never mind the hole in the door the size of a scuba tank. It’ll repair itself soon enough.

“But Donna!” the man continues indignantly. “Good old Donna, locking me in a closet! I can only imagine what’s gotten into her today. I hoped Lucy here might be able to tell me where she went, but we haven’t reached the topic yet. She was painting on the floor, and I made the regretful choice of engaging in polite conversation first. That must’ve been at least twenty minutes ago.” The man
lowers his voice and adds, “She doesn’t seem to be the most… informed person I’ve met today, and I’ve mostly been talking to paisley shirts.” He gestures with an eyebrow as he says the last bit quietly, not wanting Lucy to hear the knock against her. “But if you know which way Donna’s gone, I’ll just grab her and we’ll be on our—OH MY GOD!”

He hadn’t looked to his right until now. Dozens of dead Boomers are still strewn up and down the cell block. The sight of it holds his attention for a moment as his mouth hangs open, and he looks back and forth from it to Spencer a few times.

“Jeepers. I’d heard certain sectors were using Cylon technology, but I didn’t know it could be this… messy. Are you all alright?”

A pit starts to form in her stomach. This isn’t the only battlefield of corpses on board. “Yeah. I can take you to Donna. Come on.”

It’s a split-second decision to go the long way. Passing through the carnage doesn’t seem like the right thing to do, and taking the other route gives Spencer more time to decide what the hell she can say to this man that will justify what happened to his friend.

The three minutes it takes them to get out of the block, down the classes hall, into Sue’s elevator, and onto the lower level are surreal. For the first time today, she’s able to move freely with no distractions, no danger, no delays, and no real urgency. It’s a weird replay of the day’s events, retracing their steps and the trail of bodies everywhere—the guards in the hall, Stella Gibson and the clone in Sue’s office (which, fortunately, was face down and didn’t require any explanation). All these spaces feel familiar to Spencer now, whether she likes it or not. The sense of foreboding and mystery and being wrapped up in something big and ominous has all been replaced by sadness and knowing what is behind the curtain. The ship feels smaller to her now. So do the answers to the questions along the way.

And all the while, as they get closer to the abandoned corpse of their mutual friend, Spencer doesn’t want to ever reach it. She just wants this to be behind her already. The emotional exhaustion has taken over, and she’s moving through each hallway on autopilot.

The man says to call him “The Doctor,” which is weird, but she’s too tired to care. He asks general questions about the events of the day, but Spencer’s out of bandwidth for more than a few words per answer. If anything, she’s only entertaining his inquiries out of respect to Donna. It seems like being nice to this guy is what she would’ve wanted. So, Spencer explains about Umbridge and how Donna was hellbent on wanting to help a woman who was already dead, and she explains the spider story as succinctly as possible. The Doctor hasn’t heard of DYAD, but he doesn’t seem the least bit fazed by a tale of killer mutant spiders in outer space, for whatever that’s worth.

As they reach the main intersection, he asks, “Friends of yours?”

Spencer stops and looks up to see activity in the docking bay. Vasquez is just stepping into the small black ship on the far side. Ripley’s already sitting in the cockpit, flipping switches. “Yeah.”

As the door to the vessel closes, Spencer watches from the window, hoping they’ll look over so she can wave goodbye. Smoke fills the space as the engine fires up. After several blaring alarm sounds, the far airlock wall parts at the center to reveal the vast blackness of space. All of the air and smoke are immediately evacuated, along with something long and dark and quite sizable that originated from further inside the docking bay. Whatever it was, it’s there and gone in a flash.

Spencer lurches forward with her hands against the glass, trying to find any trace of it. “Did you see that?”
“They leave the parking brake on?” the man asks, peering over her shoulder with squinty eyes. “Should we yell and point?”

“What was in there! I saw it.” But the more she looks around, the sillier she feels. There’s nothing there now. Remembering the afternoon’s events, she hopes it wasn’t that guard, Greggs, that they locked up in here. Hermione made it quite clear she wanted her left unharmed. If it was, there’s no going back now. What’s done is done. Spencer can deal with that problem tomorrow. With a sigh, she refocuses on her friends to see them off.

Ripley catches her eye, and Spencer shares a small wave and mouths, “Bye.”

The landing gear releases silently and detaches, pulling into the base of the ship and out of sight. Ripley carefully backs it out of the docking bay like a car in a parking spot. Spencer doesn’t remember reading about piloting experience in Ripley’s file, but she seems to know enough to get them out of the garage, and that’s a good start.

Once Ripley has cleared the edge of the doors, she slowly turns the ship ninety degrees clockwise to angle out toward the open sky. Then, without warning, they take off at blinding speed, almost like they just vanished. It seems weird after such a cautious start. But two seconds later, the giant shark sails by the docking bay with jaws wide open, zooming right past the place where the ship had just been.

Spencer jumps back from the window. This isn’t the first time today the shark has scared the living shit out of her, but it needs to be the last.

“Whoa!” the man cries, wide-eyed with wonder. “And what is that beautiful creature?”

“Beyoncé.” Spencer heads a few feet back in the direction they came until she reaches the door to the docking bay control room. “We need to seal the airlock. Come on.”

Of all the tasks Spencer’s had to deal with today, this one proves to be the simplest. The second switch they try works, and the doors slide closed. With a loud hiss and buzzing sound, the docking bay automatically replenishes with oxygen and re-pressurizes itself. Spencer’s a bit bummed it didn’t take longer, if only to serve as a distraction from what’s still ahead.

They walk mostly in silence down the hall toward DYAD. Spencer doesn’t like chit-chat and doesn’t want to talk about what happened to Donna until she has to. This hallway doesn’t feel exciting anymore. The adrenaline rush of searching for Quinn and finding her has long worn off, and what remains is mourning and regret. Things could have gone so differently today.

Finally, as they reach garbage room door, Spencer takes a deep breath and says, “There was one really big spider, like a queen.” They stand there awkwardly, but Spencer’s in no hurry to go inside. “It was living in here, and we found it by accident. It attacked us, and Donna stood up to it. She was so, so brave.” Spencer’s voice cracks a little at the end as her emotions get the best of her.

The Doctor realizes then what Spencer’s been building up to and opens the door without further delay. But Spencer can’t bring herself to go back inside that hell chamber where she was trapped, burned, and almost suffocated. She stands in the doorway, propping it open with her body so the light can pour in, and closes her eyes against the sound of the Doctor’s words and tears.

Several minutes later, they make their way back upstairs. Spencer walks ahead, leading the funeral procession. She tells herself it’s because she’s the one who knows the way, not because she can’t look at the sorrow following a few steps behind. She remembers when Donna had been the one so excited to explore this place and the Doctor had warned her to stay away. Then this morning, she
urged Donna to get back in the TARDIS and leave once Dolores was found dead. Spencer should’ve tried harder, she should’ve insisted. This wasn’t her fight. She shouldn’t have died here. The horrific battle scene plays on loop in her mind with every step forward, and each time, Spencer fails to save her.

She counts the white tiles on the walls as they pass and listens for the whirring of air circulating through the vents, then tries to identify what key the elevator music is in. Anything to distract her from the fact that there was barely enough left of Donna Noble to be carried away at all.

The walk back seems even longer than the walk there. But eventually the TARDIS door closes and the familiar whooshing noise starts up again, blowing Spencer’s hair back as the ship fades in and out and finally disappears. Further down, inmates are casually drifting from cell to cell, no longer impeded by locks and doors, laughing and conversing without a care in the world. It seems more than a little irreverent, what with their kills still lining the hall, but Spencer tells herself they’ve earned this victory. After what has been The Longest Day, they deserve a break. If there is something worth laughing about, Spencer doesn’t want to take that away from them. The mess can wait until tomorrow.

Lucy’s still sitting inside what might be the only closed door in the place. The art show is over; everything’s taped back up on the wall where it began. It’s a rare quiet moment, Spencer realizes—Lucy’s not painting or wrapped up in someone else. Instead, she’s sitting perfectly still on the lower bunk, knees close in to her body, chin resting gently on top. If she’s staring at anything in particular, Spencer can’t tell. It’s striking, seeing her like this. Spencer’s seen Lucy stark naked and wide open, and yet here, fully clothed and curled up tight, she’s never looked so vulnerable and weak.

“Hey,” Spencer says, but Lucy doesn’t look up. “You okay?” She’s guessing Lucy’s had time to process the closeness of her past just one floor below. Or maybe she’s mourning the deaths of thousands of bees and spiders. Maybe she feels bad for coming at Spencer’s neck with a goddamn battle axe. Maybe she’s sad she missed.

Whatever’s on her mind, there isn’t anything Spencer can say to make it better for her, not yet. Wounds take time to heal, if they do at all. And while Spencer has other places she needs to be, she doesn’t want to just abandon Lucy, either. They’ve both been through a lot today. So, Spencer swallows her resentment and does the good friend thing.

“I was talking with some of your…gang back there. Sounds like they really care about you.” There’s an awkward silence that Spencer lets hang a bit too long. “We don’t have to talk, but I wanted to check on you.” Still no reaction. “I should probably go see if Aphasia and the others are okay.” Spencer lets go of the bars, beginning to leave, but then pauses and adds, “Thanks for your help today. We really needed you, and you were there for us.” She means it.

Finally, there’s some motion from Lucy, but she’s just lying down and pulling the white sheet over her body, as if it’s bedtime and Spencer isn’t there at all.

Fine.

“Good night, I guess,” Spencer says half-assed and walks away.
Stepping over and around various dead Boomers (and past a few celebratory orgies in bunks), she reaches cell 10. Hermione and Aphasia are sitting quietly on the top right bunk, Mack’s sleeping on the bottom left, and Quinn is lying on her side, reading up above her. It’s almost like everything’s back to normal. Spencer knows it’ll never be the same around here again, but this might be as close as they can get for right now.

“Hey,” she begins awkwardly. “Sorry to interrupt.”

Quinn looks up, and Spencer catches her eye.

“I need to go back downstairs for a minute, and I kinda don’t want to go alone.”

Quinn takes a moment to consider the request, then sets down *Mother’s Milky Mistress* and slides over the edge of the bunk. Both feet hit the ground with a soft thud.

“Do you need any help?” Hermione asks, but Spencer shakes her head.

“You guys rest. Thanks, though.”

“Back soon,” Quinn says without looking at them and follows Spencer out.

They start down the corridor, quietly passing a cell or two where other inmates are chatting about the events of the day. When their silence starts to feel uncomfortable, Spencer says, “Thanks for coming with me. I realized we haven’t really gotten to talk today.”

With the faux-kidnapping and exhausting battle behind them, Spencer wants nothing more than to curl up in Quinn’s bed, strapped down with stupid seatbelts, and hide under the sheet together until the rest of the world melts away. She wants to get back to that emotional place when all that matters is how long it takes her to be brave enough to touch Quinn’s skin, or how many times Quinn will kiss her shoulder blades before taking a breath. Just…to get back to them—Quinn and Spencer—past her time with Lucy, past all the fear and death and jealousy. To finally, truly be a real thing, however they want to define it.

They pass cell 16, where Lexa, Clarke, and Octavia are deeply in the middle of…being deeply in each other. The room looks like a Yankee Candle store in full blaze. With an orgy. It’s as good a reminder as any of how things could be. Spencer takes a deep breath and tells herself, *There’s no time like the present.*

“What are we even doing?” Quinn says, stepping over a stray Boomer leg.

The question hits like a blow to the chest, and Spencer looks away as she walks on. *Has Quinn moved on already? Does she not see this as a “thing” at all? This chemistry between us? It’s not like I was making it up the whole time. How could she—*

“Are you sure we don’t need weapons?”

Now Spencer’s even more confused.

*Oh. Their errand.*

“Yeah,” she says, trying to recover as smoothly as she can. It doesn’t help that she almost slips in a pool of Boomer blood as they reach the main intersection. “I just want to go talk to the DYAD people again and follow up on a few things.”

Quinn stops a few feet short of the door. “Things about me?”
“No,” Spencer replies with the same irritated tone. “It’s mostly about Sue. And Lucy, I guess.”

Quinn huffs and reaches for the already open Barracks door; a guard’s foot is conveniently caught in it, creating a gap about six inches wide. “Of course it is.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Quinn pulls and holds the door open wide. She mimics her sister’s saccharine smile and says, “Everybody loves Lucy,” then starts down the stairs without another word.

“Hey,” Spencer argues back. She stands at the top and watches Quinn descend without looking back. “Not everyone.”

Now Quinn stops, partway down. They stand in silence for a moment, then Spencer adds, “Not like that.”

Quinn lets out a deep breath and mulls this over. With a gesture of her head, she prompts Spencer onward as they continue down into the belly of the beast once more.
It turns out it’s much easier to get into DYAD with a keycard. No severed head or trash chute gymnastics required.

Quinn and Spencer pass through the lobby quickly and head down the long hall toward the room where Spencer recovered from her injuries. Halfway there, they run into Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins—not the one who helped them earlier, the one who was boinking Raven in the engine room.

“Hey!” she says, “You’re not allowed to be down here. What are you doing out of your cells?”

Spencer blinks. “You didn’t seem to care when we were roaming the halls earlier!”

There’s a beat as the doctor considers this. “Endorphins. It was a chemical response. Don’t move, I’m calling security.”

“Good luck with that,” Quinn says.

They both know there isn’t anyone left alive to pick up a phone. The doctor must know it, too. You can’t get from the engine room to DYAD without seeing a whole lot of murder.

“Fine. I guess I’ll just have to handle this myself.”

“That won’t be necessary.” Delphine emerges from a narrow hallway Spencer hasn’t been able to explore yet. “They’re with me.”

“They don’t have clearance!” Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins protests. “They’re criminals!”

Delphine holds up a hand, offering her point. “I think we’re all criminals here, Juliet. Don’t you?”

“Some more than others. I’m calling Sue.”

“Actually,” Spencer cuts in, “that’s why we’re here—to talk about Sue. She can’t take your call right now.” Spencer lets that sink in before continuing. “Is there somewhere we can sit down? All of us. There’s a lot to go over.”

Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins looks to Delphine and says, “Okay...the conference room?” She seems uncomfortable taking orders from an inmate.

Better get used to it, Spencer thinks.

A few minutes later, Spencer, Quinn, the two surviving doctor wives, and Delphine, are all face to face around a long, wooden table. Spencer doesn’t know if she can trust everyone, but they don’t have much of a choice now. Nobody else is dying, so they’ll have to find common ground.

“Is this everyone you trust on this ship?” Spencer asks.
“Almost,” Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins says.

“Cosima is coming,” Delphine says.

The conference room door opens and Raven enters in a hurry. “Okay, I’m here.”

Spencer hadn’t expected this member of the party, but she’ll roll with it.

Raven takes a seat next to the two doctors and scoots in. “Some blood was seeping near a circuit board in the floor upstairs. Anybody know what happened to all the guards?”

“My sister had an exciting day,” Quinn says.

That’s putting it mildly. But picturing the atrium reminds Spencer of what’s in the infirmary. “Oh. I’m...really sorry for your loss.”

She means it, but the doctors don’t seem to believe her. “Yeah, I’ll bet,” one of them says. She turns to her wife. “Where’s Arizona?”

Oh no. Spencer’s heart sinks. They don’t know. They thought she was flippant about the loss of the guards. “I—” she starts, but they aren’t paying attention to her.

The other doctor redirects the question to Raven. “Wasn’t she with you?”

The first doctor, Juliet, answers. “No, I was.”

“We thought she was down here with you,” Raven says. “Haven’t seen her all day.”

“I haven’t seen her either.” This is the doctor who did Spencer’s dental work earlier—the second one she met. “I’ve been down here since this morning.”

Spencer really wishes these three would get a scheduling calendar. “Please—”

“Did you check the infirmary?” the second doctor asks.

“It’s her day off.”

“Then where the hell is she?”

All the adults in the room look at each with curious expressions, but Spencer’s heart is pounding. She wasn’t expecting to have to deliver this news. She doesn’t want to do this.

“Please just listen to me for a minute,” she says as calmly but firmly as she can.

Just then, the door opens and Cosima steps in, embarrassed to be late. She grabs the last open seat and scoots in. “What’s up, guys?”

“She’s upstairs!” She doesn’t mean to sound so exasperated, but at least she has their attention. “Just...give me a minute.” It’s a dick move not to tell them right now where their wife is, and she knows it. But once Spencer reveals that she’s dead, the others won’t hear a word she has to say.

“A lot’s happened today. Thank you again for helping me earlier. I’m not sure how much all of you know, or if you even know the same things, so I want to make sure we’re all on the same page.” She
makes eye contact with each of them in turn before proceeding.

“First things first: Sue is no longer in command of the Uterius.” That gets some worried glances out of them. “The prisoners revolted and took over the ship. Sue, Becky, and Buffy are locked away, and all the other guards are dead.” Really, Greggs’ status is pending, but she doesn’t mention that.

“That’s not possible.” The second doctor looks to the scientists for backup. “There are always more guards.”

“Not anymore,” Quinn says.

Spencer points in the general direction of G1. “We took out the disgusting bathtubs of goo down the hall and destroyed all the backups. No more Cylons.”

“So, what,” the first Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins says, “you’re holding our wife hostage? What do you want?”

“No, I… I’m so sorry,” she begins carefully and takes a shallow breath. “Your wife died sometime this morning, we think, or maybe last night.”

The rest of the air leaves the room. The widows gasp in disbelief as their collective world shatters.

Somehow, Spencer keeps talking. “Her body is still upstairs in the infirmary—”

The two doctors are on their feet and out the door before Spencer can even finish her sentence. Raven, Cosima, and Delphine all stand up to go after them, but Quinn quickly blocks the exit and holds out a hand to stop them.

“No,” she says. “Let them go. You have to figure out what you’re going to do when they get back.”

“What do you mean?” Delphine asks.


Raven’s grief is shifting into anger. “Why does everybody keep talking about spiders?!”

All eyes turn to Delphine, who falls back into her chair and covers her face with her hands.

Spencer places her palms flat against the table with arms straight, looming large as the others sit back down. “They ate half of her leg, and she bled out in the infirmary.”

“OH GOD,” Delphine cries into her hands. Raven’s sitting in stunned silence, horrified by the revelation.

“Fuck,” Cosima mutters as her forehead falls against her hand. “Fuck!” She removes her glasses and wipes her eyes with the sleeve of her jacket, then turns to her girlfriend. “What are we gonna do?”

Raven sits up, piecing something together. “What do you wanna bet it’s these spiders who messed with the gravity last night? Somebody shredded the wires.”

“Yeah, that’s what we think, too,” Spencer says, then looks at Delphine. “We think we killed them all, but are there any more?”

The blonde doctor sniffs and dabs at her eye with her thumb. “We have thirteen hundred of them, Spencer, so what do you think?”
“We?” Raven interjects. Nobody’s telling her anything, and she doesn’t like feeling stupid. “Who the hell is ‘we’?”

Spencer stares into Delphine. “What do I think?” She points an arm toward the door. “I think your little friend Becky has been sneaking into your secret spider lab for the last six months and letting them out to kill prisoners upstairs!” She’s mad now, tired of the condescension when she’s the one with all the current information.

Cosima shoots daggers at Delphine, too. “You told Becky about this and not me?”

Delphine rolls her eyes. “I didn’t tell Becky shit. She never had access to that project.”

Spencer leans closer and says, “Yes she did! She called herself ‘Queen of the Spiders’ and unleashed a swarm of death on us today while we were all trapped in the cafeteria. So yeah, I think you need to take us to the rest of them—right now, before they get back.”

With a sigh of frustration, Delphine gets up and starts for the door. She leads the other four down the narrow hall to the far end and around a sharp turn to the right. Spencer recognizes it—they’re back at the trash chute opening. Next to it, directly across from a supply closet, is a hidden, hinged panel in the wall. Delphine presses on it to release the door latch, and it swings open, revealing a keycard reader.

Cosima exhales and puts her hands to her head with elbows out. She turns around and laughs in her anger, feeling deeply betrayed. “I don’t even know what to think about you right now.”

Delphine ignores her and swipes her keycard. Spencer notices it has a silver stripe on it, like the one Vasquez got off Becky.

There’s a small double beep, then a hiss as a panel of the wall separates and slides away. The door is completely camouflaged. It’s no wonder Cosima didn’t know it was here. Maybe Sue didn’t, either. Hell, Spencer and her friends were standing right here hours ago, and they had no idea.

Spencer looks inside before she steps into the room. It’s large, white, and absolutely plastered wall to wall with glass tanks. They must be stacked ten high and twenty across, layered like building blocks. At first glance, they look empty, but that’s hardly a firm conclusion from this distance. The floor is littered with dozens and dozens of lids, like they were ripped off and cast aside in a hurry. There’s a white island countertop in the middle of the room with some assorted papers and a microscope. Spencer definitely wants to read through that later. Right now, the priority is making sure this room is in fact empty.

But someone isn’t happy about it. “How is this possible?” Delphine asks, looking around with a stunned expression. “How could they all escape? The room is sealed.”

“Guess not,” Raven says.

Spencer looks at Quinn. “Help me check the tanks.”

She and Cosima begin on opposite sides, looking into each one in turn. Fortunately, there isn’t a base lining of stuff to dig under, like sawdust, or even play structures or plants to hide behind, just basic glass and some scattered pieces of string. No wonder they wanted out. They were probably getting bored to death.

“These are clear,” Quinn calls out as she finishes the bottom three rows on the left-hand side of the room. She grabs a nearby stool and slides it over, preparing to check some tanks just out of reach.
Raven looks around the room enviously and asks the scientists, “Do you have any idea how much of this stuff I could use?” She sounds pissed, and Spencer isn’t sure why Raven’s focused on her vodka business right now. It seems a bit insensitive given that one of her lovers just died.

“We’ve given you everything we can spare. You know that.” Delphine’s tone makes it clear she doesn’t want this attitude right now.

“Yeah, right,” Raven says. “I don’t think you’ll be needing these heat panels anymore.” She grabs a few lamps and some thick slabs of treated glass, as many of each as she can carry. “I need to get these upstairs.”

“Right now?” Spencer looks away from the tank she was checking behind. “You’re not gonna help us?”

“I am helping, trust me.”

But it’s not good enough, and Spencer’s look tells her as much.

“Find me in an hour, and I’ll explain everything,” Raven says. “Bring Aphasia.”

That certainly catches Spencer off-guard. “Why?”

“Just give me one hour. Tell her it’s almost ready.” And with that, Raven takes her armfuls of glass and bulbs and heads down the hall toward the entrance of the lab.

“What’s ready?” Spencer calls after her, but it’s no use.

“This side’s clear,” Quinn says as she finishes the top row in the back of the room. “Anything?”

Cosima picks a lid up off the floor and puts it back on an empty tank. “No such luck. This place is a disaster.”

Spencer isn’t giving up yet. “Keep looking.”

Next to her, Delphine is still scanning the room in utter disbelief and sadness. Her ever-important secret project walked out the door and left her behind. “I can’t believe you killed them all.” It’s barely a whisper, but her voice is trembling. It’s unnerving.

“Only after they killed some of us. So, you can help us now—make sure every last one of them is dead—and we’ll help you when the doctors come back.”

“I’m not going to help you destroy my life’s work.”

“You don’t really have a choice,” Spencer says loudly. “Unless you want those doctors to tear you apart. Quinn and I just might let them.”

Delphine looks to the door, but they’re not coming—yet. “So much for our deal, then?” she scoffs. “Remember? You agreed not to hurt the science, or us, and we agreed to help you.”

“That was before we knew you were responsible for a bunch of prisoners dying!”

“She has a point,” Cosima says.

“No.” Delphine isn’t taking her eyes off Spencer. “You said it yourself, Becky is responsible for the deaths of those girls—not me. Or maybe we tell the doctors there are no spiders at all. Maybe it was you who killed their wife. From what I’ve seen, you and your friends are certainly capable of
dismembering someone. Or eating them!”

Spencer’s eyes widen.

“Oh yes, I’ve heard all about your friend Ms. Lopez. I think they’ll certainly believe that before ‘killer space spiders,’ especially when there is no evidence here to support it. But you do have a file with Dr. Umbridge. What does that say about you? You’re delusional. You made up the whole thing. Cosima will back up my story.”

Delphine and Spencer both look for Cosima’s reaction, but before she can pick a side, Quinn’s voice cuts in from behind them.

“You know what’s scarier than killer space spiders?” One by one, the other women turn to hear the answer. “Me.”

Quinn is standing on a stool, three feet up in the air, with her jumpsuit unzipped and folded down at the waist. Her black bra matches the handle of the pistol pointed right at Delphine’s face. (The ripples in the metal chambers also match the curves of Quinn’s abs, not that Spencer noticed or anything.)

In the silence of the room, they can hear distant movement down the hall. The doctor wives are back.

“Where the hell did they go?” A door slams, then another, then some more angry words.

“Hey,” Cosima says gently, “nobody needs to get hurt here.”

“They’ll find us soon.” Quinn moves the gun’s aim between the two scientists from moment to moment. “And we’re going to have a nice talk about the truth and how to move forward with our day. If anybody moves or says something I don’t like, I will shoot you in the head. Spencer, please keep checking the tanks until they arrive.”

Spencer, tragically, tears her eyes away from the sexiness that is Bossy-With-a-Gun Quinn and scans the remaining twenty tanks or so on the back wall. The sounds of voices are getting closer.

When the squeaking of shoes on linoleum floors comes within range, Quinn calls out sweetly, “Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins! We’re in here! Near the trash chute!”

Delphine glares. “You’re not going to get away with this.”

“Watch me.”

“What the—” one doctor starts as they both stumble into the room. Their faces are red and swollen, and they look like they’re having the worst day of their lives. Spencer knows the feeling. Still, it’s startling how much they seem to have fallen apart in just a mere fifteen minutes. “What’s going on? What is this?” The first doctor keeps looking around from Quinn to the gun to the scientists with their hands up, then to the many, many empty tanks.

Quinn is firmly in command of the situation. “Spencer and I came downstairs to have a little chat with you, and that’s exactly what we’re going to do. Isn’t it, Spencer?”

“That’s right,” she calls over her shoulder as she sweeps the tanks in the back-left corner.

“So,” Quinn says sweetly. “I suggest everyone spread out, get on your knees, and put your hands on your head so we can have a heart-to-heart about what happened here today.”
The women exchange looks but keep quiet and do as they’re told. Quinn takes a big step from the stool onto the large island counter in the middle of the room and nudges aside the microscope with her shoe to gain more stable footing.

“I’m sure you’ve all read my file. So, you’re probably aware that I’m a convicted serial killer. I may not be the psychopath that my sister Lucy is, but I think it’s safe to say there’s something in our genes that makes us enjoy murdering people in cold blood. Would you agree with that assessment, Miss Human Genetics Expert Cosima?”

Cosima doesn’t seem afraid to look Quinn in the eye—or look down the barrel of a gun. “Yes.”

“Excellent. I do love being right. Now, as soon as Spencer’s done checking these tanks, she’s going to ask you some questions. You’re going to answer them. If you don’t, or if you get them wrong, I’m going to shoot you. This is Sue’s gun, by the way. You should know she left me three bullets, after she shot your Spencer clone in the head and then tried to shoot both me and Lucy.”

Delphine and Cosima react quietly to this news but don’t interrupt.

“Three bullets and four of you,” Quinn says. “That means we get to play: Who Wants to Live?”

Spencer tries to tune out the insanity happening behind her and focus on the task. Quinn’s certainly doing a good job of buying her time. If she isn’t thorough in her search, if even one spider survives, the terror could continue indefinitely. So far, so good, though, and only a few more to check on the right-hand side.

“Can we ask questions, too?” Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins says. “Like where did my wife’s leg go?”

She pushes the words through gritted teeth as her emotions catch up with her again.

“Fun fact,” Quinn says, “your scientist pal, here”—she points the gun at Delphine—“made thirteen hundred killer spiders that eat people! Very ambitious.”

The doctor leans over toward Delphine. “What is she talking about? This was you?”

“And then,” Spencer cuts in, “your friend Becky got a keycard to this room like I said and decided to make herself—quote—‘Queen of the Spiders’”—unquote—and let them out to kill everybody one by one, including me, my friends, and of course, your wife.”

“That little bitch,” the other doctor says. “I should’ve left her locked in there.”

Spencer’s jaw drops. “You let her out?”

“I had no reason not to! I came back from my block with Raven and heard banging on a closet door. I figured she locked herself in on accident. She isn’t the sharpest tack in the box.”

“Fantastic,” her wife retorts.

It must’ve been after they left DYAD with the clone, Spencer realizes. That’s when Becky unleashed the massive horde on them in the cafeteria. If the doctor had left her there, several inmates would still be alive, and they could’ve wiped the spiders out here and now on their own. Somehow. (In all honesty, she’s secretly glad that the killing-a-thousand-spiders part of her day is already over.) But now Spencer’s thinking about something else—something Vee said right after the massacre.

“Wait. If neither of you knew about the spiders, whose keycard is this?” Spencer reaches into her bra and pulls out the one with the silver stripe.
“You just said it was Becky’s,” Cosima offers.

But Delphine is insistent. “I never gave Becky a key to this room.”

“Becky got it from Vee, who got it from Aphasia,” Spencer says. “And Vee said that Aphasia stole it off one of the doctors.”

“This is one of those times,” Quinn chimes in, pointing the gun back at them, “when you don’t want to lie.”

The two wives look at each other in alarm. “It wasn’t me!” they cry simultaneously.

Then, as if reading the other’s mind, they both realize what the only possible answer must be: It was their dead wife’s keycard.

“Did Arizona know about this?” one of them asks Delphine. “What did you do to her?”

“Nothing!”

Cosima looks just as surprised as the doctors. “Is it true? Was she working with you?” This woman must really love doing science, Spencer thinks, because she’s about to cry again.

“No,” Delphine tells Cosima, then repeats, “No!” She looks at the doctors, then Quinn, holding a hand up in protest. “I swear it. I was working alone. You can check all of the paperwork. You’ll see it’s only my name on it. But I confess I had a backup key in case I lost this one. It seemed too risky to have only one. I kept it in my desk, but she must have found it and taken it. I’m embarrassed I didn’t even realize it was missing.”

“Are you really trying to blame all this on our dead wife?” one of the doctors says. “Take some responsibility.”

The other doctor wipes her eyes and offers, “Maybe she discovered your horrible death zoo and was trying to stop you. Somebody should.”

Nobody argues with that.

Spencer considers this new angle, and another piece clicks into place. “What if the doctor told Dr. Umbridge, and Dr. Umbridge told the Doctor!”

Everyone’s brows furrow at that statement, even Quinn’s.

“There’s this guy,” Spencer clarifies, “he calls himself the Doctor. He travels around helping people, I guess? In some kind of time-traveling phone booth that can vanish into thin air. I realize how stupid that sounds, but I’ve seen it, I just can’t explain it. Our friend Donna was with him,”—she looks at Delphine—“before your giant Satan spider ATE HER FACE OFF, and she said that he was contacted by Umbridge but she didn’t know why. What if Umbridge knew about the spiders because your wife told her, but she knew she wouldn’t get anywhere going over Sue’s head?”

One Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins looks at the other and asks quietly, “Did she ever say anything to you about this?”

“No, I…I don’t think so.” Her face scrunches as she tries to remember. Or tries not to cry. “I just don’t understand why she wouldn’t talk to us about this. She never kept secrets.”

“I guess she was trying to protect us?” her wife says. “Maybe she knew there wasn’t anything we
could do that wouldn’t put us in danger.”

“So, she goes to Umbridge?!” the doctor cries in disbelief. “Why not just tell Sue?”

Spencer offers, “Maybe she did tell Sue, and Sue had her killed for it.”

Delphine shakes her head. “Sue doesn’t know about this experiment. Or, if she did, she never said anything to me about it.”

“Well, I hope you’re proud of yourself,” the doctor says to Delphine, and her wife squeezes her arm. Turning to face her, she cries out, “This is her fault!”

“I tried to tell Sue,” Spencer says, getting them back on topic. “I told her there was a killer spider in my bunk right after I got here. I had no idea about all of this,” she gestures around the room, “but I wasn’t entirely wrong. And Sue wouldn’t listen. She had some bullshit rationale for why people were disappearing. It didn’t faze her at all.”

“Sue only hears what she wants to hear,” Delphine says. “She sees what she wants to see. It’s been convenient for us that she loves plausible deniability so much.”

“And intake bonuses,” Cosima adds.

Delphine doesn’t argue with that. “She doesn’t need to dig around and find out what’s going on. Maybe that’s why she’s still alive.”

“Yeah,” Spencer agrees. “That, and she’s banging the President of Space. No wonder Umbridge thought she couldn’t go over Sue’s head. I guess when the spiders somehow found out they’d been discovered, they killed the people in the know before word could get out, but that didn’t include Sue because she was a non-believer.”

“Hang on,” Cosima says. “When the spiders ‘found out’?”

“Yeah. They can understand speech and even write. They could’ve overheard some conversations from anyone. They’ve been crawling around the ship for months. They even hid under my bed.”

Cosima adjusts her glasses. “So, our best working theory is that my girlfriend bioengineered a thousand-plus super-intelligent carnivorous arachnids—without me. They were accessed illegally by Becky who took the keycard from Vee who got it from Aphasia who stole it from a doctor who stole it from Delphine. And when that doctor discovered the spiders, she told another doctor about it, who then sought help from another doctor who refers to himself as THE Doctor. And then a few key recon spiders happened to somehow discover this information, report it back to the others, and orchestrate an en masse targeted consumption of all three doctors in question before word could get out?”

Spencer shuffles through all of that and offers up some corrections. “THE Doctor isn’t dead, but his friend is. And she wasn’t eaten by the little ones, she—”

“Right, right, right, sorry,” Cosima corrects herself. “Helena.” She glares at her girlfriend again.

“But yeah, that’s what I’m thinking.” Spencer exhales deeply, considering the scope of all this. “Don’t forget the part where Vee had Becky use them to kill inmates month after month in a gang war for control of the prison. They scheduled their attacks around a zero-gravity staff dodgeball tournament, of all things, and those fall during the inmates’ period cycle, when the ship is surrounded by a giant, flesh-eating shark named Beyoncé. But those murders aren’t to be confused with Sue’s annual Christmas reaping that she blamed on Ripley to cover her tracks. Or that she occasionally
airlocked people just because she didn’t like them.” She takes another deep breath and sighs. “There’s been a lotta death here.”

These are the facts, she knows it; she’s lived it. But it’s just all so absurd when you say it out loud, like something out of the SyFy Channel or bizarre fanfiction.

“Wow,” Delphine says, and then the room falls silent for a minute.

Quinn looks over her shoulder and asks, “Do I get to shoot anyone yet?”

“No,” Spencer says, keeping her eyes on the adults. “We’ll see how round two goes. The good news is, it does look like all the spiders really are dead. So, now we get to talk about where to go from here.”


“Well, you’re the one breeding armies of weaponized spiders, so you tell me.” Spencer’s patience is wearing thin. “Is this about money? Are you in some kind of unbreakable government contract or something?” A beat, then a reminder. “We’re back to the part where my girlfriend will shoot you if you say something we don’t like.”

Her heart is pounding, not from the violence and danger in the room, but from the balls it took to call Quinn her girlfriend. Out loud. In front of other people. …And without discussing it with her first, Spencer’s realizing. And when she’s armed and could literally shoot Spencer with bullets. But it’s been five whole seconds now, and Spencer’s still breathing.

Quinn readjusts her hold on the gun and stands a little straighter.

“We are under contract, yes, for a significant portion of the prison’s annual budget.” Catching Cosima’s eye, Delphine corrects herself. “I was under contract to continue Dr. Schecter’s work, as I told you. I’m required to share out my findings every three months.”

“Like what?” Spencer asks. “You obviously weren’t tracking their whereabouts.”

Delphine lets the dig slide. “Primarily growth rates, intelligence markers, fertility rates, venom effectiveness, eating habits, and behavioral observations.”

“No grammar lessons?” Spencer says. “We could tell.”

Quinn’s eyes narrow slightly. “Sounds like you’ve got some new data for the Eating Habits section. I’ll tell you how to spell their names.”

“I’m very sorry about what happened,” Delphine says. “I assure you, I am. But I’m still under contract, and I need my supervisors to believe things are progressing normally. Otherwise, I lose my job and get reassigned elsewhere. Or worse.”

“Fine by me,” one of the doctors says, and her wife squeezes her arm again. Spencer can’t tell if it’s to shush her or agree with her.

Cosima speaks up. “She can’t leave. I need her here.”

“She lied to you,” Quinn says.

“Yeah, and I’m mad as hell. But I’m also sick.” Cosima lets that sink in before continuing. “I have a serious genetic condition that’s slowly killing me. Delphine is the only one who understands the
“coding sequence and my history and can engineer my treatment.”

“It’s true,” Delphine says. “There are vials of serum in a small refrigeration unit in room 3 if you would like to go check.”

“They can’t do it?” Quinn asks, pointing the gun at the two doctors.

“No,” Cosima says. “She stays, non-negotiable.”

It sounds honest enough, so Spencer’s willing to give her the benefit of the doubt. Saving your life can trump breaking your trust.

“Fine,” Spencer says, giving a soft, apologetic glance to the doctors.

“Meaning what, exactly?” Quinn asks.

Even in this disheveled room, Delphine is loyal to her projects. “I can’t just abandon my work.”

Quinn aims the gun right between her eyes. “Oh, I think you can.”

“You don’t understand how this works. I have to keep reporting that the spiders are alive and well.”

The deafening crack of the bullet firing makes Spencer jump about a foot in the air. She cowers instinctively, hands covering her ears, then she turns in horror to see just how dead Delphine is.

“How about ‘no,’” Quinn says, staring down with steely eyes. A small wisp of gray smoke escapes from the open barrel and dissipates into the air.

Delphine is alive but seems afraid to move or even look up. The bullet from the warning shot is lodged firmly in the white panel of the wall behind her head. Spencer’s both surprised and grateful that the room is so sturdily made. Perhaps tough enough that killer spiders can’t chew through it.

Delphine’s breathing fast but keeps her composure. “Even if you kill me, they’ll still use my notes to begin production facilities elsewhere. Unless I give them a reason not to.”

“She’s right,” Spencer says, holding a hand up to stop her newly minted girlfriend from blowing a hole in Delphine’s face. “You said this was just a first run. We have to tell them the project is a failure in a way that doesn’t get you fired. Make it look like it’s a waste of their money so they give up.”

Delphine exhales and stares off to the side, thinking it through. “I could begin reporting incidents of illness or severe infighting. I would need to manipulate a few factors to show I tried everything I could to stop it. They have to believe that there was no way to salvage the project.”

“Can you do it?”

“Yes,” Delphine says without hesitation, then takes another deep breath. “It would take probably… nine months to fabricate the appearance of a total failure in a way that seems organic. If they believe me, the project will be terminated.”

“No more killer spiders,” one of the doctors says quietly.

“No more killer spiders.”

“Then they’d better believe you,” Quinn says, readjusting her aim, “or you’ll be terminated.”
Spencer knows it’s entirely possible that Delphine is lying to save face and keep herself alive, but they have no better option than to believe her. “The project ends,” she says, “and then what?”

“Hopefully, I get to focus entirely on my work with Cosima.”

“The medical treatments?” Quinn asks.

Delphine looks at Cosima nervously. “That…and our other projects.”

“Yeah, about that,” Spencer jumps in with faux cheerfulness. “Let’s talk about cloning. Let’s talk about how and why you’ve been selling copies of me and my—” She catches herself and quickly decides twice in five minutes is pushing it. “—Quinn to the highest bidder.”

“Technically speaking,” Delphine says, “we used to sell Lucy, not Quinn.” She looks back at the gun and shuts up.

Cosima angles her body toward Spencer. “Yeah, it’s money, you said it. Sue tells the doctors which prisoners are coded for production, then they get a blood sample on intake and bring it to us to get started.”

The doctors look embarrassed to have any part in this now but don’t speak up to refute the facts.

Cosima continues, “It’s really not very many, I don’t think, relatively speaking. We’ve done, what—” she looks at Delphine, “—eleven models in five years? But you two have been our best-sellers by far. We had to stop producing Lucys when Sue cut the line, but demand for Spencer has been off the charts. You’re on track to be our best seller ever.”

She wishes she could be proud of that. She really does.

Cosima’s getting science-happy again. “We had to develop new aging accelerants just to keep up with demand. It’s how we were able to heal you this afternoon, actually. We’ve dramatically cut down on the incubation period, and it’s been exciting to see just how many clones we can bring to full-term in—”

“Hmm,” Quinn says, cocking the hammer on the revolver. “I don’t think I like the sound of that.”

“Cosima,” Delphine shushes. “Please don’t make this worse than it already is.”

“Well,” Spencer says, “you’ve been selling clones of people, so it’s already pretty bad.” May the day never come again when Spencer hears about her incubation period. This whole situation has her frustrated to the point of exhaustion.

Meanwhile, she can’t help but notice the more playful side of Quinn that’s come out with the gun. It reminds her of Lucy in her element, but she wouldn’t ever dare say that out loud. If only Spencer could find that level of fun, herself. Maybe then she wouldn’t hate everything about this.

She runs a hand through her hair and exhales deeply. “I get that the ship needs money. I would like to keep eating. But no more copies of me. No more Lucys, and no more me’s. It’s creepy. You said you have others, right? Stick to them.”

Cosima bends forward, supporting her weight with her knuckles on the floor as her head hangs down. Quinn’s assertion that they stay on their knees seems a bit much, even if it is for Spencer’s own safety.

Still looking at the floor, Cosima asks, “What should we do with the ones we already grew?”
She cringes at the word grew for a moment before she can form a response. “Yeah, um…Sue said you still had, like, forty of them.”

The scientists look at each other, then up at Quinn, who firms up her stance. Delphine nods for Cosima to answer honestly.

“Closer to fifty now.”

“Wow.” It’s a quiet statement, barely a sound. Spencer fights back the tears of horror that she feels creeping in. She’d give all the money in the world for this to not be something she now has to deal with. God only knows how many they’ve already sold. It’s a question for another day when her brain isn’t already overloaded. Who ever has to face the ethics of this? She can’t bring herself to end their lives—painlessly or otherwise—but the thought of putting fifty more versions of herself down on Earth makes Spencer unbearably queasy. Still, nausea is better than murder. Hearing that one of them died today was hard enough.

She exhales deeply and runs her hands over her face before mumbling, “Fine. Sell them and be done with it. We need the money, and I don’t want them here anymore. Do what you have to do.” She turns away and takes a moment to compose herself before continuing. “And you’re sure the Lucys are all gone? There aren’t any more sitting in storage waiting for a forever home?”

“That’s correct,” Delphine says. “They’re gone. We sold the last one years ago, shortly after production ceased.”

“Why quit a best-seller?” Quinn asks. Each word is dripping with disdain.

“We were given a compelling reason to do so.” Delphine stares her down, daring her to fire. “It turns out they were all killing people.”

But Quinn just looks a little amused. “Guess it was a bad batch.”

“When you were arrested, your face was all over the news. Anybody could’ve seen it. Any number of other girls with that face. What then? What would they think, or their parents? What if they started asking questions? Do you have any idea what kind of problems that could create for our operation?”

“Wouldn’t want to get in the way of all the great work you’re doing here,” Quinn says facetiously. “I’m almost sorry I killed all of those people.”

“Well, you should be. DYAD had to pay off every news outlet within five hundred miles of Lima, Ohio to bury the story. Your parents as well. Your murder spree cost us nearly seven million dollars. Not to mention the lives of all the families you ruined.”

Eyes still on Delphine, Quinn steadies the gun again but aims it at Cosima. “Why stop now? Keep talking.” It’s a dare.

Spencer’s desperate to keep this from escalating and jumps in to bring it back around. “Sue’s the one who decides who gets cloned, right? But it could be anybody?”

“Scientifically speaking, yes, it can be mostly anyone, as long as there aren’t extreme genetic factors that interfere with the process. So far, the only person Sue brought to us who was incompatible was a girl named Lexa. Her genetic sequence has been mutated by radiation so thoroughly that her blood has turned black. We decided not to pursue that line. Too many variables.”

Spencer’s a bit thrown by that. She’s met Lexa; she doesn’t seem like a mutant, just a candle freak.
“But for our business purposes,” Delphine continues, “we only work with certain prisoners—ones who are brought here specifically to be replaced by a clone on Earth.” The look on her face provides the unspoken, ‘like you.’ “We use blood from the primes to produce first clone, which is called an ‘alpha.’ This is the one for the swap. We arrange transport through government back channels. We then sell additional beta clones to discreet private parties worldwide. Our numbers are limited to minimize exposure, especially in the United States.”

“She means we only produce clones of certain people,” Cosima says. “I think there are…six primes currently on board?” She looks to Delphine for confirmation.

“Yes, that’s correct. Primes are extremely valuable to us.”

Spencer remembers the blue files and what Sue said about ‘primers.’ “Let me guess—me, Lucy, Regina, Martha, Kat, and Graham.” She swallows hard at that last one.

“That’s right,” Delphine says, suspicious as to how she knows that.

Spencer takes a deep breath and closes her eyes. “Then it’s five now.”

“I’m sorry?”

“Graham’s dead.” Now seems as good a time as any to come clean about this, considering Quinn’s holding them at gunpoint.

Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins gasps. “Oh no.”

“She died in the battle upstairs.” Close enough. “I’m sorry.”

The scientists sigh and exchange looks but don’t seem ready to release any wrath on Spencer. “I’m sorry, too,” Delphine says.

Cosima takes off her glasses and cleans them on her lab coat. “Let’s hope no one comes looking for her.”

“Yeah.” Spencer exhales loudly, running a hand through her hair. She takes a minute to think through all this and paces beside the counter Quinn’s standing on. Right now, their needs and DYAD’s resources have to mesh. “There has to be a way for all of us to get what we want and work together.” She looks at the scientists first. “You want to keep doing your experimental research as legitimately as possible to further your careers and keep it above board, meet your contracts, and get paid.”

“Yes,” they both agree.

“We want to live happy, healthy lives where no one’s locked up and no one else gets hurt. And you…” she looks at the doctors, “…honestly, I have no idea what you want.”

Right now, it looks like they both want to crawl into a hole and not come out for a year. “I want my love to not be dead,” one of them whispers. Her head drops toward the floor and she starts silently weeping again. Her wife scoots a bit closer, enough to take her hand and squeeze it hard.

“I’m so sorry, both of you, for what happened.” Spencer means it, though the words seem shallow
and empty right now. It’s easy to fall into the guilt trap and tell herself the dead doctor is her fault. Delphine should be the one apologizing to them, not her. But it doesn’t look like that’s going to happen. Spencer shakes it off. “If you’re willing to stay, we need you upstairs to help take care of us. I think everyone respects you and how you help us, and you’ll be safe.”

One of the doctors, Juliet, laughs through her tears. “Yeah, real safe, I’m sure. No, thanks.”

Her wife sniffles and wipes her face with her mascara-stained sleeve. “Honey, she’s right. We should stay.”

“Lauren. You actually want to stay in this shithole? With a bunch of escaped criminals.”

“No, but we don’t have anywhere else to go, at least not until Raven’s done. We promised to help take care of these women, no matter what.” The second doctor pauses, then adds gently, “And I think it’s what she would’ve wanted.”

“To stay in the flying uterus where she died?” She sniffles again, desperately needing a tissue.

Leaning in to press her forehead against her wife’s temple, the second doctor, Lauren, smiles. “We could do worse.” They hold their pose for a moment of quiet comfort, squeezing softly and releasing as they breathe. “I’m gonna stay with you tonight.”

Juliet opens her eyes, then looks down, struggling with how to react to that. “No, it’s okay. It’s your night with Raven. We need to stick to the schedule.”

“Hey—” Lauren takes her wife’s chin in her hands and looks into her eyes. “I’m not leaving you alone right now.” She kisses her cheek and runs her fingers through the long, blonde hair, tucking it behind her ear. “I’m not going anywhere.”

Spencer gets lost in the moment, watching them, as do Cosima and Delphine. It’s truly moving to see the kind of love they have for each other. Spencer can only imagine what it would be like to have not just one person care for you like that, but two at the same time. The fullness that must come from that feeling…The sense of feeling balanced and complete by having multiple sides of yourself addressed. There’s a longing deep within her that Spencer can’t quite reach—a wish for something more—and she feels closer to it watching these women. But this isn’t the time for feelings.

“Okay then.” Spencer pulls herself together to refocus. “Good, everyone’s staying.”

“Who’s in charge now upstairs?” one of the doctors asks. “All due respect to the people with the gun, but I don’t feel comfortable taking orders from inmates.”

Quinn cocks her head. “Then just take orders from my gun.”

“We don’t want any more fighting,” Spencer says. She doesn’t give Quinn the chance to interrupt her and debate the point. “I think we’re going to have kind of a council-slash-committee to make decisions with some representatives of different interests.” She’s trying to make it sound as legit and responsible as possible. “I don’t see why you couldn’t be a part of that.”

“I know you said you locked Sue up or whatever,” Juliet says, “but she’s not going to just give up this place.”

“I still have two bullets,” Quinn smiles.

Spencer cuts in, “Which I really don’t think you’re going to need after all, okay? So, can you just put it down now? Please?” But Quinn doesn’t move. “They’re helping! Let’s just figure this out and go.”
“If Sue’s not dead,” Cosima asks, “what’s your next move here, guys?”

“We’re keeping her alive,” Spencer says, and Quinn rolls her eyes. “As long as we need her for something.”

“A punching bag, maybe?” Cosima offers, but Spencer’s not listening.

She’s just had an idea.

“Hang on. Here’s a…really weird proposal. Sue is the public face of the prison, right? So, we still need her, at least until we can figure out how to work around that. She might have information we can use, if we can get it out of her. We can keep her locked up and try to wait her out, but obviously the President will notice if she goes missing. So, what we really need is her face.”

“What are you suggesting?” Delphine asks.

“I can cut her head off,” Quinn says.

Spencer shoot her a look. “Do you think you could make a clone of Sue? We can swap her out just like she did with me and use the copy to keep up appearances.” It seems like beautiful poetic justice. Spencer holds the remaining air in her lungs and waits for a response.

“Another one?” Delphine clarifies.

Spencer’s brain stops working. “‘Another one’?”

Quinn fills in the blanks for her. “They already cloned Sue.”

“Christ!” Spencer says, unable to stop herself, “is there anybody on this goddamn ship who hasn’t been cloned?!?”

“Um,” Cosima stumbles, looking awkwardly at Delphine, then at the floor.

“Yes,” Delphine says. “Of course. Including half the people in this room, so there’s no need to overreact.”

Quinn doesn’t seem shocked at all by this revelation. If anything, she sounds relieved by how much it makes sense. “Sue was the cheerleading coach at my high school. One of the other Sues, anyway.”

“No way,” Cosima says, stunned by the coincidence.

“I know. We were really close back home. When I got here and I saw her but she didn’t know me, I thought I was going crazy. I didn’t know how that could be possible. Then I met Lucy.” She shrugs and ends the story there.

A beat passes, and Delphine says, “Technically, our Sue is already a clone.” She looks to Cosima, who nods along. “But we have the original sequence on file.”

“She’s a copy?” Spencer couldn’t sound more shocked if she tried. “She’s not the real Sue?”

Quinn turns her head at that and glares. “Something wrong with that?”

Spencer winces at her mistake. “No. Sorry.”

“Yeah.” Cosima pushes up her glasses. “The original Sue—or whatever her name was—came from a lab down on Earth decades ago as part of an experiment called Project Runaway. They put dozens
of betas all over the globe and kept track of them to see if they would somehow find each other, like if they were drawn together by some cosmic force or innate biological drive or something.” Cosima’s eyes move from Spencer to Quinn. “She was the prototype for this whole experiment that led to Lucy and then, you. DYAD bought out the company that ran it and took over their program, and the rest is history.”

Spencer imagines dozens of Sues all over the world meeting up in restaurants and hotels, trying to figure out what’s going on. It certainly rings true enough—Lucy had an innate desire to find the other copies of herself, even before she knew about the cloning.

Quinn seems to pick up on this point, herself. “Were they?” she asks. “Finding each other?”

“Many of them did, yes,” Delphine says. “Though not always for the same purposes. Some wanted friendship, cohabitation, familial intimacy, while others wanted employment, sex, financial assistance —”

Spencer balks. “They were having sex with each other?”

“You’ve met Sue, right?” Cosima asks.

Delphine adds, “She thinks she’s the most beautiful creature in the universe, other than the inspector she’s obsessed with.”

“She was bullet number two,” Quinn mentions casually.

“I assure you,” Cosima tells Spencer, “Sue jumped at the chance to fuck herself.”

“Ew.” The scowl on Spencer’s face speaks volumes. She’s seen a copy of herself this very day, but having sex with it was the furthest thing from her mind. Maybe because they’d both been beaten within an inch of their lives. Or maybe because she’s an ethical, decent human being.

“It’s not that crazy,” Quinn offers. The gun droops a bit as she offers her point to Spencer. “People fuck themselves all the time. You should know,” she digs.

“By yourself is not the same as with yourself,” Spencer argues, but even she isn’t sure about the semantics anymore.

Cosima turns to Delphine and quietly asks, “Is it technically masturbation if it’s with a genetic identical?”

“I’m honestly not sure.”

“I mean, it’s a different body than your own, so I would think it’s not, but if—”

“OKAY, NO MORE SEX TALK,” Spencer interrupts. “The point is, if we can get a clone of Sue and teach her the basics of how this place works—the new way, where we’re not locked up—we can use her as a fake warden until we figure out our next move.”

“It’s worked before,” Cosima shrugs, “no reason why it wouldn’t work again.”

Spencer blinks. “What do you mean?”

“Teaching a Sue to be warden. They used to have people in charge of the prison floor who were completely unaffiliated with DYAD. They operated as two separate entities.” She remembers something and looks to Delphine. “Isn’t one of the prisoners a former warden?”
“Vee,” Spencer says.

“Right, right. But that got messy for them, too much liability, too easy to be exploited, yada yada. So eventually they made a Sue to run the prison because they wanted someone personally invested in DYAD’s success. They realized they could make money by integrating DYAD’s work with the prison system. It’s harder than you think to find people willing to participate in an illegal human cloning scheme.”

“I’ll bet,” Spencer says dryly. She raises an accusatory eyebrow.

“Hey, I’m here for the science,” Cosima defends herself. “And I need the treatments, I told you. I’m helping people the best way I know how.”

“Speaking of,” Quinn says, “how about that Sue clone?”

“We have four growing in the back,” Delphine offers.

But Cosima shakes her head, pushing her glasses up. “I don’t think they have time for the language acquisition phase. You guys might have to go with a slightly used model, here.” Glancing at Delphine to make sure she’s not too off-base with her suggestion, she says, “You could try one from room 23.”

Quinn and Spencer look at each other.

“What’s room 23?” Spencer asks warily.

“In the main hall outside DYAD,” Delphine says. “It’s where Sue takes the President for their intimate encounters. There are two other Sues who live there specifically for those purposes.”

Spencer makes a face. She can’t decide if she wishes they’d taken the time to check the other rooms on the hall, or if she’s very, very glad that they didn’t.
Two For the Price of One

Chapter Notes

Here’s the map of the Uterius and the character photo index.

Spencer doesn’t know if she’s supposed to knock first or what. She’s also not even sure how to open the door, as it’s locked with another retinal scanner. But fortunately, Sue’s DYAD card works, and the white door whooshes open without warning.

“Madam Presid—AHH!! Who are you!”

A Sue clone scrambles on the bed, cowering in fear. She’s wearing a green satin pajama suit nearly identical to red track suit the regular Sue wears.

Spencer’s only seen inside three other rooms on this hall today, but this one may be the most bizarre yet. The majority of the space is taken up by a giant bed even wider than a king-sized from back home. It’s lined with a leopard-print blanket that could be real fur, for all she knows. There are chains with wrist-cuff rings hanging from the walls above the headboard, and it’s made of a dozen columns of metal bars. A tall nightstand dresser beside the bed is lined with drawers holding god knows what—lingerie? Toys? Weapons? All of the above?

In the corner, a few empty cafeteria trays sit piled up near the toilet. It looks like the scientists were right—the two Sues do live in here, having sex and doing little else, apparently. There isn’t even a bookshelf or a TV, nothing to pass the time.

It seems cruel, but then again, it looks very comfortable and at least they have each other. It isn’t Solitary, like what Spencer and friends have done to the real warden now.

“Where’s Sue?” asks the other one, who’s dressed in a purple satin pajama suit. “Did she send you to have sex with us?”

“No! God, no.” She takes a step back at the very idea of it. “I’m Spencer. This is Quinn. Sue sent us to talk to you.” It’s a lie, but it seems like a good starting place.

“Excellent,” says Purple Sue. “I love talking.” She lies down on the bed sideways, propping her head up on her elbow. “Tell me what a bad, bad girl I’ve been and how you want to punish me for—”

“No! Not that kind of talking! Regular talking!”

Green Sue sits down next to her sis—...the other one, and they exchange confused looks. “What else would we talk about?”

“Well, many things,” Spencer starts. This whole scene is horrifically awkward, and she doesn’t even know what she’s working with. “Do you two ever... go upstairs?”

More confused looks. “I’m not following,” says the green one.

“To the prison.”
“What’s a ‘prison’?” asks the purple one.

Spencer’s eyes go wide. Oh boy.

For a moment, it seems sadly ironic, since these women have probably been prisoners their whole lives and not realized it. But Spencer’s able to push past that and realize what a great opportunity this is. If they have no prior knowledge and no context, Spencer can make them believe whatever she wants.

“It’s the place where Sue comes from,” she says, as if talking to a five-year-old, “and she needs your help to take care of it. I come from there, too; so does Quinn. Sue was living there with us, but then…she had an accident.” Spencer’s brain spins, trying to quickly decide where this road should lead.

Purple Sue looks very afraid. “What kind of accident?”

“It was terrible. She was having sex with one of my friends upstairs, and she was getting choked. But it went on a little too long, and Sue forgot her safe word.”

“Oh, I know!” Green Sue says. “It’s Hillary.”

Purple Sue nods. “We don’t know what it means, but Sue says it’s very attractive and powerful.”

“Yes, well,” Spencer says, “she forgot it.” She’s trying to make it sound like a life lesson for kindergartners, like Sue got lost at the mall. “And she ended up dying.”

Green Sue gasps loudly, like she might cry. “Fuck me hard!”

“That’s awful!” Purple Sue stands up and shares a sympathetic expression with her counterpart. “How can we help?”

“Oh, thank you,” Spencer says, as if moved by this great idea they’ve had. “Well, now we need one of you to come and be upstairs with us sometimes. Not all of the time, just when somebody comes to visit, like the President.” Both women seem to perk up at the mention of her name. “But the thing is, we need to do some pretending.”

“Ah,” says Green Sue. “I am an expert at role playing. Would you like me to be a drill sergeant? Or a disappointed mother? I’m well practiced at Martha Slewgurt.”

“She’s very good,” Purple Sue agrees.

“Um, thank you, but what I need is for one of you to pretend to be regular Sue.”

“Oh.” Green Sue looks disappointed, like it won’t be enough of a challenge.

“Whenever the President or someone else comes to visit,” Spencer continues, “we need a warden. We need to make them think that other Sue is fine and that it was one of you who had the choking accident.”

Now they look concerned. “You want one of us to be dead?”

Quinn raises an eyebrow. “You can both be dead, if you’d prefer.”

Spencer sighs and shoots her a look. “What she means is, now that you know what the situation is, we need you to go along with it.” Spencer really doesn’t want to threaten anyone else with death today. “If you won’t help us, we can go talk to the other Sues who’ll do the roleplaying really well,
I’m sure. And then the President will start going to have sex with *them* instead, and I—”

“Okay!” Purple Sue cries out. “Fine, fine, I’ll do it. I’ll be the warden.”

Spencer looks at Green Sue. “I thought *you* were the big role-player?”

“I get choked a *lot,*” Purple Sue explains. “It’ll be a believable story.”

Spencer sighs again. “Forget the choking! Just act normal!” But it’s clear these women have no grasp of that word.

Green Sue says, “I’ll start working on my character—the woman in mourning who lost her best friend and now feels empty inside, until she’s filled with at least four fingers.”

Spencer really wants to get out of this room. “Great, we’ll go with that.” She moves a few steps toward the door. “Okay, we need to go take care of some things.” She looks at Purple Sue. “But we’ll come back to get you in a few days and show you around upstairs and explain what you need to know. Thanks.”

And without another word, Spencer gets the fuck out of that old lady sex den as fast as she can. It just goes to show, your weirdest day can always get a little weirder.

************************

“I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I’m glad you have a gun.”

Spencer’s following Quinn back up the stairs to the main floor and laughing a little, in spite of herself. All things considered, both meetings went very well. They got what they came for: answers, a confirmation that the spiders were eradicated, and a plan to move forward. Added bonus: Nobody died!

Quinn sure proved to be useful in the heat of the moment. Spencer’d had a hunch that Quinn never took the gun out of her uniform when she first came back to cell 10. She was glad to be right. Not that Spencer wanted things to get violent—she remained unarmed, herself—but it did make her feel a bit better to have that backup just in case. Even the kind that could get them vented into space.

Quinn pauses as she reaches the top step. “That’s why you invited me? To be your muscle?”

This makes Spencer stop as well. “No, I told you, I wanted to talk. I wanted to spend time with you.”

Quinn’s eyes narrow, considering this. “Good talk.” Then, pushing the door open, she steps over a Boomer body and turns right to start down the cell block corridor.

“Quinn!” Spencer catches up to her in front of cell 20. It’s currently empty, and it feels like a blessing to not have an audience right now. But then Spencer realizes it’s because everyone who lived there—Corky, Violet, and Alex Vause—is dead. “What’s going on?”

Quinn stops and turns around with tears in her eyes. “I don’t know what you want from me!” She sounds exasperated, like this has been eating at her for quite a while. “I thought I could figure it out, but I guess I’m not Ivy League material after all. I was early-admission to Yale, by the way. Not that
you ever asked.”

Spencer recoils a bit at the statement. It stings because it’s true—she didn’t know Quinn was so ambitious, or academically gifted, for that matter. Pushing aside her embarrassment (and envy), Spencer tackles the bigger question. Only, she doesn’t know what Quinn’s referring to. She runs back through the various events of the day, but it could be a dozen different things. Spencer wants to get this right. She’s never seen Quinn express this much emotion about, well, anything.

At Spencer’s silence, Quinn runs a hand through her hair, laughing in frustration, and attacks again. “You don’t even get it, do you? What am I supposed to think, Spencer? You made it perfectly clear you’d rather spend two months running around chasing a spider instead of getting to know me. But why am I surprised? Everything is about you.”

Spencer’s mouth falls open, unsure of what to say. This stings, and she’s not entirely sure she doesn’t deserve it. “I didn’t…No, it’s not!”

“Could’ve fooled me. But here’s a tip you can scribble in your journal for the next psycho murder crisis: If you want the gun, just ask. Don’t waste my time.”

“I just told you that’s bullshit! And don’t act like you weren’t having fun down there threatening them.”

“I was,” Quinn says, annoyed, “until someone decided to make me look stupid and tell me to stop. Congratulations, you asserted yourself in front of the big girls. Guess you really are the boss lady now.”

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t trying to make you look bad.” Spencer’s more than a little put off by the insinuation but tries to keep the higher ground. “I just didn’t want anybody to accidentally get shot when we were getting good information. I’ve never seen you like that. I didn’t know what you were gonna do. According to you, you kill people all the time!”

Quinn pauses for a beat. “You don’t trust me.”

Spencer’s mouth opens to respond, but she holds the words in to reconsider them first. “We’re learning how to work together.” She’s aiming for diplomatic, but it sounds like a patronizing platter of crap and she knows it.

“You’re the good cop now? I’m not looking for a business partner. I do just fine on my own.”

“Do you?” Spencer says out of spite, giving a little shrug gesture to the prison walls around them.

“Yes!” Quinn sounds exasperated. “You don’t know me, Spencer! You made such a big deal out of spending this ‘long, horrible day’ trying to find me, but I told you I’m not some Disney princess to be rescued!” She takes a deep breath and looks away for a moment, collecting her thoughts. “You don’t get to be mad at me for not needing to be saved. Not everybody gets to be a hero.”

Now Spencer’s the one fighting the sting in her eyes. “Wow, I thought I was…I was just trying to help you. Because I care about you. How about, you don’t get to be mad at ME for not wanting you to be DEAD.”

“I'M FINE,” Quinn shouts again. She turns away in frustration, running a hand through her hair and wiping her sweaty palms on her uniform. Her body swivels to face the empty cell as she chooses her next words, and she grabs hold of the bars to lean against them slightly, like she needs the support. “Today is not the day I needed you, Spencer.”
Quinn may as well have fired the gun, the way those words rip through her. Spencer’s eyes fall to
the floor as her body tenses instinctively. This conversation is not going at all according to plan.
Whatever the fuck she thought the plan was.

Quinn straightens her fingers and presses the heels of her palms against the bars, then retracts,
watching her fingers curl and flex. The mindless action seems to center her body as her mind drifts
further away. “Did you ask for the transfer because you wanted to be Lucy’s fuck puppet, or because
you wanted to get away from me?” Her words are so quiet, they just hang in the air, not even
reaching the back wall of the cell in front of her.

“That was Umbridge! Of course I didn’t want to leave you! She was a psychopath who saw we
were getting close and wanted to hurt me for some fucked up reason we’ll never know. I never asked
to leave 10. I begged her not to take me away from you.”

Spencer watches Quinn continue gripping the bars, considering her words. It’s not going to make
things any better by lying, so she takes a breath and adds, “I did ask to be put with Lucy once I got to
11, but only because I thought she was part of the spider thing and I wanted to keep an eye on her.”

Quinn exhales sharply but doesn’t turn around. “I bet you did.”

Now Spencer’s the one getting mad. “You know what? I’m getting pretty sick of this ‘Everybody
loves Lucy more than me’ pity party. Yes, I slept with her, and yes, I liked it. But you weren’t
talking to me, remember? So, I slept with Lucy because she looks exactly like you.”

Quinn turns around now, emotional but trying to hide it. “But she’s not me! Maybe you don’t get
that, but it matters.”

“Of course I get it.”

“Doesn’t seem like it.”

Spencer knows she messed up here, but the only way she can make amends is with actions, not
words. And that will take time and opportunity. For now, she says, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make
you feel like I think you’re interchangeable. You’re not.” It’s awkward for a moment, as Quinn still
isn’t meeting her eyes. “But please don’t tell her I was thinking about you the whole time.” Spencer
gives a half-smile. “She’ll probably kill me.”

Quinn leans back against the bars and slides one foot up them so her knee is bent. She’s relaxing, at
least a little. “Not if I don’t kill you first.”

“I guess the jealous streak must be genetic.”

Quinn bristles at the comment. “Lucy plays games. She likes to pretend she owns girls and make
them do things, or not. I think she gets off on the power of it. And in her mind, if you ‘belong’ to her,
then yeah, maybe she’ll fight for you. But it comes with a price.”

Spencer raises an eyebrow. “And you’re nothing like that? You don’t fight for people?”

“I don’t ‘own’ people, no.” The condescension is thick. “And I don’t play games. It’s part of why
‘Mistress Berry’ and I never worked out. I just wanted Rachel to be herself.” Quinn reaches into her
bra and pulls out her cigarettes and lighter, firing one up and taking a long drag. “Lucy likes
conquest and power. She wants to feel like she’s taken something from someone. Their words, their
choices, their voice.”

“It’s just a game. It’s all consensual.” Spencer huffs a little laugh and says, “She asks a lot of
questions.”

“I know. I heard.” Quinn raises an eyebrow as the smirk creeps in. Thinking for a moment, she meets Spencer’s eyes. “I’m saying, this is the difference between us. Lucy asks for things she wants to take. I’d rather someone make their own choice to give it to me. I told you that in the bathroom.”

I remember.

Quinn flicks some ashes away and looks at the burning end thoughtfully. “You still haven’t answered my question.”

Spencer’s brow furrows. “Which one?”

“What do you want?” She asks it harmlessly, like a close friend lending an ear with no stake in the outcome. “You’re a free woman now. You practically run this place. You can probably have anything.”

Spencer laughs again and turns away. “Yeah, right.”

It strikes her, as she says it, that she now knows exactly what she wants, after all. She just hadn’t let herself think the words until now. Images enter her mind like bursts of memory—flashes of things that could possibly become. She’s sitting in the cafeteria eating lunch with someone on either side of her, people who care about her and challenge her and make her feel safe and full and alive. But as fast as the visual appears, it fades out of her grasp. “I don’t see that happening.”

“Try me.”

Spencer’s still facing down the hall, not wanting to look Quinn in the eye. It would make it harder to admit what’s in her heart. Instead, she offers a different truth. “I never wanted to pit you and Lucy against each other.”

“You didn’t.” Quinn exhales a long, gray stream. “We’ve always had a weird thing. Before you.” She flicks another ash cluster and asks, “Did she say you have to choose?”

Spencer gives pause and replays the conversations she’d had with Lucy about their arrangement, or whatever it should be called. They never really defined it. But there is certainly one thing that has been defined. “She said I ‘belong’ to her, whatever that means.” After a beat, she remembers a line from Play-Doh class. “Oh, and ‘sharing is caring.’”

Quinn laughs softly through a puff of smoke. “I bet you never saw yourself being the prison gang type.”

“Yeah, well, apparently nobody else sees me that way, either.”

“Give them time. The other Past Hells will warm up to you. You haven’t been in very long.”

“I’m not—” Spencer starts, but then she realizes Quinn knows something she doesn’t. Has she been a member of this gang the whole time? She didn’t even know there were gangs until two hours ago. And now, she’s too embarrassed to ask the question. “Yeah, it hasn’t been very long since my initiation.” She throws it out there, hoping Quinn will take the bait and give her some much-needed clarity around this.

“I remember.” A long exhale of smoke. “I had a front row seat.”

…OH. The four-way.
It wasn’t just group sex, it was a literal gang bang.

Quinn continues as Spencer’s mind spins. “I had already talked to Aphasia about pulling you in. We both thought that was what you wanted. She said she told you about the war and that you seemed to care.” Quinn sighs quietly. “But I guess we’re still getting to know each other.”

“Hey. Maybe if you’d talked to me about it, I would’ve known what the hell was going on.”

“Yeah,” Quinn says, acknowledging her fault in the matter. “We don’t talk about that stuff with Mack around. She wouldn’t get it.”

Spencer nods. “She’s got her head so far up Lucy’s butt, there was barely room for my finger.” It’s a joke, and it gets the staredown reaction she expected. “I’m kidding,” she assures her. “There was room.” Quinn’s still not laughing. “Too soon?” A grin slowly creeps across Spencer’s face, and they share a laugh, finally breaking the tension.

Leaning against the wall opposite the cell, Spencer lets her head fall back. “Space prison gangs. Crazy, huh?”

Quinn hums in agreement. She focuses on her cigarette as Spencer lets her mind wander through the ins and outs of this new chapter of her reality.

Quinn did want Spencer with her and spoke up on her behalf. Still, it’s more than a little frustrating that she wasn’t included in this decision about her own life. And it’s probably too late now. She figures there’s no reneging on this kind of commitment to Lucy Fabray, even though she didn’t fully know what she was consenting to. Spencer feels a little duped. Hopefully the gang thing isn’t that big deal around here. She’s eaten meals with mixed groups of Aphasia’s and Lucy’s girls before. Nothing really has to change, right? And at least she’s a part of something. It’s silly, but Spencer has to admit she feels a bit better hearing she was being recruited by multiple groups. It’s good to feel wanted.

“So,” she offers as casually as she can, “what’s the current policy on dating outside your gang? Frowned upon, no big deal, death penalty…?”

Quinn gives a small smile as she flicks the cigarette again, clearly amused by how smooth and blasé Spencer’s trying to be. Her lines are still miles beyond Mack’s. “Making plans?”

“I’m considering my options.”

“I thought you were the new warden,” Quinn says playfully. “You should do whatever you want.” There’s a quiet pause while Quinn ponders her next statement. “I’m not going to ask you to choose just one of us. I don’t think Lucy will, either. You don’t need to.” She takes another breath and adds, “I don’t want you to.”

Spencer can’t believe what she’s hearing. All this time, she thought this crazy triangle of sexy murder sisters was going to end in, well, murder. Or at least some severe blood loss. But now it sounds like she can have her Quinn and eat Lucy, too. So to speak.

“Whatever you want to do with Lucy,” Quinn says, “that’s your business. But do it because she’s Lucy. Please don’t pretend she’s me, okay? I’m right here.”

“Deal.” Spencer lets a little smile show. “And same to you,” she adds in a rush, wanting to make sure the generosity goes two ways, “if you want to…”

Both of Quinn’s eyebrows rise. “I have no intention of sleeping with Lucy.”
“She’s really hot,” Spencer offers, then smiles again. They stand for a moment awkwardly; the fight is behind them but Spencer’s not quite sure what comes next.

Quinn thinks for a moment, then says, “You could go over on Wednesdays.”

Spencer’s mouth opens for a moment, confused. She was so distracted by that familiar mental image of Quinn slapping Mack’s ass that she almost missed the wording. “‘Go over’?”

“Yeah. I figure it makes sense for you to move back in.” Quinn takes in one last cloud of smoke before smashing the butt under her shoe. “If you want to. Now that we’re girlfriends and all.” She exhales and gives a small smile, meeting Spencer’s eyes.

They break out into one more bashful, happy laugh together, and Spencer knows that somehow, it’s all going to be okay.

Side by side, Quinn and Spencer walk casually back to cell 10. Spencer can only imagine what time it must be, and she’s looking forward to a well-deserved sleep. Tomorrow, for the first time in too long, she’ll wake up a free woman. (Well, close enough.) It feels like a bigger distinction than it should, considering she’s still trapped in this dump in the outer regions of the solar system with no way home. But she doesn’t have any real desire to go back there anymore. The immediate threats are finally gone. No one here has any authority over her anymore, and Spencer’s going to keep it that way.

She hears an unfamiliar voice before she sees who it belongs to, and Spencer’s tired feet carry her into clear view of cell 10 before she can think to stop herself.

There, just five feet away with no bars between them, is Kima Greggs, the last remaining prison guard, holding court right in the middle of Spencer’s new home.
Spencer takes off running back up the cell block before Greggs has the chance to say or do anything. If she has a taser in her hand, it’s not going to catch Spencer Hastings. Not again, not today.

“Spencer, wait!” someone calls out, but she isn’t stopping.

The problem is, there isn’t anywhere to go and no way out. Everywhere she turns, there is death. If this ship has a janitor—and Spencer’s only now realizing that it might not—and if they’re still alive, they will sure earn their salary today.

Spencer takes a right-hand turn and starts towards Sue’s office, then remembers what’s in there and takes another right to head down the classes hallway instead. There are plenty of rooms there—ones that don’t have dead versions of herself in them—and she can find one to hide in until she comes up with a plan.

“Spencer!” A voice comes from down the hall ahead of her, approaching quickly. It’s Aphasia.

Good thing she got away, too.

Spencer turns to run back the other way and sees Quinn’s been chasing her too and is catching up.

“We can hide in here,” Spencer tells them, pointing to the small arms room.

“Stop, stop,” Aphasia says as she reaches her. “Damn, girl, why you make us chase you? You know I don’t run. Greggs is cool.”

Spencer’s brow furrows, and she looks to Quinn for confirmation.

Her girlfriend half-shrugs and says, “She hasn’t killed anyone.”

Aphasia crosses her arms and raises an eyebrow at Spencer. Their showdown lasts all of three seconds, then Aphasia turns and starts walking back, shaking her head. “Come on,” she calls without turning around.

Spencer opts to walk back the way she came because it means she can hold hands with Quinn. It’s like a middle school crush all over again, but with a girl for the first time. Together they step over the many Boomer bodies and blood pools for what must be the eleventh time in this unrelentingly bizarre day. How very romantic.

As they approach cell 10, Spencer slows down and keeps a safe distance just in case Greggs is armed. This could be another mutinous coup to take back whatever new authority Spencer has earned.

Quinn thinks she’s being silly. “If you’re good here,” she says, squeezing Spencer’s hand, “I’m
gonna go check on Mack.”

Spencer glances inside and is surprised to see their concussed roommate isn’t lying down.

“She’s ice hunting,” Quinn explains, gesturing toward the cafeteria.

“Ah. Yeah, okay.”

Spencer still feels weird about this, but if Quinn trusts Aphasia, then she’ll have to, too. She steps just inside the door, afraid to come much closer. The last time she was in here, she had a staple gun to her jaw.

“I can explain,” Hermione says, stepping forward as Quinn slips out of sight. Greggs is sitting on Mack’s bed, feet on the ground, looking very annoyed. “Kima’s on our side. She’s been helping us for months.”

“I thought Vasquez locked you up?” The evening’s been a bit of a blur, and she was very distracted at the time by the decimated version of herself magically floating in a chair, but Spencer is fairly certain that Greggs was handled in…some way. Maybe even sucked out the airlock later.

“She did,” Greggs says, then adds pointedly, “thanks.”

“I went back and got her,” Hermione says. “I hid her in here just before I found you talking to Vee by the Mess Hall.”

“Fuck Vee.” Aphasia is back and walks in from behind Spencer to join them. She passes by Hermione and softly kisses her temple before sitting down on Spencer’s old bunk.

Hermione can’t help but smile at the touch. She moves to sit down beside her girlfriend, saying, “I can handle her.”

“So we’ve seen,” Spencer says with admiration. “Speaking of Vee…” She looks at Aphasia. “I really am sorry, about earlier.” Assuming Hermione already heard about the form incident, Spencer doesn’t want to rehash the details of her mistake unnecessarily, so she leaves it at that. “Are we good?”

“Long as you know how wrong you were.”

“I do,” Spencer nods. “You were right. Vee is the devil. No question.”

Other inmates are occasionally passing by, so Spencer switches to whispers and keeps one eye on the door as they talk. She really wants to sit down and discuss this with some semblance of privacy, but the hard floor sounds awful in her exhausted state. So, Spencer’s left with no choice but to sit at the end of Mack’s bed, about three feet from Greggs. It’s an awkward moment as she relocates, but Greggs moves over a bit to give her more space. The two pairs of women face each other, leaning in with elbows on knees to continue their talk.

Spencer’s voice drops into an excited hush. “Where’d you take her, anyway?” She’s dying to know. The whole teleportation thing is unbelievably cool, and the thought of being able to just transport yourself to nearby planets or other spaceships—

“Not as far as you think,” Hermione says quietly. “Traveling to one of the locations I mentioned is incredibly dangerous and, frankly, not anything I could do safely without preparation. So, I put her in a secure location that I knew I could reach. Despite the many events of the day, I’m not okay with killing. We should discuss what to do with her, together. Until then, she’s in a bit of a stasis. I used a
spell that makes her unable to move, like a frozen log, and hid her out of sight from the docking bay windows. She’ll stay out of trouble until we’re ready to deal with her. She should last at least a few days, if we need that long.”

Spencer is suddenly very alarmed. “You put her in the docking bay?”

“I know it’s a bit cold, but she’ll be fine. We’re not expecting any more visitors anytime s—”

“Ripley and Vasquez just took the inspector’s ship!” Spencer shouts. So much for their private conversation.

“Keep your goddamn voice down!” Aphasia snaps.

“Did you see her?” Hermione cries, getting up as if to go after her. But no, she’s just sliding the door closed and casting her Muffliato spell on it. She sits back down and asks, a bit desperately, “Is she still there?”

Spencer replays the scene in her mind, standing there with the Doctor and watching them leave. “I’m not sure? I swore I saw something go flying out when the airlock opened, but I wasn’t sure what it was. It was long and dark. It all happened so fast.”

“Was it Vee?!” Aphasia asks. She seems to be having about twelve emotions at once.

“I don’t know! Maybe?” It was just a flash before it was gone, but it easily could’ve been a frozen person as Hermione described. Finally, Spencer concedes, “I think so.”

“Glad you got me out of there,” Greggs says, but Hermione probably doesn’t catch it.

The poor girl looks devastated. She buries her face into Aphasia’s collarbone as her girlfriend holds her tightly, one hand in her hair.

“Baby, it’s fine,” Aphasia whispers. “Everybody already thought you killed her anyway!”

“It’s not fine!” Hermione cries, sniffing back her tears. “I’m not a murderer!”

Spencer tries to help now. “Technically, you didn’t kill her! Ripley and Vasquez did!” She wants to add, Haven’t you already killed a bunch of people in your wizard war? But that wouldn’t be helpful right now. And there’s a difference, she thinks, between killing on a battlefield and premeditated murder.

Hermione seems undeterred in her self-flagellation. “I’m still an accomplice! She wouldn’t have been sucked out into space if I hadn’t brought her there!” She takes a deep breath, lip quivering as she pulls herself together, and mumbles quietly, “I guess now I really do deserve to be here.”

“Hey, you did the world a favor,” Greggs says. “Believe me.”

Spencer does feel sympathetic. From getting to know the inmates here, it seems many of them hadn’t planned on becoming murderers. This isn’t how she saw her own life playing out, either. It’s a bit refreshing to see true and honest remorse for a crime committed. It’s been a long time, and it makes her feel better about her own contrition.

“Look at it this way,” she offers, “if everyone didn’t already fear you, they certainly do now. A little street cred can go a long way out here. Maybe committing a sin is just part of what comes with being in your gang!”
Hermione and Aphasia both glare at Spencer now, apparently quite offended. “What’s *that* supposed to mean?” Hermione asks.

Spencer blinks and quickly reviews her mental file, making sure she has this right before speaking. “Aren’t you called The Sins?”

Now they all look confused. “Who said that?” Aphasia asks.

Spencer can’t remember, but everyone at the time seemed to agree it was basic fact. Were they all just fucking with her? *Again?*

“I bet it was Shaw,” Aphasia tells Hermione. “She knows I hate that shit.”

“How?” Spencer asks.

“It’s ‘The Order of Cincinnati.’” Aphasia throws the same hand signals Octavia made earlier. (It seems lost on her that while it’s ‘O’ and a backward ‘C’ from her perspective, it’s ‘C-O’ to everyone else.) “That’s the full name. Some girls call it The Cins for short—like, C-I-N-S—because they think it sounds cool or whatever. But it makes it sound like we’re about something we’re not.”

“Ahh.” Spencer is a bit taken aback by how, well, pathetic and stupid it sounds. She’s on Shaw’s side for this one. But Spencer knows if she can’t say anything nice, she shouldn’t say anything at all. There might be some weapons left under there.

Gesturing to Hermione, Aphasia says, “Her group back home, the alliance that’s rebelling against the dark new world order, they call themselves ‘The Order of Phoenix’—”

“It’s *Order of the Phoenix,*” Hermione interjects. “And it’s not nearly as much like *Star Wars* as she’s making it sound.”

“But I ain’t *from* Phoenix,” Aphasia continues, ignoring all that. “I’m from Cincinnati!”

Hermione looks at Spencer like she’s exhausted from having this same conversation repeatedly and getting nowhere. “Shockingly, I’m not from Phoenix, either! And yet, here we are. The Order of Cincinnati.” Her British accent makes it sound about ten percent fancier and fifty percent more ridiculous.

“It’s a good name!” Aphasia says, though she sounds like she only sort of believes it.

“Yes, it’s a wonderful name, dear, and we all love it.” Hermione pats her on the knee, then looks back at Spencer with a deadpan expression like she’s on *The Office*. Yet another television show Spencer will never get to watch again. This show is almost as good, though.

Spencer chokes back a laugh, and Aphasia crosses her arms and legs and begins sulking with a defiant, “*Hmmph!*”

Hermione explains, “Vee’s gang used to be called ‘The Jail Marys.’ Then, when Aphasia arrived and started her own group, Vee thought she could lure her over with a clever name change. So, the girls who stayed with Vee are now known as The Spades.”

“BECAUSE SHE KNOWS I’M THE ONLY BLACK ACE UP IN HERE!”

Spencer jumps about a foot at the outburst.

Aphasia’s too angry to make eye contact with anyone as she rants. “SO, OBVIOUSLY I
SHOULD’VE THOUGHT OF THAT NAME AND BEEN THE ACE OF SPADES. BECAUSE THAT WOULD BE HELLA TIGHT. BUT NO, I’M NOT JOINING HER SATAN PARADE, AND I CAN’T JUST COPY THAT NAME EVEN THOUGH I LIKE IT, AND YOU KNOW I’M SENSITIVE ABOUT THIS.” She collapses back into her sulking position just as quickly as she exploded.

Spencer’s eyes must be bulging out of her head because Hermione mouths, “‘Ace’ is common slang for asexual” as she rubs her hands on Aphasia’s shoulders. “I know, babe. I’m sorry. You’re right, it was an awful thing for her to do.” Hermione kisses her cheek and rests her forehead on Aphasia’s temple.

They sit together in a moment of quiet comfort before Spencer breaks the silence. “Well, now that she’s dead, you can call your gang whatever you want! You can be the Ace of Spades!”

Her friends both look up, glaring at her. She’s not helping.

Spencer tries again anyway. “Or you could be ‘The Clubs’? The Ace of Clubs is pretty cool.” She knows they’re vastly inferior to spades, but the double meaning could work. “Sounds threatening enough.”

“WE DON’T NEED A NEW NAME,” Aphasia insists. But she’s trembling, like all this emotion isn’t really about the name at all.

“Okay, sorry” Spencer says and relents. She takes a deep breath and recenters herself. The girls on the opposite bed seem to be having a much tougher time of it.

Greggs notices, too, and sits forward, looking at Aphasia. “You okay?”

Aphasia stares blankly forward, eyes shining with tears, and sniffs her runny nose. Spencer can see her lip quivering; she’s trying desperately to keep herself from falling apart. Aphasia lifts her head to look Spencer in the eye, and it’s clear she’s tormented by something that’s eating her up inside.

“I didn’t know what that keycard was,” she finally whispers. Tears are streaming trails down her cheeks. “I swear, I didn’t know.”

Hermione wraps her arms fully around her as she buries her face in Aphasia’s neck. “We know, my darling,” she mumbles into the soft skin. “It’s alright.”

“IT’S NOT ALRIGHT!” Aphasia pulls away so she can look her girlfriend in the eye. “Don’t say that! Did you not see those dead girls back there?” She points toward the cafeteria, or at least tries to. She’s crying so hard, it’s tough for her to see clearly. “That’s all my fault.”

“They were fighting to save us all,” Hermione says. “This has been a war. Everything between you and Vee, it’s been awful for years. But you didn’t start it, she did. You didn’t tell those spiders to come kill us, she did.” She lets her point sit for a moment before continuing. “It’s terrible that lives were lost today. I’m as upset as you are.”

Aphasia wipes at her eyes but doesn’t seem so sure.

Hermione takes Aphasia’s hands in hers andsqueeze s. “But now it’s over. We won,” she says smiling. “I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to say that about what’s happening back home, but we have a victory here. I want to celebrate that with you. And now nobody else is going to get hurt by Vee or Sue ever again, thanks to you.”

Aphasia tuts and wipes her cheek with the heel of her hand. “The fuck did I do? You kept me locked
“You saved our asses!” Spencer says. “There’s no way we could’ve taken out the guards and found Quinn without all your weapons. If it weren’t for you, we’d all be dead or locked up right now, and Sue and Vee would keep killing inmates, and DYAD would keep on making killer spiders and selling off clones of me to the highest bidder.” Aphasia looks up at that last point, very confused, and Spencer waves a hand. “Later. The point is, we couldn’t have fought back without you. We wouldn’t be where we are right now —free right now—without your help. You saved us today.”

Aphasia sniffs hard again, shoulders high and back straight, and exhales deeply, stabilizing herself. She blinks a few times, very still, then reaches over without looking to take Hermione’s hand again in hers. The touch seems to soften her a bit as her body relaxes into a natural slouch. Aphasia looks up at Spencer once more with an expression that says, Don’t you let it happen again. “You white girls some helpless bitches.”

Greggs laughs at this, as does Hermione, in spite of herself. Spencer can’t help but chuckle a bit, too, as she smiles at her friend. “Don’t I know it.”

Hermione uses her thumb to wipe away one remaining tear trail on Aphasia’s face, then gently presses her lips to the spot. They’re going to be okay, a little bit more with every kiss.

Spencer looks up at the magical mattress and says, “I still can’t believe you had all that stuff in the first place. It must’ve taken forever to get it all here.”

“Mmhmm,” Greggs hums next to her.

“Forty-one trips,” Hermione says, brushing the bangs off Aphasia’s forehead to look into her eyes. “One piece at a time.”

“Forty-three,” Aphasia corrects.

“Is it?” Hermione looks away for a moment, running calculations in her mind. “So much traveling,” she says with a heavy sigh. “Takes a toll on your mind at some point.”

“Then stay.” Aphasia’s eyes wince with a flash of regret, then she adds, “I mean, just for a little longer. Before you have to go.”

Hermione tucks another stray strand of hair behind Aphasia’s ear, tracing her finger along her jawline. “You know I will. You don’t even have to ask.”

Spencer smiles and looks down at the floor, suddenly a bit self-conscious of infringing on their moment together. When it feels safe to speak up, she says, “I’m glad you’re sticking around. We could use your help.”

“Of course. Let me know what I can do.”

Spencer nods, grateful, then turns to Greggs. “Thank you. For helping them, and us. We really appreciate it.”

Greggs shrugs as if uncomfortable with the compliment. “Yeah, well. The good guys won. That’s all that matters.”

Looking back and forth between the guard and her friends, Spencer has to ask, “You guys seem like you’ve been working together a long time.”
“About a year, I think?” Hermione says, looking to Greggs. “Around the time this one and her friends came in.” The fingertips of her right hand trace lightly through Aphasia’s hair; her left sits in her lap with their fingers laced together.

After being forced to hide their relationship for so long, now they can finally be openly affectionate. They have a lot of time to make up for. No wonder Hermione can’t keep her hands off her girlfriend. Spencer wouldn’t want to, either.

“Fourteen months, then,” Aphasia says, meeting her eyes. “Yeah, that sounds right.”

Hermione tells Spencer, “I knew from the moment she arrived that she was special. Brave, clever, full of fire. Stunning.” She looks at Aphasia, who’s blushing now. “Resourceful,” she says with a bit of a chuckle, like it’s the understatement of the year. With eyes locked on her love, Hermione marvels, “She was brilliant.” She takes a breath, then continues. “We became friends, then more than friends.”

“Oh!” Aphasia suddenly perks up. “Tell her about the card!”

Hermione’s head falls forward. “Oh my god.” She starts laughing. “You can tell her if you want! It’s your story.”

“But I gave it to you!”

“Yes, yes you did.” Hermione takes a deep breath and turns to look at Spencer. “Would you like to know how Romeo professed her feelings for me? A gesture for the ages, to be sure.” There’s a sarcastic edge to her tone, like she thinks Spencer’s going to be on her side for this one. Aphasia, however, is practically bouncing and beaming, so proud of herself. Hermione explains, a bit gentler, “She asked Mack to borrow materials from Lucy’s class so she could make me a valentine. She wanted to share her very first thoughts about me—the exact words that came to mind the moment she passed my cell upon her intake.”

“Aww,” Spencer says. “That’s sweet!”

“Go on,” Hermione nudges Aphasia. “Tell her what it said.”

“You tell her!”

“Ohhh no, my little poet laureate. This one is entirely yours.”

“But you know it’s better when you say it! You make it sound all fancy and British and shit. You do it.”

Greggs is done with this teenage nonsense. “I think I have enough strength left in me for two more homicides,” she mutters, but the lovesick couple ignores her.

Aphasia starts tickling Hermione, and she laughs and laughs until she finally breaks. “Fine! FINE! I’ll say it! Just stop!” She squeals as Aphasia’s fingertips find the side of her ribcage. It’s disgustingly adorable.

Aphasia pulls back and waits with a raised eyebrow. “You remember the whole thing now, right?”

“Oh yes,” Hermione says. The tone is back. “One doesn’t forget a love declaration such as this.” With another steadying breath, she clears her throat and purses her lips, looking at Spencer as if they’re about to share something big together.
“I returned from dinner that evening to find a greeting card in a makeshift envelope under my pillow. It had my name on it, so I opened it. On the front was a big pink candy heart, drawn by hand. And on that heart was a message in tall, clear letters.” She pauses for a brief moment, gathering the will to say this out loud. “‘Shit, bitch,’” she recalls, British and straight-faced, “‘you is fine.’”

Spencer’s eyes go wide, and she doesn’t know if she’s supposed to laugh or take this seriously.

“It’s good, right?” Aphasia beams. “I mean, look at this girl. I ain’t wrong.”

Fortunately, Greggs bursts with laughter, unable to hold back any longer. That gives Spencer permission to join in, and she and Hermione share a look of understanding. There is no one like Aphasia anywhere in the universe. And there never will be again.

“Fuck you guys,” Aphasia says as they’re still laughing. “It worked, didn’t it?”

“I was already yours,” Hermione says, turning toward her girlfriend. “You just didn’t know it yet.”

The sweetness calms the moment, and Greggs and Spencer gradually break free of their giggling as they settle back in for more of the story. Greggs looks like she’s heard it a few times but enjoys it all the same.

“We started having meals together and talking every day,” Hermione says. “Once we built trust, I eventually told her about the war at home and why I’m here. But I didn’t know she would want to help me fight them.”

“There’s some bad shit going on,” Aphasia agrees. “Not just in England, but it’s the worst there. There’s this super-evil bad dude who’s been trying to take over and kill all the good people. He killed a lot of her friends already.”

“I’m so sorry,” Spencer says.

Aphasia hums, “Mmhmm. They don’t even say his name, he’s so bad.” She turns her head, and Hermione’s fingers shift to rest on her neck as she speaks. “Wal-de-mart? Hold-the-fort?”

“Voldemort,” Hermione tells Spencer, both eyebrows high.

Aphasia catches Spencer’s eye and winks. “Oh yeah, that’s right,” she says, turning back to Hermione. “Thanks, baby.” She gives her a peck on the cheek.

“As I was saying,” Hermione continues, shifting toward Spencer, “we wanted to do what we can. She offered to break ranks from Vee and begin recruiting women to our cause. And it was her idea to start stockpiling weapons in the event we needed to fight. I don’t think either of us ever dreamed we’d take over the ship, but —”

“I did,” Aphasia insists.

“We’ve prepared for several contingencies.” Hermione leaves it at that. Then she turns to Aphasia, as if just now remembering something, and asks in a whisper, “Have you checked in with Raven today?”

Aphasia hums a negative and says, “I’ll catch up to her tomorrow.”

“I saw her earlier,” Spencer offers. “She seemed fine. I think she was staying out of all the mess.”

“That’s good,” says Hermione. Looking at Aphasia, then at Greggs, she takes a deep breath and
exhales. “I’m so very glad my people made it through this horrible day safe and sound.” To Greggs, she adds, delicately, “And sorry, again, about the chair.”

“Mmhmm,” Greggs hums, looking playfully mad. “Oh, don’t worry, I’ll get you back.”

Spencer leans against the frame of the bed and angles herself to face the guard. “How’d you get involved in all this?”

“We got to know each other pretty well with all her in-and-outs,” she says, glancing back at Hermione. “I do all the intakes. One day I straight-up asked her how the hell she keeps getting out. I think she only told me the truth because she knew I wouldn’t believe it.”

“Most Muggles don’t,” says Hermione.

“It was probably ten more times before I started listening. I don’t know…we just started building trust, I guess.”

Hermione smiles warmly. “You told me about Cheryl.”

“Yeah,” Greggs says with a sheepish smile, “I guess I did.” She looks at Spencer again. “I don’t talk about my private life. I don’t talk to inmates. I’m just here to do my job.”

“You were lonely,” Hermione says. “So was I.” She leans her head against Aphasia’s, readjusting their hands in her lap and absentely stroking Aphasia’s thumb with her own. “It was nice to have someone to talk to.”

Spencer adjusts her sitting position on the bed, trying to get comfortable. Everything still hurts. “I don’t know if I could’ve ever trusted someone who worked for Sue.”

Hermione’s expression hardens. “Kima’s not like the others. She’s not a machine. She doesn’t have superpowers, and she’s not a sadistic psychopath. She’s a good woman trying to put food on the table for her family. And from what I’ve seen, she’s the only one of them who’s trying to protect us. You should give her a chance. And a medal, frankly.”

This gets Aphasia’s attention. “I might have one!” She lets go of Hermione’s hand and stands up to reach under her mattress.

Spencer and Hermione exchange similar looks of, Sure, why not.

“Anyway,” Greggs says, “a few months later, the Skanks came in and this got started.” She gestures to the happy couple. “Hermione said they needed my help. We worked out a deal.”

“What kind of deal?” Spencer asks over the sound of junk clanging in the black hole. Aphasia’s just moving things around, but she may as well have dropped a dozen pots and pans off a balcony. But Spencer’s completely enthralled by every moment of this gripping saga. And it’s giving her hope that good things can come out of finding the right people here.

“I said I’d help her bring stuff into the prison,” Greggs says. “I do all the searches on intake to confiscate any contraband before handing off the inmates to Boomer. There’s a small storage room by the elevator where we lock up any personal items that come in with someone. So, I just had to store whatever she brought until Aphasia could come get it later with that weird blanket.”

Aphasia pulls her head out of the darkness long enough to say, “I miss my blanket.”

Hermione rubs Aphasia’s closest leg in sympathy. “I know. Me too.”
Spencer’s never seen this storage room, she realizes. Filling in her mental map, she realizes how stupid she’s been all this time—the docking bay is downstairs, but the cell block is upstairs. Inmates have to be moved. Of course there’s a second elevator, probably just through the door on the far end of the processing room, which would be right above the docking bay. They didn’t need Sue’s secret one after all. Oh well. And this storage room is probably down on the end of the hall that they didn’t search.

Greggs shakes her head, amazed that they were able to pull it off. “They never knew she was bringing in Oreos and flamethrowers and all kinds of crazy shit. Even if someone came to check the lockers, it’d already be gone.” Nodding to Aphasia, Greggs says, “And she never let that wand sit in there for more than an hour, I swear. That thing disappeared before Sue even knew Hermione was back.”

Hermione smiles up at Aphasia, who’s still digging around, and says, “That’s my girl.”

Aphasia pauses her search for a moment and points a finger toward Greggs. “She found all kinds of shit for us downstairs, too. Supplies, extra weapons…”

“That weird-ass chainsaw,” Greggs mentions as a for instance and gives a little laugh.

Spencer turns at this. “You just…found it? Lying around?”

“It was locked up in one of the old armories on A-Wing that we don’t use anymore. I didn’t even know if the thing still worked, but Aphasia said she wanted any weapons or machinery I could find. Figured I’d at least offer it up.” She gives a small shrug.

“Oh, it worked,” says Spencer. She’s not smiling. She still sees bodies slicing in half every time she closes her eyes for more than two seconds. But the truth is, Spencer might not be sitting here alive if it weren’t for that godforsaken machine. And they definitely wouldn’t have survived if they hadn’t been armed at all. She owes a lot to these three women. They’ve accomplished an amazing thing.

There’s a quiet beat, then Spencer turns to Greggs again. “So, what’d you get out of it? For helping them.”

She gestures to Hermione. “She’s been checking in on my family. I got a wife and kid back home. I don’t get to see them much, can’t make a phone call, no internet. No post office on the corner. But she looks in on them for me and puts letters in a special mailbox we set up. She even brought me a picture so I could see how big my baby’s gotten. He’s almost four now.” Greggs reaches into her shirt pocket and pulls out a folded 4x6 photograph of a woman holding an adorable boy in a bathing suit. She offers the picture to Spencer, looking on with a proud, sad smile.

It makes Spencer miss her own mother, or at least the way she wants to remember her. “You have a beautiful family.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Sounds like I owe you more thanks than I realized,” Spencer says.

“Yeah, well, you can repay me by telling all your friends not to kill me the second I step out that door.”

“Yeah, of course. But you should probably stay in here tonight and lay low. I can talk to the others in the morning. I think we’re all kind of maxed out right now.”

“Oh, yeah, I got you.” She shifts to the right to dig in an area near the foot of the bed. It only takes a moment for her to pull out a sealed blue package, which she hands to Greggs before moving back to the center to resume her original search.

The cell door slides open loudly, and all eyes turn to see one very tired, very cranky Mack, who’s holding what appears to be a block of frozen orange juice concentrate against her head. Quinn’s following right behind.

“Move,” Mack grunts, approaching her bed without slowing. Spencer and Greggs do as they’re told. Mack flops down face-first and sets the frozen block against the top of her head. Then, she picks up her pillow and uses it to hold the block in place, folding the sides around in an upside-down U shape to cover her ears. “Go awayyyyy,” she groans.

Hermione looks at Spencer with wide eyes as if to say, Boy, my girlfriend’s roommate is just so great!

Spencer chuckles as they share a quiet moment of understanding. She knows all too well what life with Mack is like.

“Found one!” Aphasia shouts, withdrawing her hand victoriously. Mack yells an expletive into the pillow that Spencer can’t quite make out.

The mattress falls back against the frame as Aphasia holds up a small brass medal. It’s in the shape of a thick cross and hanging from a short, green ribbon. It’s the kind meant to be pinned to the breast of a jacket. And, based on the text under the emblem, it’s for third place in an Ohio regional spelling bee. Aphasia hands it to Greggs, whose amused smile gradually morphs into confusion the longer she looks at her new award.

“…Thanks.”

Her final task for the day now complete, Aphasia climbs up onto the top bunk. She scoots over closer to the wall as Hermione pulls herself up to join her.

Quinn’s making her way up to the opposite bunk to do the same, lying down and looking toward Spencer, clearly expecting her to follow. But something gives Spencer pause. Guilt, maybe, or just a sense that she’s needed more elsewhere right now.

She crosses the room and stands by the bunk to meet Quinn eye to eye. Brushing a strand of pink bangs out of the way, Spencer says, “If you’re okay with these guys tonight, I’m gonna come back first thing in the morning. It’s pretty crowded in here already.”

Quinn’s eyes flinch at the rejection, but Spencer leans in to give her a small kiss. “You’ll get me every night starting tomorrow. It’s been a really long, hard day, and I’m just worried about…people who are all alone right now.”

Quinn doesn’t look thrilled by her decision, but she seems to understand it. Still, this compromise will have terms. “Breakfast in bed,” she jabs playfully. “Nine A.M. Fresh strawberries with whipped cream, bacon, crepes…”

“Crepes?” Spencer laughs. “I’ll have Martha get right on that.”

“…and champagne…”

“Does Raven even make that?” Spencer grins. “I’ll go ask.” She steals another kiss, longer this time, and holds the moment until Mack starts punching her repeatedly in the thigh.
Spencer laughs against Quinn’s lips as she cringes in pain. Her forehead falls against Quinn’s cheek as she cries, “Ow! Ow! Stop!” She fights back blindly with her knee until she’s forced to give up and step away. “Good night, you guys.” Looking back at Quinn once more, she adds, “See you in the morning.”

Sliding the cell door shut, she steps out of the way as Hermione casts a quiet spell that engages the locking function once again.

Things are quieter now on the block as other inmates have crashed for the night, one by one. The cell doors are open and the hallway lights are still on, as no one seems to have yet figured out how to turn them off, but nobody seems to mind. It’s a small price to pay for their autonomy.

She reaches cell 1, her home for this one final night, and Lucy’s already asleep on her bed, curled up and alone. The room seems bigger now with so many empty beds. (She hopes Faith and Santana are okay downstairs but doesn’t have the energy to think any more about them right now. They can wait until tomorrow.)

Spencer takes off her shoes and slides as quietly as she can into the empty space between Lucy’s back and the wall. She drapes her left arm over the pink sleeve protruding from the sheet and gently pulls Lucy close to her. The sleepy girl presses back against her ever so slightly, acknowledging the gesture. Sure, they were fighting to the death a few hours ago, but that’s just the kind of day it’s been.

Spencer presses her nose into the long, blonde hair and takes a deep breath as her mind starts to play back the events of the last twelve hours on fast forward. But partway through, Spencer opens her eyes for a moment to stop the movie and reset the images in her mind. There’s no need to live through it all again. It was terrible, but it’s finally over. Now, a new story starts.

“I’ve got you,” Spencer whispers against Lucy’s hair with another faint squeeze of her arm, or maybe she only dreams it, because she’s already fast asleep.

***************

The lights in the cell block seem brighter than usual when Spencer wakes up. She’s alone, and the door is still open. Lucy’s gone, but Spencer can hear noise in the distance—yelling, loud stomps, banging on metal. Not the gentle sounds of fifty women having a friendly breakfast together.

She blinks against the morning and exhales with a frustrated moan. This was supposed to be a peaceful start, a new beginning. But maybe change is a tall order around here.

After using the bathroom, she zips up her jumpsuit and steps out into the corridor, walking north to see if anyone else is around. Most of the cells are empty; those that aren’t have one sleeping person in them at most. Until she reaches cell 10—here, three out of four women are accounted for, and most appear to be awake. Interestingly, Mack is the one missing.

“Morning,” Spencer says. She walks in the open door and approaches Quinn’s bunk with a smile, running a hand through her bedhead hair.

Quinn’s reading (of course) but peers over the edge of The Queen’s Bosom to smile at her guest.
“Morning.”

“Don’t be mad…but they were all out of crepes,” Spencer says. “Becky ate all the bacon. I think Idgie stole the whipped cream for a kinky sex game. And the latest strawberry shipment seems to be covered in paint and spider guts for some unknown reason? But I can whip up some French toast, if you’re interested.”

“I could go for that,” Quinn says, playing along. She sets down the book and angles her body to face Spencer, propping her head up on her hand.

“Excellent. If by ‘French’ you’ll accept ‘possibly from planet Earth?’ and for ‘toast’ you’ll accept ‘rectangular plank, most likely shipping cardboard from the pantry.’”

“Wow. You really know how to romance a girl.”

“I worked really hard on it,” Spencer smiles back. “And I learned from the best.” She turns to look at Aphasia and gives her a wink.

Hermione laughs quietly and leans closer to her girlfriend for a morning breath kiss.

Aphasia butts in, “You say you need whips? I got five or six. You can borrow the green one.” She gestures for Hermione to get up so she can look under the mattress. “Here, baby, move quick.”

“No, no,” Spencer says, “no, I’m good, thanks.” Looking back to Quinn, she asks, “Hey, do you know what’s going on down the hall?”

Quinn’s brow furrows; this is news to her. Spencer realizes you can’t hear the noise from this far down. And even though she wants nothing more than to climb into bed with Quinn as promised, she knows there could be real trouble brewing. She’s largely responsible for their new situation and can’t just abandon that to spend the entire day making love to a beautiful girl.

Well, she could, but she shouldn’t. Even though she really, really wants to.

“I need to go check it out.” Spencer thinks for a beat, then asks, “Wanna be my muscle?”

****************

It doesn’t take long to find the source of the commotion. The majority of the prisoners are crowded down at the very end of the hall past the cafeteria, in the solitary ward. Which, suddenly, is the very opposite of solitary.

Spencer picks up her pace as they get closer and the noise gets louder. Some people are banging on the doors of Martha’s cell, while others are simply screaming at each other incoherently. When they reach the entryway, Spencer sees that the dismembered body of the guard in red leather has been dragged out of the way of traffic, leaving behind a messy trail of blood and guts that somehow only makes the whole scene even worse. A tangle of red shoeprints covers most of the floor.

The crowd of people, Spencer can see now, is made of two opposing forces. And unsurprisingly, they’re mostly divided along gang lines. The Past Hells have their backs to the doors, blocking the path of what remains of The Order of Cincinnati and the Spades.
“Get the fuck outta the way!” someone’s yelling, maybe Tastee, but it’s lost in an even louder mess of jeering and shoving.

As the line of defense presses forward, Spencer can see Lucy in the very back of the mix, right up against the door to the middle cell. The longer she watches the tug-of-war, it becomes clear that the Past Hells are trying to create a shield of bodies around Lucy and prevent her from being crushed. But it’s not going so well. Lucy is wincing, caught in the mosh pit and unable to escape.

“What’s going on?” Spencer cries out, but nobody’s listening. “Rosa! Shaw!” Her voice is lost in the back and forth. Suddenly, a deafening scream hurts her ears from close range.

“EVERYBODY SHUT UP!” Quinn is pointing her gun at the ceiling. Lo and behold, the noise quickly dissipates as all eyes turn to them. “Now,” she continues calmly, bending her elbow to bring the gun lower, “Lucy, what are you and your friends doing?”

“We’re hungry!” Lucy Diamond says.

Quinn points the gun right between her eyes. “Not you.”

“Somebody let me out of here!” The muffled sounds of Becky pounding on a door break the tension of the moment somewhat, but the group largely ignores her.

Lucy Fabray pushes past River and Dark Willow to free herself from the huddle and walks over to her sister. “They want to let Martha out.”

“It’s breakfast time!” Tastee shouts. She’s not the only one in a hangry mood.

“But nobody has a key to these doors,” Lucy says, “except Sue. Some people want to—”

“No,” Spencer interrupts. “Someone has Cara’s keys, remember?” It might not be in her best interest to reveal that the object of a gang’s obsession is currently in her bra, even if it’s scratching like a motherfucker.

“Sue has her own keys,” Lucy says. “She showed us. A big ring of them.”

Spencer remembers now. There must be thirty of them or so. But she knows Vasquez and Ripley searched her when they stashed her here. They found the keycard; how could they miss a giant ring of keys?

At the confused look on her face, Lucy adds, “They were in her underwear.”

Spencer’s face doesn’t look any better after that.

Quinn asks Lucy, “Then why’s she still in there?” She points the gun at Johanna now, then Octavia, just to keep the mob on its toes, and glances at Mack’s ass and winks.

“Can’t unlock it from the inside?” Spencer ventures. “So, now she’s trying to pass them through the window?”

“With the promise that whoever lets her out gets immediate release,” Lucy says.

It sounds like wishful thinking, but it does give Spencer pause. “Do we believe her?”

“Somewhere you need to be?” Quinn asks, not hiding the bitter tone in her voice.

“No, I just…if there’s a way out, maybe we should let some people take it.” Lucy and Quinn both
look at her, surprised by what she’s suggesting. “I’m not saying we let Sue out, but we shouldn’t just leave everyone trapped in here if there’s an escape route. For anybody who wants to leave,” she adds. “It’s worth looking into. If Sue thinks she has leverage here, that could be of use to us.”

“She’s bluffing,” Quinn says. “If there were a way out, she would’ve taken it after she killed the inspector.”

It’s a fair point. “Maybe. But she didn’t exactly have a lot of time to try. She seemed more concerned with killing us.” Everyone shrugs, unable to disagree. “So, we take the keys, but only let Martha out. What am I missing?”

Lucy shakes her head. “She took Martha’s key off the ring and hid it. She said we would have to search her very, very hard to find it.”

“Great,” Spencer sighs. Of course Sue would do something gross with it. Why wouldn’t she? Spencer surveys the scene again and tries to find their next move.

“I think it’s in her vagina,” Lucy says.

“Yes,” Spencer winces, “I…good detective work, Lucy. Thank god we can leave it there.”

She exhales and tries to analyze all the angles of the situation. She’s never seen Lucy put herself between someone and an angry mob before. “So, you were trying to keep them from taking the deal? You don’t want us to let her out?”

It’s a bit surprising—Lucy’s been a staunch Sue supporter for months. But then, the events of yesterday probably undid all the goodwill Sue’s earned over the years, now that Lucy knows the truth. It’s hard to justify lies and betrayal of that magnitude.

Lucy’s face darkens as she considers her words. “It’s her turn.”

It’s hard to disagree with that.

Big Boo speaks up now, addressing Quinn. “You just gonna stand there with your dick out all day? Or do we get to start by eating you?”

“Like they haven’t already,” Johanna says, looking at Spencer and Lucy.

Spencer can’t let this situation get out of hand, so she takes a risk. She reaches into her bra and holds up the item in question. “You don’t need Sue. I have the Solitary guard’s keys.” Several inmates start whispering to each other, wondering how the fuck she got them. “I’ll let Martha out if she agrees to resume working. But Sue stays where she is. And if it’s not too much to ask, while breakfast is cooking, I think the rest of us should split up and get rid of all these bodies. I don’t know about you, but I’m getting tired of looking at them.”

“And where exactly are we supposed to put them?” Dark Willow asks. “Ooh! Can we put them in with Sue?”

It’s not the worst idea she’s heard this week.

“The airlock downstairs,” Spencer replies. “There’s a stairwell at the intersection past cell 20, on the left.”

“What about Sue?” Quinn says. “Someone has to stay and make sure she doesn’t try anything.”
“Can you get her to give you the keys?” Spencer asks, then clarifies, “Most of them?” She doesn’t want that last one. “I can ask Greggs to come stay with you. You guys shouldn’t have to do any cleanup. We’re the ones who made the mess.”

Lucy can’t believe it. “Greggs is alive?” She asks like she can’t believe she let one slip through her fingers.

“Yeah.” Spencer turns to face the group and says much louder now so that everyone can hear, “One of the guards, Kima Greggs, is on our side. She has been for months.” Nobody seems to believe her, but she continues anyway. “She’s been helping…some inmates smuggle weapons into the prison, and that’s how we were able to take control yesterday.”

“Excuse me?” Sue cries from behind the door. She’s got her face smooshed up against the small window, even though it’s closed. “Who’s juggling weapons?”

Spencer finishes with her best public relations voice. “So, we please ask that you not kill her. Thank you.”

No one has a response to this news, or cares. A few inmates mumble to each other, but at least they’re not rebelling anymore.

With the situation diffused, Spencer and Lucy begin redirecting the inmates to form small groups and make their way back to the main cell block, where the bulk of the bodies are. Clarke and Lexa offer to take the Solitary guard’s body with them as they go. Spencer hopes Hermione might lead a B-team on a massive scrubbing of the kitchen with the assistance of some magical cleaning spell. (Not that she’s over her nightmares about The Sorcerer’s Apprentice, but Hermione has proven to be smarter than a goddamn cartoon mouse.)

“Wait here,” she tells Quinn, giving her the ring of three keys. “I’ll go get Greggs, then you guys get Martha to the kitchen and guard Sue.” Spencer reaches out and squeezes Quinn’s hand—the one without a gun in it—and starts back past the cafeteria.

She’ll feel better about the new regime and whatever role she’s going to play in it when their ship isn’t covered in blood and corpses at every turn. And when the cafeteria isn’t plastered with splattered paint, mutant spider guts, and squashed bumblebees. And when there isn’t a dead version of her rotting down the hall with a bullet in its head. And when there isn’t…Umbridge.

Reaching cell 10, Spencer is pleased to see Greggs is already there visiting. She brings her up to speed, along with the happy couple. They seem grateful a plan was formed without serious opposition. Spencer’s a bit surprised, herself, that it went so smoothly. But there’s still a lot of work ahead.

“There’s a supply closet across from Gym 3,” Greggs says. “It’s got all kinds of mops and brooms and bleach and stuff.”

“Thanks. I’m gonna head up the cleaning crew on this end.” Spencer looks to Aphasia. “Can you take your people to Sue’s office and start there?”

“I’m gonna take some of those trophies,” she says, just letting Spencer know it’s part of the deal.

“Help yourself.”

Hermione has no objections to her assignment. “I’ll handle the cafeteria and send word when some food is ready.”
Twenty minutes later, Spencer’s holding the door as Regina and Starbuck carry one of the final Boomer bodies into the stairwell. Idgie is right behind them with Graham’s legs, one under each arm. Kat and Alice have taken over scrubbing blood stains off the ground while Rosa and Chloe O’Brien start mopping. Dark Willow and Shay are almost done moving all the remains of the girls out of the trash room, plus whatever chunks are left of the giant Helena spider. (Willow had permission to burn it further to break it down. Shay accompanied her for fire safety purposes.)

Clarke has reported that Solitary is quiet and clean, and Aphasia’s back from the east wing with Root and Shaw. They made sure to carry the dead clone out of Sue’s office when Spencer was handling issues elsewhere. No one should have to see what they look like with a bullet in their face.

Lucy’s doing a final sweep of each hall now to make sure they didn’t miss anything, though she has the sad look of an artist whose gallery has been taken down.

“Quite the pile down there,” Root reports as she comes up the stairs.

“Good,” Spencer says, “that means we didn’t miss any.” But really, there’s nothing good about what they did, and she doesn’t want to see it all gathered together in one big pile of guilt and shame. It feels like less when it’s all spread out. Spencer realizes that could’ve been Vee’s same reasoning about the deaths of her enemies. “I’m gonna go check on Hermione.”

As she reaches the intersection outside the cafeteria, she peers down the hall to see if Quinn and Greggs are in view, but they’ve stepped away. She seizes the opportunity to take a muchly needed bathroom break. It feels good to just sit down for a moment and rest. (Reminiscing about that countertop is pretty nice, too.) There’s noise in the distance, as there always seems to be in here, probably from the cleaning crew in the Mess Hall. She can only imagine what’s happening in there, but she’ll find out shortly. Spencer’s in no hurry. Not today.

Ten minutes later, she pulls on the cafeteria door and steps inside to find…the exact same mess they left last night. The giant room is covered in multicolored paint splotches from floor to ceiling. The carcasses of inmates and insects and spiders alike still litter the place. Absolutely nothing has been done, and her friend and her cleaning team are nowhere to be found.

There’s banging and angry shouting coming from the back, so Spencer runs to investigate. An older blonde woman is rummaging through the shelves of the now completely trashed kitchen. (Spencer’s not sure how much of the mess is from the no-gravity battle zone; it’s hard to tell.) With each can or box she chucks across the room, she shouts an even louder obscenity about ‘what an unacceptable mess’ it all is.

“This is NOT A GOOD THING!” Martha screams, hurling a box of thawed, soggy fish sticks in Spencer’s direction.

“Cook something!” Quinn yells from the far corner, just out of Spencer’s view.

Moving around to a new angle, Spencer is able to get a better look. Quinn’s holding the woman at gunpoint. Because this is her new favorite hobby.

“What are you doing?” Spencer asks her. “I thought you were guarding Sue.”

Martha bangs a wooden spoon five times on the metal counter and shouts, “WHERE IS MY STAINLESS-STEEL COLANDER?”

“Our friend Martha required a little motivation to get back to work,” Quinn tells Spencer. “She has
fifteen minutes to get lunch ready or I’ll turn her into a colander.”

“Oh, GO TAKE A BATH, SKANK,” Martha fires back, then kicks a case of BSM on the floor as hard as she can. It doesn’t go very far.

“You first,” Quinn says and cocks the hammer of her pistol. “Fajitas. Now.”

It seems she has a decent enough hold on the situation, but that doesn’t explain why she’s alone back here. “Where’s Hermione?”

“She’s not out there?” Quinn asks, not taking her eyes off her target. “They went to get cleaning supplies a while ago.”

“No, nobody’s there,” Spencer has to speak up over Martha’s huffing and puffing in the space between them. “I guess I’ll go see if I can find them. You got Sue’s keys?”

“Yeah. Here.” She tosses the ring of three Solitary keys back to Spencer, who catches them.

“Okay, thanks.” Spencer starts to walk away and then adds, “Good luck with…this.”

Spencer crosses back through the disaster scene and out the doors into the open intersection. She doesn’t see anyone down the classes hallway, nobody pulling supplies out of the closet. Something’s wrong.

She heads to the right and down the east passage, past the G-SPOT, and into the solitary ward. But there’s no one there, either—no Greggs, no Hermione.

“Hello?” Spencer says, approaching cautiously. This doesn’t feel right, not even a little bit.

“Hastings?” comes a voice from behind the middle door—Sue’s door. But it isn’t Sue.

“Who is that?” Spencer runs to throw open the observation window. Greggs is trapped inside, sporting a bloody nose, and the warden is nowhere to be found. Keys still in hand, Spencer opens the door as quickly as she can. “What happened?”

_How did I miss this?_ Spencer can’t believe so much went wrong so fast. If only she hadn’t needed to take a goddamn dump, she could’ve stopped this. Or maybe Spencer would’ve gotten her ass beaten and locked up trying, but at least she’d have something to show for it.

Greggs dabs at the red drops under her tender nose. “We were outnumbered. I let Martha out like you said, but she was mad as hell, so someone suggested Quinn go with her since she had the gun. It seemed like a good idea at the time. But then they knocked Hermione out and took her wand and threw her inside.”

That wand, Spencer sees now, is lying on the floor outside the cell in two pieces. “Who did?”

“Vee’s girls,” Greggs says. “Something about ‘payback.’”

And now Spencer realizes how very, very stupid it was to not oversee the division of labor beyond assigning area captains. Kitchen cleaning duty was happily claimed by the freshly scorned women who think Hermione killed their leader. A perfect opportunity to take her by force, outnumbered, before she could zap them with her magic stick. Spencer would bet her final undergarment that’s what happened. And she hates herself for fucking this up so badly. Aphasia’s gonna kill her.

But then, maybe this isn’t about Hermione after all. She’s here, safe in Martha’s cell, unconscious but
breathing. For the second time in two days, Spencer decides to leave her friend behind a locked door to sleep it off. Quinn has one set of keys and she has the other; nobody else can get to Hermione now.

She opens the window and pushes the wand halves inside one at a time, just in case Hermione is able to use them somehow for...something. Picking a stray piece of taco out of her teeth, perhaps.

She quickly returns to Greggs’ side in the hall, mind racing as she considers their next move. What’s unsettling her isn’t who’s in these cells now, but who isn’t. And here Spencer thought she was done feeling terrified, at least for a few more days. So much for that.

Looking down the empty hall, she can feel her heart beating in her chest. “Where’s Sue?”

Chapter End Notes

You can purchase the card Aphasia made for Hermione on this website. You're welcome.
Spencer take off running with Greggs on her tail, passing each empty cell in turn. She’s having flashbacks to yesterday’s exhausting search for Quinn. But it’s a different kind of dread this time. On the bright side, it’s much easier to make their way from one end of the ship to the other now that it’s clean. But it’s more and more unsettling not finding anyone when all her friends were just here fifteen minutes ago.

“I really, really hope they’re not where I think they are,” Spencer calls out as they run. They’re quickly approaching the staircase. With a look left and right, making sure the wing corridors are empty, Spencer starts down as fast as she can.

Yep, the group is exactly where she thinks it is.

The once pristine white hallways of the lower level are now sporting a Red Brick Road of blood trails that lead right into the docking bay. Behind the large glass window, Spencer sees the grotesque mountain of bodies, and she was right—she didn’t ever want this visual. It’s at least six feet high, with a hand sticking straight up at the peak, middle finger extended, like a Tim Burton Christmas tree topper.

But that horrific visual is overshadowed by the activity nearby. One red-faced, very pissed-off warden is screaming and kicking at the door, which Tastee and Suzanne and Big Boo are holding closed with their collective body weight. Fortunately, the glass is soundproof, though Spencer admits she’s morbidly curious to know what stream of belittlement Sue’s rambling off in there.

The rest of the inmates have formed a perimeter around the docking bay, cheering and chanting for their friends to send Sue out the airlock with the rest of the trash. Why they haven’t done it yet, Spencer doesn’t know. Maybe they’re enjoying their power position and want to play with their toy a bit longer before they destroy it.

“You think it’s fun locking women up, huh? See how YOU like it,” someone shouts.

“Hey Sue, we brought your dinner. It’s been sitting out for a few days, but you don’t mind, right? If it’s good enough for us, it’s good enough for you.”

“Show us that jazzercise routine you love so much. Come on now, dance! VOGUE, BITCH!”

It’d be funny if it wasn’t kind of sad that this is the state of things. This seems to keep happening, this mob mentality that brings them all to the lowest common denominator and reduces them to the worst sides of themselves. If Spencer lets herself, she could get sucked in and join them.

She catches a glimpse of Aphasia hooting and hollering on the far-left side, and Spencer runs over and puts a hand on her shoulder. “Hey,” she says loudly over the riot. “Hermione’s hurt.”

That certainly gets her attention. Aphasia whips around with eyes blazing. “Where? What
happened?"

“I don’t know. I think it was Vee’s girls. Are they the ones who brought Sue down here?”

Aphasia looks around and sees Johanna, Poussey, and the rest of the gang over on the far side of the docking bay window. The ones who aren’t blocking the door are encouraging the others to vent Sue’s ass out into space already. The look on Aphasia’s face says she’s angry Vee’s girls didn’t wait even twenty-four hours before making a move on her people—on her person. But she’s also not surprised.

“Yeah.” Aphasia starts toward the stairs, but Spencer grabs her arm again.

“She’s in Solitary. We have the keys. I think she’s safe for now. But somebody knocked her out and broke her wand.”

“Fuck,” Aphasia curses. “Why everybody keep knocking her out?! She gonna get a damn percussion.” She looks back over at the perpetrators with fire in her eyes, then shouts, “YEAH, FUCK YOU.” It’s lost in the sea of taunting, but it seems to make her feel a bit better. “Now I gotta go tell Raven,” she says, as if that task is going to be anything but fun. “After I check on my girl.”

She takes another two steps, but Spencer reaches out and grabs her shoulder one more time. “Hang on! Yesterday when I saw Raven, she said to tell you ‘it was almost ready.’ Whatever that means. I forgot, I’m sorry.”

It seems to mean something to Aphasia. “You handle this shit,” she says, pointing back behind her. There isn’t time for Spencer to ask for any details, because Aphasia’s already running.

The lower level seems no less crowded in her absence. Mack, Root, Alice, Regina, Starbuck, Rosa, Chloe, Kat, Shay, Sophia, Clarke, Lexa, Flaca and Maritza…the whole damn prison is down here.

Even Lucy.

She’s standing off to the side, leaning against the wall and just watching. Supervising, if anything. Keeping an eye on her girls in case something goes wrong. Somehow, in this scene of violence and terror, Lucy Fabray is the one keeping a cool head.

Spencer walks up quietly and slides next to her, taking in the same view. “You’re not gonna stop them?”

“I haven’t decided yet.” They continue to watch the riot, which is stuck on a bit of a loop as neither side is gaining any ground. Sue’s face drifts in and out of sight behind the heads of girls on this side of the glass. Lucy doesn’t offer any further comment until a minute later. “She hurt me.”

It’s quiet, and Spencer isn’t even sure she hears the words at all until she sees the look on Lucy’s face. It’s a private confession that she only felt safe to mention amidst the deafening chaos.

“I know.”

The inmates have started pounding their fists on the glass as they chant. Spencer doesn’t think it’s the smartest idea, but she’ll step in if things get critical. For now, her hand finds its way into Lucy’s and they just watch in silence.

“Ladies, ladies!” Tastee’s voice rings out over the din as she bangs her hand on the wall like a gavel. “The day of reckoning has arrived!” From anyone else, this sentence would sound dark and foreboding, but coming from her, with that beaming smile, it sounds downright celebratory.
A rousing cheer erupts, and Spencer realizes Sue is probably down to her final minute of existence, whether she knows it or not.

“Somebody’s about to become shark food,” Tastee continues, and she signals for one of her associates to “Get ready to hit that button!”

The group collectively holds their breath in anticipation, watching and waiting for the big moment.

“What’s she doing?” Kat asks.

Tastee holds up a stop signal and turns to look.

Sue has abandoned her angry assault on the door. Instead, she’s now walking the length of the window and searching the faces of the crowd with one hand flat above her eyes like a visor to help her see. She paces and squints and looks between the inmates until she finds who she’s looking for. Then, suddenly she stops moving and just stares.

Spencer bristles. Sue’s looking right at her.

Wait, no—She’s looking at Lucy. And now, so is everybody else.

Sue waves a hand to beckon her forward, then knocks on the glass several times and points, her mouth silently calling, “Lucy! Lucy! Please!”

Johanna gives a cocky half-smile and says, “I guess the warden wants her little debutante to die right along with her.”

Spencer squeezes Lucy’s hand and releases it. “I can go with you.”

Lucy doesn’t give an answer either way and starts walking toward the door around the far-right side. Spencer waits a few steps and then follows slowly behind.

As Lucy approaches, the girls in her path step aside, at least until she reaches Big Boo and the others guarding the door. They’re not backing down.

“Oh, beauty queen,” Big Boo says, “You reeeeeeeally don’t wanna fuck with us today.”

“Open the door.”

Big Boo blinks hard and her mouth opens a bit. “I’m sorry, did you think that was gonna work? We’re not scared of you, princess. I know yesterday you went on your little chainsaw massacre, and we’re all very happy you got to relive your childhood. But now it’s our turn, and this is our kill. So, how about you fuck off.”

It’s not up for debate, but Lucy isn’t arguing the point. “She just wants to say goodbye first.”

“Give her two minutes,” Spencer says over her shoulder.

“Did I stutter?” Big Boo says. “Fuck. OFF.”

Spencer doesn’t give up. “Why does it matter if you kill Sue now or two minutes from now? This is a pretty easy request to grant. You don’t lose anything by doing this.”

Tastee leans in and says quietly to Big Boo, “Can we just hurry up and do this? I’m getting hella hungry.”
But Big Boo is still staring daggers into Spencer. “Why the fuck should we? Or did you want to join Sue in her little spacewalk? I believe that can be arranged.”

Big Boo crosses her arms and gets inches away from Spencer’s face. It’s the kind of standard intimidation and fear tactics she expected to encounter here in prison. Compared to everything yesterday threw at her, it’s almost cute.

“Because it’s good business to have two of the people currently running the prison owe you a favor,” Spencer replies.

Suzanne, Tastee, and Big Boo all exchange looks, considering the offer. With their leader gone, their weakened status has made them a bit more desperate for an edge than they’d like.

“I guess if she does something we don’t like,” Tastee offers, “we can just airlock them both.”

“Buy one bitch, get the next one free,” Big Boo agrees, cracking her knuckles.

“Wait,” Suzanne says, turning to her friend. “I don’t think that’s how shopping works.”

Big Boo raises an eyebrow at Tastee and gestures to the door with her head. They step aside to let the visitors through but stand ready, prepared to handle any funny business.

Tastee pounds her fist three times on the door and yells, “STAND BACK.” With a push of a button, the seal to the door releases.

Spencer reaches out to squeeze Lucy’s hand once more. “I’ll be right here.”

Lucy pulls the door open and crosses the threshold to step inside. Sue smiles warmly from twenty feet away, maintaining a safe distance. The door closes behind, and everyone not currently in a viewing position—Spencer included—shifts over to get a window seat even though they can’t hear anything.

Sue offers a few words, then Lucy replies. It doesn’t look like much is happening at all. But then Lucy walks back to the door and signals through the small window for Suzanne to open it.

She looks confused but does as instructed, opening it just enough to poke her head through. “All done?”

“Get Spencer,” Lucy says.

Tastee fetches her, and Spencer cautiously enters the docking bay. Suzanne closes the door behind her, then runs over to give Spencer a thumbs-up in the window, whatever that’s supposed to mean.

It smells horrible in here, what with the very high, very gross pile of dead women just a few feet away. Somewhere, one of them has her face. And Spencer feels incredibly nervous with no bars or walls between herself and Sue, and no weapon in her hand. Their last conversation didn’t go well.

“Look who it is!” Sue greets cheerfully. “Pervo the Clown, back from the dead. That’s one hell of a party trick. So glad you could join us for a little heart-to-heart before I’m vented into space.” She looks at the mountain of carnage behind her and commends them, “I wanted the chance to tell you both, you did a real bang-up job eviscerating these women. This is not-entirely-amateur-quality work.”

She looks at Lucy, who’s back in her blood-stained jumpsuit. “I’m proud of you, kid. Pissed as a hornet in superglue, yet still strangely proud. Don’t get me wrong, you destroyed everything I’ve
ever worked for, and I wanna rip your kneecaps out and use them as extra padding in my sports bra, but you were always true to who you are, and I admire that about you.”

Lucy doesn’t seem to know what to say, but Spencer gives enough wait time to be sure she’s not stepping on their moment before speaking. Sue sounds resigned to her fate, and that means she’s out of leverage. They must have nothing left to lose. Spencer’s so glad to be in the driver’s seat for once.

“Any other final words? I think our lunch is getting cold.”

Sue looks at her and says, “You know, you look pretty good for someone I beat the almighty crap out of and then shot in the head.”

Spencer stares her down fearlessly. “Try harder.”

“Since you learned about my little science fair down the hall, I’m guessing you did a Parent Trap swap-aroo? You know, I dated Hayley Mills in college for a semester. Terrible kisser. All tongue, sloppy.”

“Enough bullshit! We know you’re a clone,” Spencer says with a little more spite than she means to. “You’ve never even been to Earth.”

“Yeah, well, you can tell by looking at her mouth that that’s how it would go.” Sue looks both Lucy and Spencer up and down, and sighs. “You went to all this trouble to try to destroy me and my crew. I hate to tell ya, but just like marriage and prayer and multiplication facts, it was a complete and utter waste of time. You kill me today, fine. But then what? You think that means you’ve won? You have no idea what you’re up against.”

Spencer is feeling braver by the minute. “I think we’re on the right track. I got close enough to it that you put a bullet in my skull to stop me.”

“Oh, you mean this?” Sue walks eight feet to her right and grabs a body by the hair, lifting it half off the ground. It’s the dead clone.

Spencer looks away but not quickly enough, and now she can’t unsee it. It’s burned into her memory. The sickly pale skin, the purple hole in the forehead, the trail of blood and ooze running down from it, the vacant expression in her eyes. And then, the horrible thud of the skull hitting the floor when Sue carelessly drops it.

“You left me no choice!” Sue says. “You broke into my secret laboratory and enticed me to divulge confidential information with the promise of delicious violence. I cannot be held accountable for my actions when I was so clearly seduced.”

“Seduced?!” Spencer balks. She’s out of fucks to give and can’t hide her anger anymore. “Do you even listen to the things you say? Do you really take no responsibility for everything you’ve done here? Look around! This is your fault. How could you let this happen over and over and over and just do nothing? You just let all those girls die!”

“Wow, Spencer, yet again, you’re just chock full of the same boring questions. I think this was way more fun when you were tied to a chair. Do I need to outline all the various ways you and your friends can go fuck yourselves?”

Spencer laughs, “From what I hear about room 23, you’re an expert at that.”

Sue turns and walks a few steps back, then sits down on a sturdy pile of Boomers about two feet off the ground. She crosses her legs and holds an arm out toward Lucy. “Honestly, I’m surprised Lucy
hasn’t filled your throat with glue while you sleep just for being so goddamn annoying. Does anyone pretend to enjoy your little police activities? Because I find it utterly exhausting and I don’t even have to talk to you more than once a week.”

“Yeah, it must be a real bore with your head so far in the sand that you don’t even notice your inmates getting eaten one by one every month. What’s the going rate on looking the other way these days? There must be some fancy space bank account with your name on it.”

“Oh, sweet, sweet Cheesecake Face. You wanna know what I got for keeping your little episodes of *Spider, She Wrote* off the airwaves? Other than the continuous gift of sanity?”

“There is literally half a giant spider right over there,” Spencer interjects.

“Every time one of my inmates was ‘brutally murdered’ by someone from a rival planet, I got to chime in on cosmic foreign policy. Most of those ambassadors don’t speak any real languages, but we find ways to communicate.” She raises her eyebrows suggestively. “I got noticed by powerful syndicates I could do business with, like that fruit dominatrix. Just love her whole shtick,” Sue chuckles. “And of course, I got more face time with the President. And, just so you don’t misunderstand: By ‘face time,’ I do mean I was sitting on her face for very long extended periods of time.”

Nowhere in that string of flimsy excuses does Spencer hear proper justification for the murder of these women. She’s even more upset than she was before. And it’d be nice if Lucy would chime in with some damn backup for her comments. But that might be asking too much, considering she’s the one responsible for the current stench and unfortunate background scenery. And…furniture.

“So, that’s all that matters to you?” Spencer asks, unable to hide the sound of defeat in her voice. “You wanted some pretty politicians to come say hi and let you buy them a drink? And you didn’t care how many innocent people died in the process?” She pauses briefly, taking a breath. “Well, congratulations on being a garbage person, Sue. So much for the whole rehabilitation thing, I guess.”

“How dare you? I don’t pay for alcohol!” she scowls, mortally offended. “That’s what Rayden is for. Secondly, no one on this ship is ‘innocent.’” Sue makes air-quotes and gestures her head at the crowd of inmates on the other side of the glass. They’re growing more impatient by the minute. “Even Dr. McFriendly has a few outstanding parking tickets, if I’m not mistaken.”

“Oh, well then, I’m so glad she was half-eaten and bled to death! God forbid the woman can’t park a car IN SPACE.”

Lucy turns her head and asks quietly, “What’s a car?”

“IT’S LIKE A SHIP BUT ON THE GROUND!”

She counts backward from five, wondering if Lucy is going to ask her what ‘ground’ is.

Sue stands up and points at Spencer, saying, “Don’t let her speak to you like that, Lucy! This skinny sack of organs isn’t half as smart or talented as you.”

Lucy shifts uncomfortably and looks Sue in the eye. “Maybe if I were smarter, I would’ve known you were lying to me all this time.”

“When did I ever lie to you?!”

“About where I came from?” Lucy cries. “Or about the fact that I grew up on same ship where you’ve had me locked up all these years? And how the company my parents worked for has been
right under my feet this whole time? And that they continued making and selling clones of me for years after I thought I stopped them?” Without a weapon in her hand, Lucy seems more scared than scary, but she’s powerful in her rage all the same. And she isn’t done yet.

“Or what about how they were making thousands of dangerous animals that kidnapped and ate my friends? I didn’t know animals would ever hurt people. I didn’t want to believe any of it. I even tried killing people I care about to defend them. And for what? Everything I know is wrong. Everything I thought I knew about my life is a LIE. And it’s ALL YOUR FAULT!”

Sue’s mouth falls open as she tries to find the right rebuttal. “…But other than that!” She beams a big smile with her arms wide, but nobody’s interested.

“I trusted you,” Lucy says through her tears. “I believed you!”

“Well, shame on me for loving you like my own daughter and wanting to do what seemed right for you. Whattaya say we kill all these hooligans, and then we can start over and go back to the way things were. Just you and me. You can pick your new cellmates from the waiting list. I’ll give you an unlimited craft supply budget—even glitter, which you know I hate. Or how about a new pink uniform with—wait for it—pockets! Your very own pockets! And a sparkly tiara. Chocolate for breakfast. A pet squid named Blippy, I don’t care! You name it, it’s yours.”

“Hurry UP,” Tastee calls from behind them.

They hadn’t even heard the door open over Sue’s bullshit.

“We’re hungry!” Then it closes again.

But Sue’s not done bargaining. She must not be resigned to her fate, after all. “Are you really going to choose these nutjobs over me?” She sounds hurt by the very idea of it. “They can’t even offer you clean toilet paper. I’ve been taking care of you for ten years!”

Spencer says, “We can handle ourselves.”

“You’re a child!” Sue barks at her. “This is a multi-billion-dollar spacecraft, Frog Legs, not Mommy’s Jetta. But you’ve probably already been to the control room, haven’t you? Lord knows you’ve left a period trail across every other inch of my ship. I’m guessing the navigation panel looks enough like a Nintendo Xbot that you think you can navigate your Twat Pirates through the galaxy without exploding. Well, good luck to you.”

This stops Spencer in her tracks. She never realized that in their journey of exploration yesterday, they didn’t find the mainframe computer running this thing. It wasn’t on the map, so she didn’t think to seek it out. But she can’t back down now.

“I spent two hours there last night familiarizing myself with the settings,” she says confidently, crossing her arms. “We’ll be fine.”

“THERE IS NO CONTROL ROOM,” Sue yells right in her face, close enough for Spencer to feel a few drops hit her mouth. “You can’t go anywhere! This ship doesn’t even have an engine!”

“What do you mean?” This is a little scary to hear, to say the least. From the look on Lucy’s face, this is news to her as well. “There’s an engine room.”

Sue handwaves this away and paces a bit as she talks. “A relic of the past, no longer needed. Raisin’s been making good use of it, though. I would’ve killed to have a room all to myself for liquor and women when I was her age. Wait, maybe I did. I’ve killed a lot of people.”
Spencer doesn’t buy it. “How is there a spaceship without an _engine_? How did we get...here?” She still has no idea where ‘here’ even is.

“Wouldn’t you know, it’s a safety precaution! Say, for instance, a herd of menstruating psychopaths ever attempted to take over the ship, they wouldn’t be able to go anywhere! Not without calling NASA for a tow first. But I think your AAA membership expired last month. We’ve been getting your mail.”

It doesn’t seem real. It doesn’t make sense. Well, it doesn’t, but it does. It’s a smart move, Spencer concedes, even if she’s on the losing end of it. It no longer matters that they didn’t have anyone to fly this thing or a plan for where to go. Being in a functioning ship gave them hope to have options, to have a chance to get away. Now, Spencer realizes they’re stuck in a giant, double-wide space trailer, unable to drive themselves out of the lot.

It’s like a U-Haul. Full of lesbians.

The more she thinks about it, the angrier she becomes. These fifty women are trapped inside a robotic uterus, unable to make directive choices for themselves. If they want to go anywhere, they’ll have to ask permission of the men in power who have no interest in their safety or survival.

Spencer’s going to throw up. Which, apparently, Sue finds _hilarious._

“Wow, you really are as stupid as you look. Just goes to show how much you need me. I’ve got the President of Space coming every month—and I do mean that in the good way. So maybe if you grovel enough, I’ll feel inclined to make an appeal for your pathetic, useless life. As slave labor, naturally. I’d kill you but I just don’t feel it’ll be as satisfying the second time around.” Sue steps forward, closing the distance between herself and Spencer. “Kinda blew my wad last night. Right on your stupid face.”

Lucy steps between Sue and Spencer. “I don’t think I like your tone.”

“*Spencer!*” Tastee beckons again. “*Let’s GO! Or you can stay here, that’s cool. If you wanna DIE.*” Then the door slams shut again.

Spencer takes a few steps backward and tries to muster every ounce of confidence she has left. “You’re the one leaving this room through the back door,” she says through gritted teeth, trying to blink away the tears forming. “We don’t need you. We’ve already got your clones from room 23 ready to step in and take your spot.”

Some color drains from Sue’s face. “Those sex-crazed bimbos?” she scoffs, trying to play it cool. “They don’t know the first thing about running a ship. Let me guess—you offered them the chance for some roleplay? _Whore-den_ versus inmate, perhaps? You think the President’s not gonna know it’s not me? You must’ve forgotten she’s met them dozens of times. Or all of our suppliers—you think they won’t figure it out? Or all my various mob contacts? Those talking sex dolls don’t know the first thing about conducting business. You’ll have more luck training a cat not to lick its own ass. You kill me, kiddo, you’ll starve to death within a month.”

“I wouldn’t count on it. Martha’s upstairs right now making enough food for everyone. Well, probably not for you.” Spencer conveniently leaves out the part about it happening at gunpoint, if it’s even happening at all.

This piques Sue’s interest. “Martha Stewart is a national treasure. Boy, are we lucky to have her. They say good protein sources can be a real problem the further you get from the sun, but she and Idgie swapped some classified Southern secrets and came up with a recipe that saved our population.
I’m particularly tickled to hear that you enjoy it.”

Spencer racks her brain to figure out what Sue might be referring to. “The BSM?”

“I still don’t understand why you all call it that.”

“I think it means…’Big Sweaty Meat,’” Spencer says. Lucy nods to confirm her suspicions. The look on Spencer’s face as she says the words pretty well mirrors the face she makes when she eats it.

“Well, that’s absolutely disgusting,” Sue says. “Maybe later you should go tell all your little friends that it’s actually called ‘ESM.’”

Spencer’s brow furrows, as does Lucy’s.

“Extraneous Scientific Material. But those words are probably too big for them to understand. So, just let them know it’s reprocessed parts of clones that didn’t complete the growth cycle properly. Like a hot dog, but made of you!”

Spencer’s eyes glaze over as she goes into shock. Oh my god. Faith was right.

“It seemed a shame to waste it,” Sue says “So, we blend it up in the lab and store it in cans in the kitchen. I hear it tastes like chicken, but you’d have to tell me what you think.”

“Not really,” Lucy says. “I like it more than chicken.”

Terrific. Thanks.

Connecting the dots, Lucy then asks, “Have you made BSM from my clones?” The question is posed as innocently as asking someone if they like snow. If Lucy’s bothered by this development, she’s hiding it well.

“Sadly, no, but I bet you’d be delicious. We’d already sold all of them off before we thought to do this. Believe it or not, we got the idea from that shitstick Jenny Schecter! One day, she got blackout drunk and started rambling on about human flesh being ‘sweet meat’ or something equally vile and disgusting. Sounded like back-country nonsense to me, but then Becky got all excited about using some canning supplies she inherited from her grandparents after they died in that tragic fire she started.” Sue thinks for a moment, then adds, “You know, we could just say ‘BSM’ stands for Botched Spencer Meat. I think that has a nice ring to it, don’t you?”

In that moment, Spencer can feel the squishy, tasteless meat in her mouth. She can feel the gelatinous sauce that sticking between her teeth. She can hear the sounds in her jawbones when she chews it over and over and over until it’s swallowable. This whole time she was actually consuming herself. All around her, everyone else was eating her ground up skin and muscles, too. It was a goddamn Spencer feast once a week.

She turns away but can’t stop her body’s reaction. In fact, the stream of vomit travels far enough to land on one of the dead bodies near the base of the pile.

(A massive cheer erupts from the other side of the glass, but none of them inside the room even know.)

“NOT ON HER, YOU SKANK!” Sue has murder in her eyes. She steps toward Spencer threateningly, and Lucy intercedes, blocking the path with her body and both arms out. But instead, Sue runs past Spencer altogether and kneels down to examine one of the bodies.
Spencer’s still too busy puking to really pay much attention, but she’s fairly certain she’s never seen this woman before. She’s blonde and very pretty (for a dead lady) and wearing a fancy outfit. It’s a shame that the bottom half of it is now covered in the contents of Spencer’s stomach. This must be the infamous inspector, the one Sue’s supposedly in love with. The one she killed…who is now covered in barf. Because Spencer just had to make it worse.

When she’s able to open her mouth without sludge coming out of it, Spencer mumbles, “Sorry.” She’s so tired of throwing up in prison. So very, very tired.

Sue points a finger in Spencer’s face. “How DARE you defile this immaculate woman with your filth! It’s YOUR fault she’s dead! Do you know how hard I worked to keep that from happening? Making sure they’d never find any evidence? This isn’t my first rodeo, despite what you may think. If you’d kept your fingers in your asses and left well enough alone, every single one of these people would still be alive!”

Spencer’s already thought about this herself, of course, but it sounds a lot worse when Sue says it out loud.

“SPENCER!” Tastee yells. “THIRTY SECONDS.”

“No, now,” Suzanne says.

“I mean, NOW!” A very irritated Tastee slams the door once more.

With the final countdown upon her, Sue channels her desperation into one final Hail Mary. Turning to Lucy, she points at Spencer and cries, “SHE MADE ME KILL YOUR MOTHER.”

Both girls’ faces scrunch in confusion.

Lucy says, “I killed my mother.”

Sue walks over to the cold, rotting body of Stella Gibson, now freshly covered in stomach acid and waffles, and kneels down to brush her bangs away from the bullet hole. “No, Lucy, this is your mother. The most beautiful woman who ever lived.”

Spencer’s chest muscles tighten at the revelation and her stomach drops. She can only imagine what Lucy must be feeling in this moment, especially coming from Sue.

“My parents were scientists,” Lucy says. There’s an edge to her tone that reflects the very thin thread that is holding her collective shit together. “They raised me and they betrayed me, and I sliced them in half. That’s what happened!”

“Those were your adoptive parents,” Sue says from her kneeling position, then stands up. “Stella was your birth mother.”

Spencer’s mind is spinning like a yo-yo. Looking at the dead woman’s face, she can certainly see the resemblance, but it still seems so crazy. And based on Lucy’s mental state last night, pulling the rug further out from under her won’t end well. Spencer won’t be surprised if Lucy kills Sue herself before Big Boo has the chance to push that button.

But, speaking of…

Lucy steels her expression and steps closer to Sue. “Tell me everything. The truth. Right now.” It isn’t a negotiation. It’s the terms for Sue to keep breathing.
Spencer takes the opportunity to slip over to the door and wave to Suzanne through the window, motioning for her to open it. “Send Mack upstairs to the kitchen,” she says. “Tell her we can’t kill Sue until every single case of BSM is down here. No time to explain. Send your friends with her to carry it if you want, just hurry.”

Suzanne listens with wide eyes and nods along with every word. She continues nodding even after Spencer’s done talking, but says nothing. After about ten seconds, it’s awkward.

“Go!” Spencer prompts, then walks back over to where Sue’s still talking. She and Lucy are now both sitting on piles of dead Boomers like footstools from Ikea. Spencer doesn’t want to interrupt their moment, so she stands behind Lucy with arms crossed and just listens.

“—couldn’t have children of their own. So, they adopted from a young woman who realized six months in that she wanted a career more than a baby. But once they got you—” Sue’s eyes light up with a smile, “—they loved you so much, they wanted even more children like you. They reached out to the birth mother,” Sue looks over at Stella, “but she said no. So, they took matters into their own hands.”

“Because starting a rogue cloning experiment is a perfectly reasonable reaction,” Spencer says. It’s blowing her mind—all this time, Lucy’s mother was alive and she didn’t know it. And, if she’s got the story right, Lucy met her mother briefly yesterday without knowing who she really was. Spencer’s heart is in her throat, heavy with guilt and regret. She knows she’s partially responsible for what happened after that. After all, it was her plan to send the decoy to the office and her idea to have Lucy and Quinn pretend to be guards.

“Why keep it a secret?” Lucy says in that same low, husky voice Quinn uses when she’s pissed as nails. “Why lie to me?”

“I couldn’t tell you because it would put you in danger. There are places where human cloning isn’t exactly legal. For instance, planet Earth. But President Roslin has no problem with the jurisdictional murkiness. ‘In the event of a Cylon attack’, blah blah, ‘human cloning can boost population regrowth’ or some crazy himmerygimmery like that.

“DYAD already had the technology and a few years of practice under their belts, but they were supposed to stay within their orders. And that did not include secretly producing copies of their kid with DYAD resources. And because I’m not a complete and utter moron, when I inherited this ship and learned the most valuable clone prototype was the daughter of the Deputy Inspector, I decided to keep my big, gay mouth shut. Despite my primal and animalistic pining for this woman, I stayed clear of her path these last ten years for your sake.” She points a finger at Lucy. “And this is the thanks I get?”

“Don’t do me any favors,” Lucy replies coldly.

“This is bullshit,” Spencer says, “You kept this secret for your sake, not Lucy’s. It’s not her fault she got cloned. She didn’t do anything wrong! You’re the one hosting the illegal operation in your basement.”

“Gee, you’re right, Spencer,” Sue says, “the authorities are super reasonable and lenient about this kind of thing. I’m sure they’d leave Lucy out of their investigation entirely, no questioning or tests or relocation to an underground facility in the middle of an Earth desert. She could just keep on rolling in Play-Doh here like nothing ever happened. Why didn’t I think of that?”

She takes a beat before continuing. “Here’s another fun fact: Stella Gibson was the prosecutor who
That takes them both by surprise. Lucy’s trying not to cry. Spencer remembers she never knew who put her here. “Didn’t she know I was her daughter?” Lucy asks.

“I honestly don’t know, cupcake. Probably not. New name, no paperwork linking the two of you. You were nine and she only saw you as a newborn. But I didn’t want to take any chances. When we got word she was coming back, I took precautions. If she did know who you are, I didn’t want her to see Quinn first. It would’ve broken her heart to see her beautiful baby had picked up such a nasty habit.”

Spencer can’t keep herself from saying, “Serial killing?”

“Nicotine! Just as addictive and a leading cause of brain cancer among ages five to ten. I would’ve had to tell her that pink-headed smokestack wasn’t the real you, just your porn-obsessed, dumpster-diving, identical twin sister. Stella would’ve then remembered that only one bullet came out of her baby cannon that day and know you must be wrapped up in a cloning scheme. So, yesterday I put Skank-a-licious safely out of sight for a few hours while the inspection played out.” She looks to Spencer now. “Until you came and screwed that all up and left me no choice but to kill the love of my life and this poor girl’s birth mother. But hey, great police work.”

Spencer doesn’t know what to say to that. She never intended for any of that to happen. “I didn’t mean—” but there isn’t an adequate end to that sentence.

“If I were in Stella’s shoes,” Sue tells Lucy gently, “and I had figured out my only daughter was in prison? I’d want to know if she was okay. Even if I couldn’t take her back with me. Especially if I couldn’t take her with me. So, just in case that day ever came, I gave you a pink jumpsuit.”

Lucy looks down at the blood-soaked uniform for a moment. Her voice is shaky and a bit thin when she says, “You marked me?”

“That way, if Stella decided to come check on you—younder the guise of an inspection, of course—she could find you, see you’re happy and healthy, and quietly leave. No fuss, no muss.”

“Without Lucy knowing,” Spencer says, harshly.

Sue shrugs.

Lucy’s lip is trembling. Nothing Sue is saying makes this any easier for her to process or accept. She sounds terrified to ask, “Did she?”

Sue sighs, her eyes full of empathy. “She came here once, about three years after the sentencing. But she didn’t tour the cell block or ask about you, no.” She looks sincerely sad to be breaking Lucy’s heart like this. “And who knows, maybe that’s what yesterday was supposed to be. Maybe Dr. Frogfarts never actually called in a complaint. Maybe Stella knew who you were under that P.M.S. uniform. I’m as sad as you are that things went all to hell. I really am.”

Spencer has to look away; her emotions are starting to get the best of her. Seeing Lucy this weak and heartbroken is hard enough, but now Spencer pictures her own mother walking through the halls looking for her, wanting nothing more than to find her and make sure her little girl is okay…only to just walk out on her again. Or worse, seeing her but not recognizing her. Not getting to say hello, or ‘I love you,’ or goodbye.

It takes all of Spencer’s strength to hold back the flood of emotions fighting in her throat. For all the times Mack came at her for judging Lucy, saying, “You don’t know what her life has been like,” it
turns out she was absolutely right. But Mack sure as hell didn’t know, either. She didn’t know shit.

Lucy’s shaking now. “I thought you wanted me to feel special. All this time. But you just took care of me because you wanted my mother.”

“Of course I want you to feel special!” Sue says, standing up and leaving an ass dent in Boomer’s back. “This stopped being about Stella a long time ago. I love you, kid. I always have. I’ve raised you like you were my own, fully embracing the bastard murder princess that you are.” She smiles. “I give you special treatment—I don’t deny that—but only because you’re better than literally everyone else in the universe. I’m all too happy to grant your requests—what you want, who you want. I keep you well fed and happy and rolling in brunettes and fingerpaint. I even taught you the language of my people. Whatever would give me the chance to get to know you better. In my heart, you’re my daughter, no one else’s.”

But Lucy’s face is red with silent tears streaming down, and Sue knows her words aren’t good enough to fix this. Not yet.

“Yes, I lied to you,” she says. “There’s a lot I didn’t tell you. But I had to prepare for the worst. I never knew when the phone would ring and it’d be Stella telling me she was coming to take you away. I could’ve easily put Quinn or any other clone in a pink jumpsuit and said it was you. But I wasn’t going to, because I wanted you to have a chance with your real mother if she ever wanted you like that. But I also didn’t want you to be waiting for something that might never come. So, I promised myself I wouldn’t tell you who she was until you needed to know.”

“Did she?” Lucy asks, forcing the words past her teeth. “Want me?”

“I don’t know.” She looks like she wishes this wasn’t the case. “I’m sorry. But I think it could’ve happened someday. I think she was gonna come looking. I think she loved you in her own way.”

Spencer can’t hold back the burning question any longer. “Then why’d you kill her? If you really wanted Lucy to have that chance? You should’ve been the one to tell Stella the truth, not just play a waiting game. You had the power to change this! Was protecting your illegal side business really more important than your own ‘daughter’s’ happiness? Because now it’s too late.”

Whether Sue was jealous of Stella’s innate connection to Lucy or just scared Spencer was going to reveal all Sue’s secrets, it doesn’t mean this woman should be dead.

Sue considers this for a moment, then refocuses on Lucy. Her eyes are shining with regret. There’s nothing she can say to make it right. “Can you forgive me?” she asks, trembling. She’s never looked so vulnerable, so human.

Before Lucy can answer, the door opens once more and Poussey peers her head in. “Hey, we got it.”


They step a few feet away and stand with their faces close as Big Boo, Tastee, and a few others file in and start surrounding Sue, pinning her in with the pile of bodies.

“You okay?” Spencer asks Lucy, then reaches up to wipe away what remains of a stray tear by her nose. “I’m sorry about Stella.”

“It’s fine,” Lucy lies. She won’t meet Spencer’s eyes but can’t seem to focus on anything else.

“I think the mob wants Sue gone for good. But I can try to get her back to Solitary if that’s what you
want.” Spencer waits a beat and adds, “It’s your call.”

Lucy looks over at Sue now, who’s pacing back and forth and trying not to trip over various limbs in her path. The Spades have gathered in full force, trading verbal jabs with the prisoner, mostly nonsensical and unnecessarily threatening. Spencer knows this standoff won’t hold out much longer.

“I won’t stop you,” Lucy says, not taking her eyes off her former mentor. It’s barely a whisper, but the words hang heavy in the air, laden with resigned sadness. She casually walks out of the docking bay without looking back. No one else notices.

Spencer watches her go, hoping she’s right that Lucy needs to be alone right now. After a moment, she heads for the door, herself. Someone has to take control of the current situation at hand.

She clears her throat and calls out as loudly as she can, “Everybody come in here!” She waves a beckoning hand so those still out in the atrium can see her. “Grab one of those boxes and line up against the windows. Make sure Sue stays where she is, by the other dead women.”

“You think this is scary?” Sue yells. She’s still trying to find an opening to get to the door, but the room’s getting more crowded by the second. “Try waking up covered in fire ants because someone left you bound, gagged, and smothered in chocolate sauce after you slept with their ex-girlfriend’s brother’s cousin’s best friend who voted for Jimmy Carter. THAT’S scary.”

But no one’s listening. Lexa, Alice, Clarke, Regina, and Lucy Diamond file in next, each carrying a cardboard box with a red “BSM” stamp on the side, and nobody looks like they’re fucking around. Soon there are at least forty women, maybe more, standing shoulder to shoulder two rows deep, all facing the warden like a firing squad. Today, they are both her jury and executioners.

“Bring them all in,” Spencer says as a few stragglers enter with more boxes. “Stack those over there.”

“Why are we throwing out the bulk of the food we have?” Octavia asks.

“I’m gonna explain. I just want to make sure it’s all here first.”

The only person still on the other side of the glass is Lucy. She’s waiting at the docking bay controls, standing by the airlock mechanism. Maybe guarding it, maybe deciding if she wants to expel the whole lot of them. But at least she’s not interfering with Spencer’s next move.

When everyone’s inside, Spencer calls for their attention. She feels a bit like Bill Pullman in Independence Day, about to deliver some rousing speech to her loyal patriots, except these people aren’t loyal to her and she’s doing this totally on the fly. Not to mention she’s pretty sure the film didn’t have accidental cannibalism.

“We’re all prisoners,” she starts. “We all did something that somebody decided earned us a one-way ticket to this space dumpster. Maybe we deserved it, maybe we didn’t. But we all were told that justice was done. Today, we get to decide what justice is.”

“Vent her ass out already!” someone yells, and the women around her start cheering in agreement.

“Oh, shut your trap, Funbags,” Sue spits back. She picks up one of Graham’s legs from the body pile and chucks it at the inmates, but they duck out of the way in time. It strikes the window with a smack and falls to the floor.

Mack runs to grab it and throws it back right away. She misses Sue by at least ten feet.
“Before we say goodbye to Sue forever,” Spencer says, waving her arms to quiet them down again, “I thought you should know what she told me today. This food she’s been serving us, it wasn’t delivered by any cargo ship or ordered from a nearby planet.” She waits a beat, then reveals, “It’s people. It’s us.” There’s a collective variety of responses from confusion to disgust as the reality of what she’s saying sets in. “It’s the ground-up flesh of girls who have died on this ship.” Just saying the words makes Spencer want to die a little. And though she’s stretching the truth a bit, it doesn’t really matter at this point.

“What the FUCK?” Big Boo asks, carefully enunciating each syllable clearly. Her voice stands out over the general rumble of disgusted responses that’s forming. “What in the motherfucking FUCK?!?”

“In my defense,” Sue says, “they were already dead!”

“So, I thought,” Spencer says, “if we’re sending Sue out with the trash, let’s get rid of all—”

Her sentence is cut off by something flying through the air and the ensuing scream of horror. Immediately, the crowd shifts from outrage to laughter, pointing and hollering at the sight before them. Sue’s mouth is hanging open in shock, and her chest is covered in sludge that’s dripping off of her in chunks. Meanwhile, the women standing near Idgie are giving her high-fives. Then, reaching a hand back into an open can of BSM, she pulls out a second fistful of the grayish-brown meat and hurls another fastball at Sue, who ducks. It misses her face by inches and splatters against the airlock wall, but Sue can’t evade the immediate follow-up from Johanna that strikes her square in the cheek. Within seconds, everyone is ripping into the boxes and smashing cans on the ground to dent them until they can pry a lid open. (Many quickly give up and just throw the sealed cans.) There are enough prisoners that the onslaught is constant and relentless once it begins. Spencer isn’t sure how her motivational speech turned into the most disgusting food fight she’s ever seen (if she can even call this ‘food’ anymore). But this is exactly what’s happening, with or without her blessing.

The noise is deafening—cans banging on the ground, inmates screaming battle cries and jeers, the repetitive juicy sound of BSM connecting with Sue and the door. Every time Sue opens her mouth to yell something back, or even just opens her eyes, they’re filled with even more sticky sludge. Heavy cans are slamming into her stomach and legs. The more she fights back, the worse it becomes. But fight she does, blindly throwing back a handful here and there as she’s able, in between rounds of meaty assault.

Watching it happen—this absolutely surreal experience of covering a woman head to toe in processed human flesh—Spencer can’t help but feel a bit bad for Sue. She wouldn’t wish this fate on anyone. Probably. And yet, when she remembers Sue’s been murdering prisoners for fun for years, and when she thinks about all the times Sue looked the other way as other innocent girls were dying, and how Sue tried to beat her to death yesterday, and all the ways she kept Lucy from knowing the truth of her life, and all the assholish things she’s said and done to them time and time again, and how she’s been having them eat people…this punishment seems like a slap on the wrist. But it’s a really gross one. Maybe this is the firing squad she deserves.

It’s several minutes before the momentum begins to wane. One by one, the women run out of ammo and start making their way out of the docking bay to take safe harbor behind the window again. (And then hopefully to wash their hands.) Spencer managed to stayed out of the fray, aside from some residual splatter on her uniform, and now slowly makes her way toward the door to ensure her escape when the moment is right.

There must have been two dozen cases of BSM, because now Sue can’t take a step without slipping in it. She struggles to stay standing with all the added weight stuck to her clothes and skin. When the
coast is clear, she wipes her eyes and nose and grunts in a rage, then falls back over again.

“YOU’LL NEVER GET AWAY WITH THIS,” she shouts at no one in particular, looking furiously around the room for anyone she can attack. The only faces she sees are in the distance, blurred from the reflection of the bright lights against the glass. “EVERY LAST ONE OF YOU IS GOING TO DIE SCREAMING!” They can’t hear her, but she doesn’t seem to care. She coughs a few times and spits out some meat, then looks toward the door to see if her end has truly come.

That’s when Sue sees the one person still here.

“So,” Spencer says cheerfully, kneeling down to meet Sue at eye level. “I hear you like to kill people.” She can’t deny the little rush of pleasure it brings. After all, these were the first words Sue ever said to her.

Sue clenches her fists at her sides and scowls, not unlike a dog showing its teeth.

“You’re a tough woman, Sylvester,” Spencer mocks, even pacing a little—carefully—for added effect. “Determined, ambitious, mentally unstable but with an arrogant flair and a smile that shows off your crazy-eyes. You remind me of a lot of my partner, Lucy. She and I have killed a lot of people, too. Only, at least we had the basic sense not to turn the bodies into meatloaf.” Spencer holds her gaze for a moment to let that sink in, then looks to her left, where the whole prison is watching. “Oh yeah, and better friends.”

“You think you’re winning?” Sue says. “You’re as good as dead, all of you! They’re going to come looking for me. You have no idea how important I am!”

Spencer takes a few more steps toward the door and stops to consider the point, tilting her head. She never knew having the shoe on the other foot could feel so good. She’s earned this moment. Squinting a bit, she asks, “Are you? A woman who sells out innocent girls for political power? I’ve just got this hunch you’re on your own.” Spencer stops and savors the moment. “But maybe the President’s just stuck in traffic.”

Sue tries to run but only slips and falls face-first into the now even more disgusting pile of dead bodies. Her raging, primal screams get buried in the fresh new layer of god-knows-what that’s now in her mouth.

Spencer heads for the open door and turns to offer one last phrase, relishing her victory. “This is my favorite part,” she says, as if sharing a treasured secret. And with that, she closes the door and flips the yellow switch that secures the seal. Spencer looks through the small window and gives Sue a little wave goodbye.

Lucy is still standing by the big red button to Spencer’s left. Looking out at their victim, she doesn’t know what to say. They’re about to kill someone, and it’s certainly pre-meditated. This time, it’s personal, as they say. And when they do this, there’s no going back. They will really be on their own—and on the run—for the rest of their lives.

Taking Lucy’s hand in hers, Spencer moves them in tandem until they’re gently resting on top of the airlock switch. She looks at Lucy and says, “For Stella.”

With a deep exhale, Lucy’s fingers tighten around Spencer’s and squeeze. “For all of them.”

And with that, their palms press down and rotate ninety degrees to the right as the mechanism activates. Red lights flash and alarms sound, and everyone takes a few steps back. Spencer wraps her arms around Lucy’s waist and watches with her as the docking bay depressurizes and prepares to
open. Sue’s flailing and screaming in a fury, but it’s muted and futile. She can’t reach them anymore. She’s never going to hurt anyone ever again.

Five seconds later, the airlock doors begin to separate, and the entire contents of the docking bay immediately shift and get sucked toward the opening. Everything slams into the back wall at once as the air is pulled out, pinning a now-frozen Sue to the other corpses like a Gravitron wall. The cans of BSM are the first to go through the crack of the door into space. Then, the stray limbs and body parts make their way through gaps like pick-up sticks one by one as the panels separate. Sue’s body is on top of the pile and will be one of the last to go, but Spencer knows the docking bay will be completely void of everything in a matter of seconds. The rapid chaos of space physics is playing out right before her eyes.

But to her shock, the moment Sue’s body gets pulled out the door, it lands in the gigantic open jaws of Beyoncé the shark, who chomps down, collecting most of it in one bite as she passes by. (Spencer jumps and screams for the third time, and is now just pissed about it.) Only her beloved sneakers are spared as her legs are severed at the ankles. They drift aimlessly into open space in opposite directions.

The beast opens her mouth again and takes in a few final bits; others bounce off her body and scatter randomly. Then, when the docking bay is empty, the shark opts not to restart her orbit around the ship, and instead turns at a sharp angle and sails away, finally sated.

“Y’all hungry or what?” comes a voice from behind them. It’s Aphasia.

And while a part of Spencer feels she’ll never eat food again, ever, there certainly is more than enough to celebrate today over a cup of orange juice from concentrate and some of Martha Slewgurt’s famous fish stick tacos.

“Come on,” Spencer says to Lucy with a small smile. “Let’s take the stairs.”
After the thrilling experience of steps, Lucy’s ready to lie down for a well-earned nap. (The emotional mother-reveal likely played into it, too.)

They walk together to cell 1 and Spencer sees her safely inside, tucking Lucy in with a kiss. “Get some rest. I’m gonna go check on the others.”

By the time Spencer catches up to them, she can tell from the disappointed groans and bickering that even though food is ready, their eating space is still a disaster. Hermione is there, awake and standing but very cranky.

“No, I will not just ‘magic it away,’” she tells Lucy Diamond. “We don’t yet know if this wand can be trusted, and I’m not going to use it without testing it first in a safe location. For all we know, it could bring the spiders back to life to eat us for lunch.”

Spencer sees a wand in Hermione’s hand but not the same one as before. Hers had winding designs like ivy around the shaft. This one is more like a series of small round discs pushed together on a kebab. One in the middle is bright pink.

“Hey. Where’d that come from?” she asks.

“It belonged to Umbridge. Aphasia took it from her desk months ago when she was looking for mine. Of course, Umbridge thought I stole it since we have a history, and not a good one. But she could never prove it was me, much as she tried. I might as well use it now. It’s the best and only option.”

Spencer’s eyes widen, still stuck on the fundamental fact of the matter. “Umbridge was a…” Is ‘witch’ derogatory? “…She could do magic?”

Tastee speaks up, not giving a shit about this backstory. “So, who’s gonna clean all this up? My tacos aren’t getting any warmer.”

“Unfortunately,” Hermione answers Spencer. “She worked at my school for a year. It was dreadful. I can tell you about it over lunch, assuming we ever get to eat.”

Poussey comes in with hands full of bottles and sponges and scrub brushes. “There’s more in the closet out there.”

A few at a time, the women file back outside and start gathering supplies. The bodies of Violet, Corky, Sarah Connor, and the others were removed yesterday, which helps Spencer feel like she might eventually be able to eat in this room again. But not until a lot of bleaching has occurred.

It takes a little under an hour for the fifty or so women to get the job done—scrubbing the tables, scraping paint and blood and guts off the floor, putting all the furniture back into something resembling order. The family that fights together wipes together, Spencer supposes. (Or, screams
together, cleans together?)

There’s no way they can reach the ceiling, but they collectively decide to let it be. It’s kind of like a mural. The multicolored splotches and smears from the paintball battle stand in testament to their fight for their freedom. So long as a crusty, old, dead bee doesn’t fall into Spencer’s food, she thinks it’s a solid redecoration move.

It feels strange filing through the line with her tray like everything is normal. As Spencer reaches the front, she sees Martha Stewart angrily folding tacos and placing them on trays in the rear of the kitchen. Quinn’s still back there as well, sitting on a stool nearby with the gun on her lap and a lit cigarette in hand. Martha uses her apron to fan away a cloud of smoke that drifts in her direction. She makes a snide comment that Spencer can’t hear, but it’s enough to make Quinn threaten her with the gun again.

When the moment dissipates, Spencer calls out to her girlfriend and waves her over. Quinn blows another stream of smoke directly onto the next batch of tacos as she passes by, and Martha gives them both a nasty stare.

“You okay?” Spencer asks.

Quinn leans against the counter with one arm and looks back at her charge. “Nobody ever tells you that being the muscle is incredibly boring.”

“Yeah, sorry about that.”

A few more girls walk by and take trays of food, offering polite hellos. Quinn flicks some ashes at Martha, then takes a final drag and puts out the cigarette in the taco closest to her. Just in time for Aphasia to grab that tray.

“Thanks for holding down the fort here,” Spencer says. “You missed quite a show downstairs.”

“Is that what all the meat was for?”

“Yeah.” Spencer shifts uncomfortably and turns so her back is to the kitchen. “We airlocked Sue.”

Quinn looks out over the cafeteria, surveying all the conversations and socializing she’s not a part of. “Sorry I missed that.”

“Everybody went into the docking bay and starting throwing BSM at her. It was…wild.”

Quinn lets out a small laugh. “That was your plan?”

Spencer laughs, too. “No, I just wanted to get rid of it! I think Idgie started it. Sue told us BSM was really leftovers from DYAD, so…”

“Leftovers? Like…” She tilts her head forward and raises her eyebrows suggestively. But not the good kind of suggestive, like she’s proposing they go fuck in a bathroom—the bad kind of suggestive that implies she and her friends have spent years eating dead girls without knowing it.

“Yeah,” Spencer confirms. “Shockingly, nobody was thrilled about that.”

“Do you think Cosima know that’s what’s happening? I don’t really picture them in the canning business.”

“I don’t know. But there’s gonna be a discussion.”
Spencer sees Hermione and Aphasia wave her over from their regular table. Most of the women seem to be back in their usual spots. There are some empty seats now, but it still feels good to return to a sense of normalcy. Spencer grabs a tray and says, “You coming to sit down?”

“Soon. Gotta muscle Martha back home first.” Quinn looks over her shoulder to make sure the galaxy’s Most Wanted Chef isn’t about to assault her with a rolling pin.

“Good luck.”

Spencer starts walking toward her friends and makes a mental note to work on the Martha problem as soon as possible. It’s certainly not sustainable for Quinn to have to stand over this woman every single meal.

“Hey,” Quinn says, calling Spencer back. “I was thinking about something.”

Spencer turns and walks a few steps back, listening.

There’s a beat of hesitation, then Quinn says, “Maybe you shouldn’t move into 10.”

All around Spencer, the clanging of trays and cups and silverware comes into hyperfocus over the dull hum of chatter and laughter. Whatever appetite she had fades away, quickly replaced by disappointment and anxiety in the pit of her stomach.

She screwed it up. She was supposed to stay with Quinn last night, and instead she chose Lucy, and now she’s being punished. For all of Quinn’s talk of how Spencer can have both of them like she wants, she’s getting a petty consequ—

“Now that 20 is open,” Quinn continues, “I thought we could move there instead. Just us.”

Spencer’s mouth falls open a bit, and she tries to recover from her gross misunderstanding of the situation. “So you can be as far away from Lucy as possible,” she digs playfully.

Quinn shrugs. “Added bonus.”

Spencer smiles big and blushes, looking down at the floor. “I love that idea. I’ll get my stuff after lunch.”

Quinn blushes, too, and nods to acknowledge the agreement. Spencer suddenly feels like she’s talking to a school crush, so she says goodbye and makes her way quickly to the open seat next to Aphasia.

It doesn’t take much pressing to spill the beans on the latest development in her relationship. They knew something was up—Hermione said she’d never seen Spencer looking so happy.

“I’m just glad all the death and spider hunting is over,” Spencer says, taking a bite out of an overcooked fish stick. “Maybe we can finally get some peace and quiet around here.”

Aphasia rips a bite out of a stale tortilla. “Yeah, hopefully it won’t be too loud down there.”

“Where?”

“In 20.”

Spencer blushes. “We’ll try to keep it down.” She looks away and reaches for another fish stick, dipping it in ketchup that might just be red fingerpaint.
“No,” Aphasia clarifies, “I mean I hope it’s not too loud for y’all right there by the engine room.”

“If I can survive Mack’s spank noises, I can handle the noise of a distillery.”

Hermione swallows a sip of water and sets down her cup. “It’s more that the engine itself might be terribly loud? But then, the walls here do seem fairly soundproof. I wouldn’t worry.”

Spencer realizes nobody else must know what Sue told her. She pushes her tray aside and sets her elbows on the table, leaning in to tell the big secret. Aphasia and Hermione notice and both lean in slightly, too.

“You’re won’t believe this, but it turns out…there is no engine.” Spencer gives a quick look to either side of her to make sure nobody is eavesdropping. “It’s just been a lie.”

Aphasia sits up straight again, as pissed as ever. “Then what the hell has Raven been doing?”

“Working on the gravity, I guess? And plumbing, I think? Maybe?” Spencer’s not been too clear on what Raven’s responsible for under Sue’s employ. Apart from all the vodka-making and sleeping around.

“She don’t need all my stuff for that!” Aphasia gets up, knocking her tray onto the floor, and storms out of the cafeteria.

Hermione calls out to her, then looks back at Spencer.

“What’s she talking about?” Spencer asks as Hermione’s stepping away.

“Come on,” she beckons, and leads Spencer out the door, leaving their half-eaten lunch behind in the noise.

****************

Hermione begins to jog when she sees Aphasia is already down the cell block and out of view. “Aphasia!” she calls out and picks up her pace.

All Spencer can do is follow as they blow past each of the twenty empty cells, turning right at the atrium to approach the engine room door. Aphasia is already there, knocking impatiently. She sees Hermione coming up behind her and says, “If this room is empty, she better be the next person you evaporate off this ship.”

“Apparate.”

“Whatever.” Aphasia pounds again twice. “Raven! Don’t you make me kick this door in!” More pounding. “Raven!”

“Here,” Hermione says. “Wait. Let me try.” She reaches into her uniform sleeve and withdraws Umbridge’s wand, adjusting her grip and pointing it at the door. She doesn’t have the same usual confidence, but then, she did say this wand was untested. Maybe if it’s bad, it’ll lock the door forever or something. “Alohamora.”

Nothing.
Hermione sighs in frustration and examines the wand as if expecting to see a flaw.

“I think it uses a keycard,” Spencer offers. “I’ve got one.” She reaches into her bra and withdraws Sue’s card, holding it up to the reader beside the doorframe.

The locking mechanism clicks and releases as the door moves open an inch with a quiet hiss. Aphasia immediately steps forward and kicks it hard, like a cop busting into a drug dealer’s apartment. But the force is so great that the door swings all the way open, hits the wall, and bounces back, closing and locking again.

Spencer catches a quick glimpse of something in there, but she can’t tell what it was. It was big, though.

There’s an awkward silence, then she steps forward and scans the key a second time.

Aphasia pushes the door with her shoulder and goes barreling into the room. “Raven!”

Hermione follows her with Spencer right behind, though Spencer seems to be the only one startled by what’s taking up most of the space in the room. It’s…well, she honestly doesn’t know what the hell it is. A giant contraption, like if someone took a junkyard and hooked all the pieces together, or that old Mouse Trap game. In fact, the only thing indicating it’s not just a pile of trash is that Spencer can see large empty spaces in between segments of components. It’s been intentionally sculpted and organized this way.

There are metal cans hammered flat and nailed together like a quilt, creating panels several feet long. Connected to those are long metal bolts and wires, so very many wires, and some thicker cables on the ends. And what looks like…kitchen tools? Featuring a silver colander mounted to the motorized bottom of a blender, if Spencer’s not mistaken. There’s one of the aquarium tanks from downstairs and some strategically positioned lamps for visibility down low where the overhead light is blocked. Near the top is a giant bundle of popsicle sticks held together by a belt. On the side, jump ropes and WWMD rubber bracelets wrap around large wooden spools.

The longer Spencer looks, the less she has any fucking idea what it’s supposed to be or do. She’s never seen a vodka production plant, but this isn’t what she would’ve expected.

“What is this thing?” she asks, but Aphasia’s too busy peeking around every corner looking for the missing mechanic.

“It’s my goddamn masterpiece,” says a voice behind them.

Aphasia turns on a dime and runs at Raven full speed. Spencer braces for the impact of Aphasia’s fist against the girl’s face, but instead, Aphasia wraps her arms around Raven and squeezes. “Where the hell have you been? Pastings got me all twisted up thinking something happened to you. She said this was gone and I was like, ‘fuck.’”

Raven hugs her back and looks over at Spencer curiously. “I’m fine. I was out looking for one more piece.”

“I hope you found it,” Hermione says. “They broke my wand. I don’t think I can get safely in and out anymore with the one I have now. It isn’t worth the risk if I’m unable to protect myself.”

Spencer had forgotten all about that. Now Hermione’s just as trapped as the rest of them.

“Yeah, I heard,” Raven says. “I’m sorry. Hopefully we can find something on board that’ll work.”
“What else you need?” Aphasia asks, then gestures at Spencer, saying, “You told her to tell me it was done.”

“It is. Mostly.” Raven walks over to the far side of the…whatever it is…and points to an area under a lot of random things tied together. “I need to be able to lift this panel and close it when I need to keep the circuitry away from the fuel line. If I just bend the metal repeatedly, it’ll wear thin and break. I need something like a big hinge. I was just checking in the gyms to see if there was any old sports equipment that could work, like a catcher’s mask or something.”

“You mean something that moves like this?” Aphasia puts her hands flat together and then opens them, keeping the heel of her palms touching. “Yeah. I’ll be right back.” She heads out the door, making sure not to let it close all the way.

Spencer looks again at the eight-foot-tall, ten-foot-wide junkyard casserole. “Okay, you’re gonna have to explain to me how a colander and wires and some popsicle sticks make vodka, because this is blowing my mind.”

Raven stares at her, looking offended. “It doesn’t make vodka.” There’s a pause, then she points to the far corner of the room, back by a bunk-sized mattress on the floor, where a series of brass containers is connected with plastic tubing. The whole set-up probably takes up four square feet and looks pitiful in comparison to whatever this other thing is. “That makes vodka.” Looking back at her masterpiece, she smiles and says, “This is what’s gonna save us.”

“If it works,” Hermione says under her breath.

“It’ll work.” Raven’s back to being annoyed again. “Sounds like we’re out of other options, anyway.”

“I’ve done the best that I can,” Hermione says in her defense. “Let’s hope you’ve done the same.”

The door bursts open again, and Aphasia runs in, breathing heavily. “I got it.” She proudly holds out her Thighmaster with one hand on each side, extending it to Raven, then pumps it a few times to show her how it moves.

A smile breaks out across Raven’s face. “Excellent.” She takes the item and crosses the room to open a tool box, removing a medium-sized screwdriver and walking back to the machine. “I need a few minutes to get this attached. You guys go get the fuel.”

“Sure.”

Hermione and Aphasia both nod and head for the door, but Spencer’s patience is wearing thin. “What fuel?! Will someone please tell me what’s going on?”

Raven looks up from her fiddling and says with no lack of condescension, “You’re in the engine room, Spencer. This is an engine.”

“An engine.”

“Yep.”

Spencer blinks. “…for the ship?”

“Yep. Hand me some washers?”

Spencer knows what all these words are, but they’re not forming logical thoughts. There is no stretch
of the imagination that could make this collection of Goodwill rejects an actual functioning system, much less one that could power a spaceship. The only thing Spencer can make sense of right now is what a washer is, so she heads toward the tool box, rummages around until she finds them, and takes them to Raven.

“I just…” Spencer starts, looking at components she can now see from this side—bicycle gears, the buckle from an airline seatbelt, a piece of chain link fence—“I have no idea how this is supposed to work.” She gives a little laugh, like the entire concept is preposterous simply because she doesn’t understand it.

“Good thing I do.” Raven reaches for a stray piece of tubing and connects it to a pipe on the panel. “It’s taken almost two years to get all these pieces together. I’m dying to finally try it out.” She tightens another screw and moves the metal panel that’s now attached to the Thighmaster up and down. From the light in her eyes, it’s working exactly as planned.

Raven then looks toward the door and says, “Oh good.” Hermione and Aphasia are back, each lugging a gallon-sized milk jug in each hand. “Bring one over here and put the rest against the wall.”

Hermione sets hers down and shakes out her sore fingers while Aphasia hands one jug to Raven. She opens it and pours it slowly into the aquarium tank, then reaches out a hand for a second jug. The liquid isn’t golden brown like gasoline, it’s perfectly clear, which is odd. Spencer can’t smell anything new in the air, either.

“Is that…water?” she asks.

“Can’t burn water.” Raven thanks Aphasia, who’s on her way out to go get more jugs with Hermione, then looks back at Spencer as she sets the empty container aside. “Thought you were supposed to be the smart one.”

“Well, pardon me for being a little confused. Sue said this ship doesn’t have an engine.”

“It didn’t. So, I built one.” Raven moves the two jugs Hermione brought into the far corner to make room for more. “I guess I didn’t like the thought of being stuck in one place for the rest of my life.”

“Sue didn’t know you were doing this?”

Raven laughs. “Sue wouldn’t know if her head was on fire. I gave her some free vodka samples; she didn’t ask questions.” Raven walks over to the miniature distillery and places a new tin can underneath the drop spout, taking the full one out and setting a lid on top of it. “We all wanted her dead, but things take time. You can’t just come in, guns blazing, stir up shit and expect to be the hero. If you want to do more than just survive, you have to have a plan.”

Spencer can’t help but feel like the comment is directed at her. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means you should realize that not everything is about you. Some of us have been here for years working on how to get out from under Sue.” Raven takes a small hand towel from a hook on the wall and wipes off her hands and brow with it. “I know you’re all proud of figuring out this spider thing and you’re in charge now or whatever.” Raven turns to look her in the eye. “I just hope you see that we can handle ourselves. I hear you used some pretty impressive weaponry yesterday. Good thing Aphasia spent over a year stock-piling it. This room was empty when I first got here. And now? We’re ready to fly.” Spencer must look like she’s about to object, because Raven holds her hand up and says, “If you wanna go be the new warden, fine. Just know some of us in here weren’t sitting around waiting to be saved. We’re the ones saving you.”
Aphasia and Hermione return with four new jugs, then start heading back out for more. “Feel free to join us at any time,” Hermione says to Spencer.

“Right, sorry.” She breaks away from the awkward conversation and sheepishly follows them out as they walk in a line back to cell 10. Raven’s words are playing on loop in her head and will be for a long time.

Aphasia lifts the mattress high enough for Hermione to lean her entire torso into the black hole. She pulls one gallon jug out at a time, handing them to Spencer.

“Wait, is this vodka?” She remembers Aphasia saying they were storing it under her bed. Now she knows why. And the engine room already reeked of it, so opening a bottle changed nothing.

When everyone has two jugs, Hermione reaches in once more and hands Spencer a third.

“No, these are really heavy,” Spencer groans. “I’ll come back for that one.”

“It’ll be faster if you take it now. There are twenty-nine total jugs, and we’ve already carried the first eight, leaving twenty-one more. If we each carry two and you carry three, that’s seven jugs per trip, meaning only three trips. But if you don’t, we can only transport six jugs per trip, meaning we’ll have to go a fourth time. And I—”

“Yeah, you could’ve just said ‘please.’”

Spencer starts out into the hallway. She’s around cell 14 when she looks back and says, “Remember that great floating thing you did the other day? I miss that.”

Hermione adjusts the grip on her gallons of moonshine. “So do I.”

It takes another fifteen minutes to complete the last two trips, but then finally all twenty-nine gallons are relocated and stacked in a three-by-three-by-three arrangement in the corner of the room.

“I don’t wanna burn too much on the test run,” Raven says. “I calculate it’ll take a minimum of three gallons just to fire up the rocket jets.”

Spencer blinks. “There are rocket jets? The giant uterus has rockets?”

“Don’t sound so surprised,” Raven says. “This was a fully functioning military ship before they gutted it to be a prison.” She seems pretty sick of Spencer’s attitude. “They ripped out the engine and the controls, but they didn’t take any of the firing systems or the stabilizers. So yeah, if I can get this burning hot enough, we’ll move. Won’t be very fast, but inertia will do the rest.”

Raven reaches into her pocket and takes out a small Nokia flip phone, the same one Spencer saw her with before. She punches at the keypad, then reports out, “Yeah, if we burn five gallons, we should be able to hit a maximum speed of about eighteen kilometers per hour.”

Spencer can’t help but laugh. “Eighteen kilometers per hour? My dog can run faster than that.”

“You ain’t got no dog,” Aphasia says, crossing her arms.

“I’m sorry, Princess,” Raven says, tightening something with a twist of her screwdriver, “did you have a better plan for getting us moving? You’re welcome to get out and push.”

She doesn’t, but it still seems pretty worthless to crawl through the vastness of space slower than you’d drive in a school zone.
“How long will it take us to get to Earth at that rate? Can your little phone count that high? Because I’m pretty sure we’ll all be very dead by then.”

Raven stops working and turns to look at Spencer. “Who said anything about going to Earth?”

The question hangs in the room as everyone stares, like Spencer suggested they host a Republican fundraiser or that they should eat mice for dinner.

“My bad,” she says, holding her hands in the air. “I just figured since it was the only place that could sustain human life within the nearest hundred million miles, that’d be a pretty decent destination.”

“This thing can’t sustain human life?” Aphasia points her hand at the walls around them. “You look pretty alive to me.” The ‘for now’ is implied.

“The engine gives us options,” Hermione says. “Not to find a new home, but to possibly evade being caught. If someone finds out what we’ve done with Sue and the others, they would come looking for us here at these coordinates. If we start moving now, we can hopefully be out of range by the time someone notices.”

Spencer balks. “Even at that speed, it would take months for us to get out of sight. There’s nothing to hide behind out here.”

“I’m hoping to enhance our velocity,” Hermione says. “Once the engine is functioning—and if I can get this wand to behave—I have a few ideas for charms to try that might boost our speed without requiring more fuel. But I can’t get us running on my own. The ship’s simply too large.”

Aphasia looks to Raven. “Guess we better not waste any more time arguing then.”

Raven gives her a nod and hurries over to stand by the tank, angling a metal container underneath it to its correct position. She looks at Hermione and says, “You want to use the wand for this?”

Hermione shakes her head. “It’s too risky. I need to practice with it first. I don’t want to risk botching your engine.” She reaches for Aphasia’s hand and gives it a squeeze. “Find Willow for me, please?”

Five minutes later, Aphasia returns with Dark Willow, who seems even more in awe of the masterpiece than Raven herself. After a quick explanation, Dark Willow seems happy to oblige and summons a small fireball into the metal container, which ignites a fuse and starts the engine in motion.

Spencer sees a series of large medical syringes—swiped from the infirmary, no doubt—bobbing up and down like pistons into the tank of vodka. The tubes begin filling with hot air as the process continues, and soon, the whole ship is vibrating. Aphasia wasn’t wrong—it’s loud.

Then, with a bit of a jolt, everything lurches forward. The girls all fall over; Raven catches herself on the ship, and Aphasia grabs onto Hermione’s shoulder as they hit the ground together. Spencer steadies herself on her feet again and rubs her sore knees. Dark Willow’s doing the same.

“Is everyone alright?” Hermione asks. The others nod.

“Are we moving?” Spencer asks, looking around for some way to tell.

Raven grins. “Let’s go see.”

She runs out into the hall as Hermione and Aphasia follow closely behind. Spencer doesn’t want to miss this and takes off, too.
“You’re welcome!” Dark Willow calls after them with a wave as they run away. Then, she quietly swipes a small container of vodka from the distillery area and goes back to her bunk.

Back in the hall, the girls run to the right, heading for the processing room with the wide window. Spencer knows the shark is gone, but she approaches the glass cautiously all the same. There’s a general hum throughout the ship, louder at its source but still audible from further away. And as the four girls stand and look out at the wide expanse of the galaxy, somehow it feels even larger now that they’re venturing into it. It feels endless, like an open highway.

“I can’t tell,” Hermione says, squinting at stars and holding very, very still.

“Look, there!” Aphasia points to a series of small asteroids floating not far from the ship. “See? Either they’re all moving directly toward us at exactly the same speed, or we’re moving closer to them. My money’s on us.”

“Holy shit,” Spencer says, watching carefully. She sees it—six small rocks at very close range, all getting closer by the moment. “I think you’re right.” She turns to Raven, truly amazed. “We’re moving.”

Raven grins big and fistpumps like it’s the happiest day of her life. “YES! Yes!” She stands and looks out the window with her hands covering her mouth. She’s trying not to cry. “We did it.” Looking over at her friends, she reaches a hand out and squeezes Hermione’s shoulder, then shares a smile with Aphasia. Suddenly her face falls a bit. “Shit, we didn’t get Greggs. She should see this.”

“I’ll go get her,” Aphasia says. But she’s in no hurry to tear her eyes away from this view or let go of her girlfriend’s hand.

“Which direction are we going?” Spencer asks.

“Not sure. I haven’t figured out a way to steer yet.”

“…You didn’t think that was important?” Spencer’s confidence has taken a nosedive. It’s also occurring to her that Raven hasn’t mentioned a braking system.

Aphasia turns and gives her some attitude. “You don’t get to tell us what’s important. At least we’re doing something.”

“The odds of us crashing into anything sizable are astronomically low,” Raven says. “Especially at this speed. First step was to get moving. Steering is tomorrow’s problem. I’ll play with the stabilizers and figure something out.”

“Pssh,” Aphasia says, “I believe in you, girl. Look what we can do.”

“Look, indeed,” Hermione says, staring out the window, starstruck.

Spencer catches Raven’s eye and silently mouths, “Thank you.”

Still smiling, Raven gives a half-shrug in concession and offer back, “You, too.”

The four women enjoy their well-earned moment together, gazing out at the stars and quietly drifting through space. After all they’ve been through, all the pain and losses and heartbreak, the victories have finally begun. They are alive and free and safe, in control of their own destiny. In a weird way, they’ve become a family.

They don’t know it yet, but the inmates of the Uterius have hope for a different future now, all
thanks to a brave and powerful witch, the hoarding thief who loves her, a guard willing to take a chance, a conspiracy theorist who refused to give up, and the mechanic who could build the impossible.

****************

It takes only one minute for Quinn and Spencer to move their collective worldly possessions to cell 20 but four minutes to pick which bed they want to share. They eventually settle on top-left, out of habit and nostalgia, and are thirty minutes into taking the new bunk for a test drive when Greggs comes banging on the door.

“Spencer, hey, come on. I need your help.” She pounds on the bars a few more times until Spencer emerges from under the sheet and turns to look at her.

Wiping her wet face with the back of her hand, she makes sure Greggs can see just how pissed she is to be interrupted. “Can it wait? I’m occupied.”

“So’s the docking bay. I can try to get rid of her, or we can send one of the Sue clones to talk to her, but I didn’t think you wanted to do that yet.”

Spencer’s down on the ground and getting dressed now as fast as she can, fastening her bra behind her and zipping up her jumpsuit. “Shit. No, we’re not ready.”

Quinn doesn’t look too thrilled about the situation, herself. Neither of them was expecting company to come calling this soon. But hey, maybe it’s just someone selling Girl Scout cookies, and everybody wins.

Spencer pulls her shoes on quickly. “How the hell did someone get in the docking bay without authorization?” She has no idea how any of that works (or who would even authorize it), but she’s seen it in movies, so it might be a real thing.

“She comes here so damn much,” Greggs says, “Sue gave her her own code.”

Spencer looks up at Quinn, who’s still on her back with knees bent and spread wide. If this is what Spencer thinks it is, that orgasm is most definitely going to have to wait. “I think I need your help for this one. You coming?”

Quinn sighs and rolls her eyes. “Not today, I guess,” then rolls to climb off the bunk.

****************

“No, it’s not a cookie vendor.” Greggs rolls her eyes. “Sue gave her her own code.”

Spencer looks up at Quinn, who’s still on her back with knees bent and spread wide. If this is what Spencer thinks it is, that orgasm is most definitely going to have to wait. “I think I need your help for this one. You coming?”

Quinn sighs and rolls her eyes. “Not today, I guess,” then rolls to climb off the bunk.

****************

“While it’s certainly lovely to see you again, Quinn, I still don’t understand why Sue isn’t here to greet me herself. We have protocols.”

Quinn and Greggs are standing in the small circuit room outside the docking bay, just two feet from where Spencer watched Sue get pummeled by human flesh and then eaten by a shark. Their guest, clad once again in black leather and latex from head to her six-inch heels, seems to have no idea
she’s only the third most interesting thing that’s happened there so far today.

“She’s sick,” Greggs says. “But inmate Fabray said she had a relationship with you and offered to be your welcoming committee.”

**That** comment picks at an old wound. Mistress Berry crosses her arms. “Hardly much of a relationship when we missed out on potential years together because someone—” she stares at Quinn now, “—wasn’t honest about her feelings for me until graduation.”

“Fine, Rachel,” Quinn says in her trademark flat tone. “You want the truth? Sue’s dead.”

Mistress Berry gasps and holds a hand over her open mouth in a very Old Hollywood kind of way. “That’s terrible!”

“Not really. The inmates revolted and took over the prison yesterday. Sue and all the other guards are dead. We’re in charge now.” There’s a beat, then Quinn nods her head toward Greggs. “She’s helping.”

“Wow…” Mistress Berry raises and drops her eyebrows, happy for them but very thrown by the whole thing. “Congratulations. That’s quite an accomplishment.” She thinks for a moment. “Why are you telling me?”

“Because I know I can trust you.” Quinn’s eyes are shining with sincerity now. “And because I need you to understand why you can’t come back here anymore.”

That clearly stings; Mistress Berry flinches at the very suggestion. “Don’t you want my help?”

Greggs speaks up now. “We’re gonna lay low for a while, try not to draw attention to ourselves. And we won’t be taking on any new prisoners, so we won’t have much to offer you.”

“I see,” she says, composing herself as professionally as she can. “Thank you, Officer.”

“If you want to help us,” Quinn says, “corroborate our story. Tell people that everything is business as usual here and that you still talk to Sue.”

Mistress Berry smooths out the sides of her outfit with her hands, not that they were going anywhere. “You want me to lie for you.” She finds Quinn’s eyes and something in them makes her say, “Lucky for you, I’m quite the accomplished actress.”

“Thank you,” Quinn says softly. With that handled, it now occurs to her why her old crush must be here. “What happened to Katniss?”

“Oh yes. Girls of her strength typically last at least eight to ten months. But that’s not why I’m here. I wanted to speak to you.” Her eyes shine with that big smile that lets the other person know they’re about to be asked a favor. “There’s a new group I’m co-leading, a sort of interstellar a cappella troupe of the highest caliber, and we’re desperately in need of altos. And I thought—”

“No.”
But we’re really, really good! And we’re performing in only the fanciest performance halls in the galaxy, and I just—"

“No.”

Mistress Berry looks hurt and disappointed, but recovers. “Well, if you want me to keep quiet about your lesbian pirate ship, I’m going to need a little something in return.”

Quinn’s demeanor shifts from annoyance to disbelief. “You’re *extorting* us?”

“No, I’m negotiating. After all, I think it only seems fair. And if you won’t share your singing talents, then you’ll have to come up with something else of equal or greater value.” She crosses her arms all high-and-mighty in that condescending way that both pissed Quinn off in high school and turned her on.

Thinking for a moment, she offers, “How about another sub? I know someone perfect, but she’s stubborn and mean and will be hard to break. But if anyone can do it, you can, Rachel. It could be your crowning achievement, if you’re up to the challenge.”

Mistress Berry considers the offer, clearly intrigued but not wanting to relent on the Quinn-singing-with-her-again bit too easily. “Do I know her?” Then, she appears struck with a realization and her voice drops suddenly. “Wait, it’s not that terrible girl who sleeps under you and doesn’t bathe, is it? The one named after a truck.” She shivers at the thought.

“No,” Quinn says, hiding a quiet laugh. She pauses for a moment, thinking about how much fun this is going to be. What a terrific housewarming gift for Spencer!

She gestures for Mistress Berry to follow her out of the room, asking, “Did you ever meet Becky?”

****************

“Oh, HELL no!”

“There’s no way.”

Three days later, the first meeting of the Council of the *Uterius*’s New Trust (C.U.N.T.) is in session. They’re huddled in the library around the only round table on the ship, which is just barely large enough to hold all ten members: Spencer, Lucy, Aphasia, Hermione, Tastee, Poussey, Greggs, Raven, Delphine, and one Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins. It seems to be a fair sampling—two members from each gang, two *Uterius* employees, and two DYAD employees. And they’re already off to a great start, arguing about their very first topic.

“We can’t keep her locked up like our prisoner!” Spencer doesn’t get why she has to plead this case, but she will if she has to.

“She *is* a prisoner,” Tastee says.

“So are you,” the doctor points out.

Spencer ignores that and turns to Tastee. “Not our prisoner! What are we going to do, hold her at gunpoint every time we want a snack? That’s hardly a long-term solution and one that’ll probably get
us poisoned."

Delphine folds her hands together. “Not to mention a prisoner requires full-time security.”

“Quinn doesn’t want to do it,” Spencer says, “and she shouldn’t have to.”

Greggs leans back in her chair. “Don’t look at me. I didn’t risk my life helping y’all just to spend the next few years on Solitary duty with a scary old white lady.”

“You stayin’?” Aphasia asks her. “We thought you’d be gone by now.”

Greggs sighs. “I haven’t decided yet. It’s hard to walk away from a steady paycheck, if we can keep that coming. Maybe with a little raise, on account of the ‘downsizing’ and all. I don’t mind staying on as security for y’all. I’ve got friends here. But I do really miss my girl.”

“Okay,” Spencer says, making a note on her legal pad, freshly stolen from Sue’s office. “So, we need to figure out what to do with Martha Stewart—”

“It’s Slewgurt,” Tastee says.

“It’s really not. And we need to find out what paperwork needs to be filed for Greggs’ payroll. Plus a raise.”

Poussey says, “That’s all great, but I’m wondering how we’re gonna get more food.”

“I ain’t eating no more BSM,” Tastee says, eye bugged out.

“I don’t see much point in having a fancy chef if all she’s got to work with is toilet paper and toothpaste,” Poussey says. “Assuming we still know how to get more of that, too.”

“That’s on my list of things to look into,” Spencer says. “Anything that went through Sue’s office, I’ll handle it.” Underneath the other items, she secretly writes, Make Sue’s office my office. It’s more appealing now that the bodies have been removed. Though, she’ll need to figure out if she wants to keep the trophies Aphasia didn’t take. She does like that alligator one.

“What, ‘cause you the new warden now?” Tastee asks, sounding very unimpressed.

“No—because I’ve spent the most time filing paperwork for her and I’m familiar with it. I can do this.” Spencer looks around the group and reminds them, “We’re all in charge now. This is just how I can help.”

“So, what’s my job?” Poussey asks excitedly. “What can I do?”

“Um.” Spencer pauses and glances around again. She doesn’t want to get a beatdown for telling criminals to do something they don’t want to do. “Whatever you feel comfortable with, I think. Everyone should do what sounds good to them.”

“What all do you need?” Delphine asks.

“Let’s make a list. Someone has to be in charge of food. Placing orders, overseeing meals, running the cafeteria, handling Martha.”

“Sounds like a big job,” Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins says.

It’s quiet until Aphasia asks, “They get to pick the food?”
“Sure,” Spencer says, unable to think of a reason why not. “Somebody has to.”

“I got that, then. We gonna have waffles EVERY day.” She looks incredibly pleased with herself.

“Great.” Spencer jots down Aphasia’s name and makes a new bullet point. “Somebody needs to be in charge of communication between us and the other inmates. Public relations or press secretary or whatever. I don’t want people in the dark or having to rely on the grapevine for information. They won’t trust us anymore. We need an official voice from this group to tell everyone about the decisions we make.”

“I can do that,” Poussey says, looking around. “I like talking to people.”

“I can talk to my girls,” Lucy says.

It doesn’t sound defensive, but Spencer worries that having each gang only talk to their people will go against the new sense of interconnectedness they’re trying to achieve.

“Actually,” she says, “I was hoping you’d be interested in taking on something else. As much as I can’t believe I’m suggesting this, I thought maybe you’d want to be in charge of the vocational program.” When nobody seems to understand what that means, she adds, “The classes.”

Lucy ponders it for a moment, then smiles. “I’d like that.”

“And what should we do?” Delphine asks, nodding to the other doctor. “We spoke before about taking our program in a new direction,” she says to Spencer, carefully. “I’d like to discuss some possibilities of what that might look like.”

Tastee says, “I’d suggest not making killer spiders.”

Greggs looks worried. “Is that the only thing y’all’ve been doing down there?”

Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins gives a little laugh at that and says, proudly, “We’ve also been doing groundbreaking work in the field of human cloning.”

“Cloning?” Tastee asks.

Aphasia glares at the doctor. “Yeah, we heard.”

“It’s primarily a facility for genetic research,” Delphine says, “and biological development.”

“Biological development’?” Poussey asks. “What’s that got to do with prisons?”

“DYAD is its own entity. We do bring in a significant cash flow to the prison, which pays for all your food and clothing and healthcare. But structurally, we simply share the ship, nothing else.” Lucy stares her down hard, which is scary enough to get the amendment, “And we also share people.”

“Not anymore, you don’t!” Aphasia snaps.

“And in the interest of sharing,” Spencer says, cheerfully redirecting the conversation, “I thought maybe you could look into developing a new food source for everyone. Make chickens or cows or something.”

“Make cows’?” Delphine looks like she’s never felt so patronized in her life. “We don’t have the cellular material for that kind of project.”
“I don’t know! Something we can eat that isn’t people! Or burnt fish sticks.”

“Or spiders,” Aphasia adds, pointing her finger.

Lucy says, “We are not going to kill animals just to eat them. I won’t allow it.” Coming from anyone else, that statement wouldn’t mean much. From her, it literally means, ‘I will slice you in half if you try.’

Spencer honestly wonders how Lucy has lived this long without eating meat. It’s not like there’s a soybean farm nearby. “If we don’t eat protein somehow, we won’t survive. Can we compromise? What if they’re able to grow animals only partway, or maybe just parts of them—enough that we can eat, but not make them really alive, like, fully grown. That way, they don’t technically die when we eat them.” It’s a bizarre suggestion, and she doesn’t know if it makes sense or if it’s even possible. But it’s worth a try.

Delphine and Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins exchange looks. Delphine’s wary, but the doctor gives her an optimistic shrug.

“It’s possible,” Delphine says carefully. “It would take time, but we can divert some resources and make it a priority.”

“We’d appreciate it,” Spencer says.

Lucy thinks about it. “I’d want to see it for myself.”

Delphine doesn’t have a problem with that. “Sure. We want to be more transparent with you all from now on. We aren’t cloning people anymore, but we still want to continue our work—with non-violent animal projects only. And make money selling them, of course.”

“Maybe you and Lucy can invent some new space animal together,” Spencer says, a bit passive-aggressively.

But her sarcasm is lost on Lucy. “I would love to do that!” she beams. “I’ve been working on many exciting designs.”

“I’m open to that, yes,” Delphine smiles. She then adjusts herself in her seat and sits up straighter, facing Spencer. “If you’re interested in participating, we could use some extra hands. I was hoping you’d be willing to come work with us. We’ve read your file; we know you were accepted to Georgetown. Have you ever considered a career in biological science?”

Spencer can’t believe what she’s hearing. “You’re serious.” No one steps in to claim otherwise. “You’re offering me a job?”

“An internship, I suppose. We can’t pay you, of course, but you’d be working directly with us on all of our projects.”

“Including mine, I hope,” Lucy adds.

Thinking back to the first time she saw the list of “classes,” Spencer wasn’t sure she’d ever get to do real academic work again. Something that challenged her, something rewarding. Now, she can have a direct impact on the future of this prison and get high-level science education and research experience as well. Whether it could be considered “real-world” training is irrelevant at this point. It’s the best opportunity she’s seen since she first set foot here. Not to mention, working downstairs would help her know for sure that they’re not making any more clones of her. It’s a win-win.
She tries to play down her excitement as she smiles and says, “Yeah, sure. I’m in.”

“Speaking of your projects,” Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins says, “if we’re going with your plan of using a Sue clone to handle visitors, someone’s going to have to be her handler.” Seeing the confused faces around her, she takes a moment to explain the Sue clone situation to the whole table, then continues. “It’s going to take some work to acclimate her to the prison and teach her to talk knowledgeably, or even like a regular person.”

“Yeah, no kidding,” Spencer says. “Someone’s going to need to take that on.”

“True,” Poussey agrees.

Everyone in the room quietly nods and avoids eye contact with each other, waiting for someone else to step up. Finally, the silence is broken when Tastee throws her hands up, annoyed, and says, “Fine, I’ll do it. Damn.” She sighs and resigns herself to this awkward task. “I’m just saying, if she tries to get all freaky on me, we gonna have to airlock her saggy ass, too.”

“What else is on your list?” Hermione asks Spencer.

“Raven, you’re working on improving engine function and steering, right?”

“Yes. I’ve got a few ideas so far; Hermione and I are working on it. But at least we’re moving. I burned through about forty percent of the fuel supply to get us going. Should be somewhere around thirty-eight kilometers per hour, which is already a lot faster than I calculated was possible. I don’t want to push it further than that if we don’t have to. Some of the components are literally held together by string and tape.”

“Yeah, let’s not push it,” Spencer agrees. “Thanks for handling that.”

Hermione tells Raven, “I’ll try some strengthening charms as soon as I can.” Turning to Spencer, she asks, “What else can I do?”

“How’s the new wand?”

“We’re getting acquainted,” Hermione says. “I’ve been practicing with small, simple spells—levitation, folding clothes, opening doors, et cetera. Nothing on people yet, not until we’ve built trust.” She’s talking about the wand like it’s a person, which Spencer finds more than a little weird. “If we avoid problems, I might be able to travel soon. If there’s something you need.”

“Possibly, yeah. I mean, I don’t know what supplies I’ll be able to arrange for us yet, so it could be really helpful having a backup plan.” Spencer thinks about the whole teleporting thing—which she’s super jealous of—and has another thought. “Will it be harder to land in the right place now that the ship is moving?”

“The Earth is moving at approximately sixteen hundred kilometers per hour, and I land there just fine. I think I can handle whatever we’re doing now.”

“Fair enough,” Spencer concedes. “Let’s hope you don’t have to leave any time soon. And I suggest we start keeping an eye out for some kind of small ship we can commandeer. One like Ripley and Vasquez took. We need a way to make short trips as things come up, so we’re not just relying on teleporting.”

Hermione considers this and agrees. “I can’t be expected to handle every single thing.”

“It is harder for her to appetite when there’s someone with her,” Aphasia adds.
”Apparate, dear. For the twentieth time, it’s *apparate.*”

Lucy speaks up, turning to Spencer. “Maybe Quinn can ask Mistress Berry if she has an extra cruiser, or where she got hers. Maybe we could offer some kind of trade.”

“Yeah,” Spencer says, writing it down. “I’ll ask her.”

“I have another question,” Lucy says, then hesitates. “I’d like to move rooms.”

“Yeah, I don’t see why not.” Spencer looks around for any voices of dissension. “I think everything’s fair game at this point; some people have already been shuffling around.” Including herself, of course. “Where did you want to go?”

“Home.” Lucy pauses again, like the word feels foreign in her mouth. “The barracks downstairs are much nicer than the cell block. There should be plenty of room for everyone, especially since some people will want to live with their partners.”

Poussey smiles. “Actual beds?” She turns and gives Tastee their very complicated high-five, absolutely elated.

Lucy nods. “And no more bars. We’re free now, right?”

“Long as nobody takes my room,” Greggs says, “I’m cool.”

“Or mine,” says Dr. Lewis-Burke-Robbins.

Spencer looks at Greggs. “We haven’t cleared most of the rooms on that hall. Do you think you could take a few girls and oversee that? Just making sure there aren’t any more surprises and get us an official count of how many rooms are available for inmates.”

“Yes, I can do that today.”

Raven shifts in her chair. “I’d need to recode the scanners on all the doors if other people are moving in there. I could just deactivate the biorecognition software so anyone can open them, if you want.”

“You can do that?” Spencer asks. The longest day of her life would’ve been a bit shorter if she’d known Raven could get into any door without effort. Spencer’s regretting not getting to know the prison’s Most Valuable Mechanic sooner.

“You’ve got Sue’s master keycard, right?” Raven says. “I’ll need it to do a system reset, then we can reconfigure them however we need.”

“Yeah.” Spencer reaches into her bra and pulls it out, handing it to Raven. “That’s great, thank you.” She pauses. “I mean, if that’s what the group wants to do.”

No one offers any desire or reason to stay in the cell block, so the motion passes easily. Spencer can’t wait to tell Quinn they’re going to have a real room all to themselves.

“Speaking of Sue’s stuff,” she says, “something tells me she probably has the biggest room down there.” Spencer looks at Lucy. “I think you should have it.” She almost adds, “so you have room for your orgies,” but thinks better of it.

“That’s nice, but I think I’d rather go back to my old room. It’d be good to have all my—”

“Oh God,” Spencer says, jumping out of her seat. Her eyes go as wide as the table she just banged her knee on. “YOUR ROOM.” And with that, she takes off running at full-speed, praying there’s
more left of Santana, Faith, and Buffy than could fill a BSM can.

Everyone watches her go but remains otherwise still and quiet.

Aphasia breaks the silence, reassuring everyone, “It’s fine. She just locked some people in there with a cannibal a few days ago.”

“Santana’s back?” Poussey says with a casual smile, like an old friend is returning home from college. “How’s she doin’?”

“Oh, she good,” Aphasia says in that same small-talk vibe. “You know, keepin’ it real.”

“That’s good,” Poussey says.

Hermione smiles and looks fondly at her girlfriend. Aphasia wasn’t even there when the group encountered Santana, but Hermione told her the full story afterward. And now, Aphasia’s being absolutely adorable telling others how it went. She’s one of the heroes.

“Well,” the doctor says, all too happy to cut that conversation short. Her hands fall to her thighs as she looks around the group. “Sounds like we’re off to a good start. Let’s report out to the population about the move downstairs and reconvene in four days to follow up on any new things that come up. Everybody brainstorm solutions for dealing with Martha and bring updates on your individual projects to share out. Anything else?” The others shrug and glance at each other around the table. “Okay then. On behalf of Spencer, who I guess isn’t returning today, I declare the first meeting of the C.U.N.T. officially adjourned.”

“Yes,” Delphine says, “good work, everyone,” though it sounds like she only sort of means it.

“Go team,” Poussey says.

The first to her feet, Aphasia stands up proudly and announces, “Guys, this is the best cunt I ever been in!”

****************

“Good afternoon, class!”

The chipper and bright voice of Lucy Fabray sings out over the cafeteria as the familiar “Pop Goes the Weasel” song plinks its final notes. Strange as it is to say so, Spencer’s glad this is happening. Her first day at Play-Doh Funhouse seemed much scarier than it does now, given all that they’ve seen. This big scoop of whimsy is providing some much-needed levity. Perhaps that’s been the point of it all along.

The paintball mural on the ceiling matches nicely with the neon streamers and tablecloths, but otherwise, the setup is the same as it always was. Somehow in the extensive massacre that took place on this ship ten days ago, all the crafting supplies survived unharmed. And even though there’s no real reason to do so, Lucy insisted on keeping enrollment limited to twelve people with a waitlist after. (Spencer took the place of the late Sarah Connor.) It seems any opportunity to engage in a power dynamic makes her happy, and now that Lucy is in charge of the entire vocational program, no one can make her do otherwise.
“As you may have heard, I’m going to be teaming up with the DYAD scientists downstairs to design a new animal!” This announcement receives a hearty round of applause. By god, even Spencer is clapping. “And I thought to myself, what truly brings out my innermost creativity?”

“Murder?” Spencer says to Mack, sitting next to her.

“Play-Doh, of course!” Lucy is absolutely beaming as she holds up a container in each hand. “So, today let your imagination be your guide as we design what could become the next superstar of biological development. Pipe cleaners and googly eyes are on the front table. After thirty minutes, we’ll do a gallery walk to see if we can get any new ideas from each other.”

Spencer represses the laughter in her chest and purses her lips, watching her undefined-secondary-relationship shine in her element. (It’s much better than Lucy’s other element, the one involving a chainsaw.) Spencer pushes and prods at the clumps of green and purple clay on her wax paper, but nothing is coming to mind.

A few minutes later, Lucy makes her way to their table and exchanges some kind words of praise toward Mack’s creation, something like a ten-legged platypus with spines on its back.


Lucy leans down like she’s coming in for a kiss, but then diverts her face at the last second. With a dangerous smile, she whispers into Spencer’s ear, “You don’t make the rules here, Spencer. I do.”

Thirty-eight minutes later when class is over and the students have all departed, Spencer sticks around to help Lucy clean up the mess, only to end up a complete mess, herself. It turns out pipe cleaners can make for very effective DIY handcuffs, and green fingerpaint is a lovely color on her breasts. The handprints on her chest and neck won’t wash off easily, but Spencer doesn’t mind. She has nothing to hide anymore. And as Lucy drives two (paint-free) fingers deep inside her, bent over a pink tablecloth in the middle of the room, Spencer smiles against Lucy’s shoulder. If this is the new life she’s worked hard for, she’s damn well going to enjoy the moment.

She’ll never have her old life back, the one in Rosewood with Aria, Hanna, Emily, and her parents. The one where she goes to Georgetown and becomes a lawyer who climbs a corporate ladder. The one where she marries some guy from grad school and gives her mother the grandchildren she always wanted. Some other Spencer is living that life now. Maybe she’s still in Radley. Maybe she’s sleeping with one eye open, deep in the clutches of A’s twisted mind games. Or maybe she’s happy. Spencer hopes so.

But she’s missing her old life less and less each day. There’s something about this new world she has up here that’s grown on her. For a place built to strip away her freedoms, it sure feels like anything’s possible now. Between the questionable food and ridiculous classes and magic spells and colorful characters all around her, prison life has become anything but boring. She has new versions of what she left behind—friends, family, school, work, even romance. And purpose. Ambition. A meaningful career. If she’s going to spend the rest of her life in jail, what better place is there to be?

And when the ship rocks with the force of another meteor crashing against the south side, driving Lucy’s fist inextricably inside her, Spencer bursts into laughter and wonders how lightning has struck her not just once, but twice. And as she looks up into Lucy’s adoring eyes, and then into Quinn’s
later that night, curled up together in their new, bars-free bedroom, Spencer realizes that she has indeed been struck twice. And she couldn’t be happier.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

Here’s the map of the Uterius and the character photo index.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

After a week of intense negotiation, the C.U.N.T eventually agreed to let Martha Stewart roam free and unguarded, provided she actively worked to improve the quality of meals for everyone. With the solitary ward now otherwise uninhabited, Martha turned it into her own beautifully decorated three-bedroom apartment. Spencer never went to see it for herself, mostly because she was still incredibly intimidated by Martha, but also because she heard a rumor that Ripley’s old cell was now a sex dungeon.

There was a period of a few months, right after Martha learned about Play-Doh Funhouse for the first time, when she sought to challenge Lucy for the title of Craft Queen aboard the ship. With no followers of her own, she eventually dropped the competitive angle and made nice. In the end, she and Lucy became allies and swapped tips for many years before Martha’s sudden and unfortunate death from choking on a fish stick. Whether her alliance with Lucy was a long con to eventually retake reign of the crafting world—then foisted by her enemy, or if her death was truly an accident, no one ever knew.

Thanks to Spencer’s rescue, Santana and Faith emerged from room G38 relatively healthy and unharmed. They had bellies full of flesh and blood-stained faces, but at least they were alive and whole. Both girls growled like feral cats for about a week before returning to their regular selves. There was no trace of Buffy, however, and the survivors refused to officially confirm the obvious conclusion. Instead, they chose to mock Spencer by insisting that spiders must’ve done something to her. Nobody bought it. A few times over the first year, Spencer swore she saw Buffy’s blonde hair going around a corner or her face peeking out through a cracked door, but she was probably just imagining things.

Clarice’s rotten skeleton was dragged out and airlocked, and Lucy moved back into G38. She didn’t do much in the way of redecorating, or even cleaning, for that matter. Spencer still visited for sessions with Lucy but never let Santana or Faith put their mouths near her again. The three of them remained a trio until Santana eventually hitchhiked her way back to Earth after five years. Spencer heard occasional ripples in the news of vicious attacks on sororities and hoped her friend was doing okay.

With the monthly murders over, the Uterius no longer had problems to report and went back to being a quality prison in the eyes of the space government. Well-versed in her verbal patterns, Spencer successfully imitated Sue in written communication and drew no suspicion from the authorities. The Sue clone only had to be used for business purposes twice when random passersby came knocking on the docking bay doors. The President soon lost interest after Spencer crafted a series of overly clingy and codependent-themed messages to her office, and no further attempts were made to book conjugal visits on the Uterius. In lieu of this, however, the Sue clone did try to have sex with Tastee on no fewer than eleven occasions.

What remained of Vee’s gang eventually made peace with the death of their leader and the new
collaborative spirit of things, even Suzanne. Jessica Huang was outraged not to get a spot on the
council, so, instead, the others agreed to let her be the new leader of their faction. She also insisted on
“helping Spencer” with the ship’s new budget, but of course just took it over entirely. Through some
inventive corner-cutting measures, Jessica helped them afford new items like roll-on deodorant,
cheddar cheese, and a subscription to Better Homes & Gardens. She then withheld these items upon
delivery and used them as bribes to leverage removal of the number four from the cell block and
gyms, after which she was more agreeable to work with. The inmate population lived comfortably
for many years thanks to her efforts.

Angry Melanie Marcus, the crankiest lawyer this side of Jupiter, managed to find the *Uterius* for
Spencer’s annual parole review. However, she was so infuriated by the additional crimes Spencer
committed since they last met, she had an aneurysm halfway through the meeting and fell down
dead. The inmates kept her space cruiser and used it to make supply runs until the fuel tank was
depleted.

About nine months after Sue’s defeat, a group of lady space pirates stumbled upon the *Uterius* while
hunting Beyoncé the Shark. Fortunately, the captain, a woman named Indra, was an old friend of
Octavia’s. She was willing to broker a deal, offering a year’s worth of food, toiletries, and protection
in exchange for a dozen clones of Lucy Diamond. Spencer, Quinn, and Lucy Fabray all protested at
first, but in the end, the C.U.N.T. ruled in favor of temporarily reviving the cloning program, as it
was truly in everyone’s best interest. (Lucy Diamond was fine with it.) When the deal was secured,
Kima Greggs finally went home to rejoin her wife and son. Within a year, they were expecting their
second child, which they agreed to name Hermione (or Herman) in honor of their friend. The
arrangement with Indra evolved over the years into a long-standing alliance of mutual benefits—
supplies and safety for the *Uterius* and an army of very sexy clone pirates for Captain Indra.

Two years after the death of their wife, the doctors formalized their arrangement with Raven by
making her the new third party in their marriage. All three women changed their names to Lewis-
Burke-Robbins-Reyes and continued to conduct “business” with Starbuck at least once per week.
River regularly hid in the ceiling to watch them until a bounty hunter named Dutch tracked down the
ship in pursuit of her. Luckily, Moriarty managed to seduce Dutch and eventually convinced her to
give up the mercenary life and stay on the *Uterius*. River started watching them, too. One day, she
found a spider crawling around in the ceiling vents, smashed it with her fist, and ate it. She never told
a soul.

It took four misfired spells, two bewitched aquarium tanks, and an entire afternoon for Hermione and
Aphasia to unpack the black hole and relocate everything into Sue’s master bedroom. Much to her
delight, Aphasia found a pack of five hundred water balloons she’d long forgotten. They became an
excellent addition to the dodgeball tournaments, especially once Hermione applied a repairing charm
so they could be reused. (The inmates decided the tourneys were worth keeping—now that they got
to play, of course—and held them weekly. Raven even agree to cut the gravity from time to time.)

Hermione never returned to the wizarding war. By the time she built up enough trust with
Umbridge’s wand to risk it, Spencer found word on a rebel website that Voldemort had been
defeated by a boy named Neville Longbottom. Hermione enjoyed a peaceful retirement with her
girlfriend, who then became her fiancée eighteen months after the inmate revolution.

It happened one morning at breakfast. After a call to attention in the crowded cafeteria, Hermione got
down on one knee and proposed. With a teary smile, Hermione professed her deep and undying
love, appreciation, and admiration for Aphasia, using her big words and fancy accent in true
Hermione fashion, but then closed out her speech with a perfect delivery of, “Will you be my forever
boo?” Aphasia laughed and clapped, delighted to her core, and gave a resounding, “*Hell yes!*”
Hermione beamed and laughed along with her, sliding a ring made of waffles onto Aphasia’s finger.
They kissed to seal the deal, and the whole cafeteria cheered and threw their waffles into the air, pounding on the tables and applauding til their hands hurt. (Later that evening, Hermione replaced the waffle ring with a gold one, when Aphasia could no longer resist eating it.)

The engagement was the biggest day of celebration since the victory over the spiders, rivaled only by their wedding a few years later. Lucy went all out decorating the Mess Hall, and Tastee officiated, as she was already an internet-ordained minister. Greggs wasn’t able to make it back to Quinn, and the Spades stood as their bridespeople. There wasn’t a dry eye in the room during the vows. Afterward, Hermione apparated Aphasia off the *Uterius* for the first time, taking her on a two-week honeymoon in Kenya. Aphasia was excited to finally use her knowledge of Swahili for more than just making fun of Spencer, and she returned with a sketchbook full of animals and pockets full of swiped knick-knacks from corporate tourist shops (as well as purchased treasures from the natives). Aphasia and Hermione spent seven happy years next door to their good friends Quinn and Spencer until the time finally came to move back to Earth and start a family. The remaining inhabitants of the *Uterius* celebrated their wedding anniversary like a national holiday from then on, raising a glass to Hermionasia and honoring all the happy couple had done for them in the revolution.

Ripley and Vasquez came back to visit the *Uterius* every Christmas. It took a few years for the inmates to trust that nobody would be murdered, but eventually they embraced their return as a new annual tradition. However, the inmates did not embrace Vasquez’s insistence they take all turns sitting on her lap to say what they wanted for being such bad, bad girls all year.

Mistress Berry didn’t obey the order not to return and kept attempting to recruit Quinn to her interstellar a cappella group. Quinn finally relented when Rachel promised that they would never ever perform a Madonna song. Power Hour was replaced by Beyoncé All Day, blasting from noon to midnight every Sunday. The inmates continued to refer to their synced periods as “Shark Week” for many years, even though the literal meaning was no more. Beyoncé the Shark never returned to the *Uterius*, but rumor has it she lived to be over a hundred years old and completed one million laps during her *Uterius* days.

Quinn and Lucy Fabray were never the best of friends, but they did have a newfound sense of respect and understanding after the mutiny. Maybe it was the bond of surviving something, or a newfound appreciation for their sisterhood; maybe it was the polyamorous relationship with Spencer. Quinn even considered joining Lucy’s class one day during an extreme fit of boredom. (She also quit smoking when it, too, could no longer hold her attention.) When the library ran out of romance novels she hadn’t yet read, Quinn decided to write her own. She titled it *Wrist Deep*. Spencer read it sixteen times.

Though she never killed again, Quinn did convince Mack to try breath play during their weekly spank sessions. Quinn always succeeded in knocking her unconscious, intentionally or not, which was satisfying enough. And for about three months, Quinn became strangely obsessed with the idea of stealing a baby, even going so far as to hijack the cruiser and attempt smuggling missions. Once she accumulated a total of forty-eight babies (stashed in her former cell), she became bored with their endless needs and traded them to Indra for twenty pounds of bacon, which she refused to share with anyone. Truly, the only thing Quinn never grew tired of was being with Spencer, though that was far too cheesy for her to ever admit.

Idgie Threadgoode, heartbroken after the infamous battle that resulted in a total loss of her winged companions, was even more devastated to hear they could not be replaced. Hermione brought the bad news—Earth’s bee population had gone extinct. After a destructive rampage and an excessive amount of drinking, Idgie decided to start an animal rights activism movement on the *Uterius*. Lucy was first to sign up, and together they held protests and rallies that attracted as many as half a dozen
people. Lucy also joined Idgie’s new class, History of Bees, in solidarity. Outside of DYAD’s productions, neither woman ever saw another live animal again.

Lucy Fabray successfully expanded the vocational program to include new hits like Leather, Pickpocketing, and Orgasms by lifting the rule that only two classes could take place on any given day. This gave her the opportunity to expand to teaching a second painting class, co-run by Aphasia, called Animal Portraits. It also made room for less popular courses, such as the six foreign languages taught by a woman called Villanelle. (She seemed to be the only person who knew more dialects than Aphasia, which remained a point of contention between them for years. Their multilingual arguments in the cafeteria drew a bigger audience than the class ever did.) Unnerving as the new instructor was, Spencer was glad to finally have real academic content in her day. She even offered a new class of her own—Investigative Analysis—but nobody signed up. Ironically, she could never figure out why.

When not teaching, herself, Lucy used her time to convert cell 1 into her own personal art museum. Every Monday she made Faith pose nude while Lucy sculpted her in Play-Doh, and of course, slapped the shit out of her at the slightest hint of movement. It resulted in some of the finest work of her lifetime.

Three days a week, Lucy spent mornings in DYAD working to develop a new animal for production. After a month of sketching and brainstorming, she took her finished draft to Delphine for phase two. The scientists were wary, but Lucy refused to take no for an answer, and they eventually conceded. They were able to begin production much more quickly than anticipated, because—instead of designing genetic code from scratch—they secretly asked Indra to kidnap an infant specimen from Earth for their purposes. Lucy had the joy of watching her creation come to life over the next few months, and she never looked happier. Because as it so happened, though she didn’t know it, the animal Lucy so proudly invented already existed. It was a bear.

Spencer Hastings went on to become the best scientist DYAD ever had. Well, maybe not the very best, but probably one of them. Definitely in the top twenty. She helped develop an edible protein source that tasted a lot like bologna, despite her best efforts to improve on the flavor. It became a staple of the inmates’ diet, and their health improved dramatically. She was a hero in her own mind and helped take care of the women of the Uterius for many years to come. (Though, Spencer never forgot what Santana had said about bologna being her favorite food, and the coincidence was enough to make her suspicious of Santana’s ‘psychic Mexican third eye’ from then on.)

Despite their victory in the revolution and the peaceful years that follows, Spencer couldn’t lay her paranoid instincts to rest and never fully let her guard down. You can take the girl out of Rosewood, as the saying goes. After all, two days after being offered the internship at the first council meeting, Spencer found a sealed envelope waiting on the floor of her room when she woke up. Inside was a simple white card. It read:
Chapter End Notes

This story took 4 years to write, off and on in bursts. Believe it or not, it was only supposed to be a smutty one-shot. For the first year or so, I had a co-author, my dear friend halfabagoffritos. We wanted to create an “ultimate angerbang” by getting some favorite characters together—Spencer, Quinn, Santana, and Faith—for a big angry orgy. But how to get them all in one place? Well, why not put them in prison? In space!

Once we had that starting point, we tried giving a little backstory for Spencer to lead up to it. In an attempt to make it as cracky as possible, we threw in the character of Charlotte the spider, inspired by a funny piece of kid writing. Instead of, “it turned out she was a nice person,” it looks like it says, “it turned out she was in sex prison.”

The whole murder mystery aspect grew from that, and the story only became more complex as we added characters and storylines to incorporate fun new elements. When the first chapters were written, no one had even heard of Orphan Black, Orange is the New Black, or The 100, three shows that would eventually become integral to the plot. I never let myself find a ceiling of ridiculousness or decide a storyline was too weird. After all, this story is based primarily on Pretty Little Liars and Glee. That said, I did try very hard to maintain sequence and continuity within absurdity. If the overarching mantra was, “Sure, why not?”, the challenge as a writer then became how to provide a rational (and if possible, canonical) explanation within the universe I created for that thing to occur. Even with magic and science fiction, there are still rules, even if I’m making them up. Everything had to make sense.

We posted the first eleven chapters as we wrote them, but then realized the plot was actually Becoming Something, and we didn’t quite know what it was going to be yet. So, we stopped posting but kept writing, giving us the freedom to play with many ideas and not have to ret-con ourselves. Thank goodness we did, because the story only got bigger and wackier over the years. Fritos eventually had to drop out of co-writing but gave me her blessing, and the saga of space prison continued on.
For all initial intentions of writing a smut one-shot, in the end the actual sex portions of the story amount to about five percent of the fic. Who knew?

This is by far the biggest thing I’ve ever done. Previously, my longest finished fic was less than 10k. I’ve seen writers and filmmakers talk about having a story inside them that they just had to tell, and I didn’t truly understand how that felt until now. For whatever reasons, this story refused to ever lessen its grip on me, and likewise I refused to let it go. It’s in my heart and a part of me. I’ll surely never do anything else of this magnitude again, and I’ll always treasure the four years of my life that I got to spend thinking about this story and tinkering with it. It has delighted me and challenged me and pushed me beyond what I thought I could do, and for that I am grateful. And while I’m proud of what I’ve created, a part of me will always be sad that the ride is over.

My greatest hope is that you have enjoyed this story as I have. My goal, above all, was to take the reader on a ride and create laughter. If I have accomplished that, then I have succeeded. Thank you for reading and supporting fanfiction writers.

If you are so inclined, there is an official soundtrack! It's on Spotify; here's the playlist:

1. "Strange Times" - The Black Keys
2. "Move Bitch" - Disturbing Tha Peace
3. "You're Not Alone" - Saosin
4. "Express Yourself" - Madonna
5. "This Used to Be My Playground" - Madonna
6. "Bad Girls" - M.I.A.
7. "S&M" - Rihanna
8. "Hung Up" - Madonna
9. "La Isla Bonita" - Madonna
10. "If You Only Knew" - Shinedown
11. "One Moment More" - Mindy Smith
12. "Spiderwebs" - The Mowgli's
13. "Live to Tell" - Madonna
14. "Heathens" - twenty one pilots
15. "Crime" - Art of Dying
16. "The Sound of Violence (Tha Trickaz Remix)" - Cassius
17. "Believer" - Imagine Dragons
18. "Give It 2 Me" - Madonna
19. "Photograph" - Nickelback
20. "Last Hope" - Paramore
22. "Cherish" - Madonna
23. "The Dog is Black" - Unkle
24. "Rollercoaster" - Bleachers
25. "GDFR" - Flo Rida
26. "Spider Dance" - Toby Fox
27. "Ray of Light" - Madonna
28. "The Girl" - City and Colour
29. "Forward Motion" - Thousand Foot Krutch
30. "Started From the Bottom" - Drake

Songs are arranged chronologically to align with characters or references in the story. Try to identify them all!
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!