

This Is Our Story
Chapter Six

“So can you give me a ride to school, Goner?”

Conner looked between his mother, who was putting the finishing touches on their breakfast, and Angelica, sipping her coffee across from him. He replied in a low voice, hoping his mom was more focused on the oldie rock station she always listened to in the mornings.

“So... you’re going to go back?”

Angelica shrugged. “Sure. Like, what’s the alternative? I can’t go back to my normal school, and my dad would freak if I ditched what he thinks is my new school. Besides, I already did all this shit once, so why not just boost my GPA and take it easy?”

“Oh. You’re not... mad?”

“Mad? At who? Some bizarro portal in the universe that warped me to another reality? Nah. I did good in high school, and I’ll do better this time around. Besides, not like there aren’t fringe benefits here and there, if you know what to look for.”

Something subtle in her tone made him cognizant of the way she looked today. He was so used to seeing low-key Angelica, home from school and lounging around the house, that he forgot how well she cleaned up. A fashionable dark floral dress that was snug across the chest and then hung straight down to mid-thigh, makeup to the nines, hair straightened, jewelry. Her stepbrother so seldom noticed her appearance, he’d nearly forgot how good she could look. “Got your eye on someone, do ya? Aren’t you worried about jailbait?”

Her voice dropped still lower. “Really? After your little date last night, you wanna lecture me on what I tap?” She grinned at the sight of his crimson façade. “Anyway, are you gonna give me a ride or what? I don’t have a parking pass, and what’s the point in spending forty bucks on one if I can just bum off you?”

“Uh, that could actually be a problem. See, I give Owen a ride.”

She frowned. “Oh yeah. Eh, I can behave myself if he can.”

“Then... sure, I can give you a ride.” Conner could almost hear his friend’s voice echoing, *I’ll ride you any time, Ang*. Lord, he hoped the guy could behave himself for a fifteen minute car ride. He didn’t have much hope.

Except when Owen hopped in the backseat a short while later, the only thing he said was, “Oh, we’re taking you today? Cool. You look really nice, by the way.”

“Thank you, Owen,” she answered.

That was it. That exchange was very nearly as strange by virtue of its banality as everything else this week had been by its bizarreness. The whole drive was silent save for the radio. When they got to school, Angelica parted ways with them, though only after Owen wished her a good day, and she wished the same to him.

“OK, so what the hell is going on,” Conner demanded of his friend once his sister was out of earshot.

“What are you talking about, man?”

“I’m talking about the first civil exchange I’ve ever seen between the two of you.”

“Eh. I figured after how she flipped on me the other day, I’d better just play it cool.

Damn, man, I’m not *that* immature.”

“Since when?”

Owen laughed. "Say, speaking of grown-up behavior, how'd your date with Hottie go last night?" Conner's broad grin gave it all away. "That good? How many bases you round?"

"I... look, you wouldn't believe it all if I told you. She's so into me, she'll just... I'm not exaggerating when I say she'd do anything for me."

"Oh bullshit. Man, one little blowjob and suddenly you think you're big pimpin'."

"Her words, not mine. I tried to come up with something she wouldn't do, and if she has limits, we didn't find them."

"Wait, you mean you didn't find them, as in you got all kind of wild? Or you didn't find them, as in she *said* she'd get all kind of wild?" Owen asked.

"Well..."

"Ha! I knew it! Sure, she *says* she'll do this and that, but just you wait. You make the ask, and suddenly she'll be too shy, too nervous, too much of a good girl and good girls don't do *that*..."

"Let's see, shall we?" Conner cut in, fishing his phone out of his pocket. He brought up Hailey's text history, then typed out a message.

I need a blowjob from my slut. Know someplace private we can meet during first period?

Owen's expression shifted. "Well then. You don't mince words, do you."

Conner just watched for a reply, and quickly received one. *Meet me in the auditorium. Your slut can't wait.*

"Daaamn, son. All right, so maybe I was wrong. Happy?"

"I'm gonna be soon," he said, texting back Hailey to confirm.

"Eighteen years old and ditching your first class – how's that feel?"

"Well, since I'm doing it to get head from one of the hottest girls in school, it feels pretty darn good."

"You're my inspiration, dude, seriously. All right, well you two kids have fun, plaster that bitch's face vicariously for me."

Conner was still seething when he strode into the auditorium. Hailey, sitting in the front row, waved him down excitedly, but her smile faded when she caught sight of him.

"Nothing," he said testily.

"You're sure? You look upset."

"It's OK. I just ran into somebody who gave me a hard time."

"Do you wanna talk about it?"

Conner did not want to talk about it, since the somebody in question had been Hayleigh McKnight. The encounter hadn't really been an encounter at all; he'd simply walked by her and her boyfriend Jayce Deacons. Not so much walked by, actually, as Jayce veered out of his way to shoulder check Conner. The guy had almost half a foot and fifty pounds on Conner, who had been knocked to the floor with ease. Hayleigh had just laughed. "Watch where you're walking, dork," she'd said with a sneer as they walked away laughing.

Conner had never had much of a problem with her prior the other day; he was realizing now that this was due much more to limited contact than a kindhearted disposition.

"It's OK. I have you now. That's all I wanted. Though I gotta say, the auditorium isn't exactly as private as I was hoping. Anyone could walk in here at any moment."

“I know. Come with me.”

Conner followed closely behind Hailey for what turned out to be a very short journey. She lead him down into the orchestra pit at the foot of the stage, and from there, opened a wide door into an area beneath the stage. It was filled with rows up rows of chairs hanging on long, wheeled racks, though there was enough room to go between them, which Hailey did. It was pitch black down there, but she had her phone at the ready with its flashlight on to guide them. It wasn't even high enough to stand upright. To his surprise, once they passed the chairs, there was a mat spread out on the cement floor, not unlike the ones they used in gym class. Nearby was a neatly folded blanket and a pair of pillows.

“Hailey... what is this place?”

She spread out the blanket on the mat, then invited Conner to sit beside her. “I did set crew for the drama department freshman year... I guess I thought I would meet people, make friends.” The awkward pause told Conner that she had not. “They use this place for storage. And sometimes, I would use it for a place to kind of hide out and just relax when I wanted to be alone. I still do.”

Conner smiled. “It's... kinda nice, actually. A little toasty, though, but a small price to pay to be alone with you.”

“Yeah, I think the school's boiler is right underneath it, or nearby anyway. Gets to be a little much sometimes. Of course, you can always...”

Hailey started by removing her top, and didn't stop stripping until she was completely naked. It didn't take long; like last night, she had on neither bra nor panties. “Much better.”

Conner joined her in nakedness. It didn't actually help much with the temperature, but it suited his agenda just fine. “So it is.”

Hailey didn't need any further prompting; the availability of his cock was enough to get her mouth wrapped snugly around it. Conner just laid back, propping his head up with the pillow, and tried to forget Hayleigh and Jayce's bullying. The way she'd laughed at him. The way she'd attacked him after school the other day. The way for years, that musclebound jerk had lived the charmed life of the star jock while Conner was left to scrape up what little respect his talents could net him. Jayce, getting to fuck Hayleigh McKnight whenever he wanted. Her, getting to *be* Hayleigh McKnight, with all the fussing and fawning and flattery and favors and...

“*FUCK!*” Conner yelled. Somewhere not far off, a sophomore in the hall outside the auditorium looked around, trying to figure out where the phantom obscenity had originated. What she couldn't hear as she walked away was the pitiful gurgles of Hailey gagging around Conner's red, swollen prick as he held her lips down against the base of his shaft. As she walked on to first period, she missed the heaving gasp as he realized what he was doing and let go.

“What did I do wrong?” Hailey pulled up, sweeping her shampoo-commercial hair aside and looking at him with heart-rending apology for what had been an immensely enthusiastic blowjob. Tears were rolling down her face from the discomfort.

“Nothing, Hailey, you were doing great. I'm just stressed. I'm sorry.” He grabbed his shirt and dabbed at her cheeks. “Are you OK? I didn't mean to.”

“Did you like it?” Hailey interrupted. “I know that, like, that's supposed to be something boys like. Deep throating? I think that's what you call it.”

“Oh, Hailey, I didn't...”

“I know you didn’t mean to,” she rushed on. “But if you did, I could do it some more. I want to get really good at that, and you know what they say. Practice makes perfect and all. So I could practice. If you want.”

Her persistent stroking of his moistened cock made it impossible to lose his erection. “That’s really sweet. Really. I just bumped into a couple jerks in the hallway on my way into school, and it got to me. I didn’t mean to take it out on you.”

Hailey just smiled at him, only pulling her mouth back off his cock when he finished talking. “What? I didn’t mind at all. Can... can I ask who it was? The jerks.”

He sighed at the memory of it, and at the feel of her tongue caressing his shaft. “Jayce Deacons and Hayleigh McKnight.” It felt strange, saying the name to her face, but the eyes registering nothing.

Hailey just gave him a sympathetic face. “Yeah. She’s the worst.”

“You guys don’t get along? I wouldn’t have thought you had much interaction.”

Hailey paused. “Because she’s Miss Popular and I’m not?”

Conner froze. That was exactly what he’d meant. He couldn’t say that to the woman nursing his cock though, so he thought lightning quick. “What? Of course not. Because she’s a total bitch and you... well, you’re probably the nicest girl I’ve ever met.”

In an instant, her face transformed. What had been a distracted, albeit friendly, blowjob became nothing short of her mouth making love to his cock. She threw herself into it, moaning in her own urgency to – he supposed – repay his compliment. As he flopped onto his back on the soft blanket, he could feel her pussy begin to grind on his lower leg as she feverishly fellated him. He usually tried to hold back a little to prolong the fun, but the way she was going after him, he didn’t last two minutes. Hailey swallowed down every spurt, literally sucking at the end of his cock as if greedy for a few more drops.

“Can you...” She had to pause to catch her breath, but only barely managed. “Can you go again? I want to try something.”

“Try something? Like... what?” Even with his mind blown from an orgasm, he was paranoid about anything involving his penis.

“Just trust me, OK? I think you’ll like it. And if you don’t, I won’t ever do it again. Now just close your eyes.”

Reluctantly, Conner complied. “I miss looking at you already, you know.”

He heard a pleased giggle, but it cut short. “Quiet you. Now keep ‘em closed, and...”

There it was again, that sensation no man ever had or could get tired of. A warm, wet, smooth mouth and a tongue as much of each and more so, all of it enveloping his manhood with gentle firmness. The pure relaxation of her work, the heat from the boiler, the fact that it had been less than an hour since he’d been torn from his bed... It was all he could do to stay awake, even as his hard-on returned.

Until Hailey spoke.

“Still closed?”

“Mmhm.”

She gently took his hands and placed one on each side of her heads, rubbing them until he’d taken a loose grip in her hair. “Now I want you to imagine this was Hayleigh McKnight, that instead of me, you had that bitch down here sucking your dick, and I want you to just fuck the shit out of her bitch face. Just like a minute ago, but this time... don’t stop.”

Conner's eyes opened. There was Hayleigh's face, grinning mischievously but not able to conceal her fear he'd reject her proposal. When he'd seen the real Hayleigh, the one who now walked around Hailey's doughy skin, she'd looked at him with disdain that her timid face barely seemed able to display. It wasn't her. Somehow, it was almost as if his brain had seen that condescending smirk in her true face, the one she'd been born to. Heard her mockery in her true voice.

"I... I don't know, Hailey..."

Hailey's – Hayleigh's? – face suddenly twisted into a sneer, but the next moment she turned over her phone's flashlight, plunging the crawlspace into darkness. "What's wrong, loser? Don't have the balls to go for it? Maybe Jayce was right when he said you're half the man he is."

Conner's muscles – which might hold half the power of Jayce's only if the athlete was under the weather – tensed. Bizarrely, he could even tell Hailey was altering her voice. Prior to their body exchange, she'd had a bit of a scratchy voice, deeper than average, while Hayleigh's was decidedly high-pitched and a tad nasal. The kind of voice people would find annoyingly chipper in a less attractive girl.

He tried to make sense of it. Hailey was imitating Hayleigh using Hayleigh's own voice to role play Hayleigh giving him a coerced blowjob because Hailey wanted to help him relieve the stress from Hayleigh's bullying, which had only happened because Hayleigh had found out about him trying to edit Hailey back into Hailey.

It was to be the most meta moment in his entire life.

"Shut up and blow me, Hayleigh." Conner pulled her head back down, and per her request, fucked the shit out of her bitch face. Before long, he fumbled around until his fingers located her phone and flipped it back over. She tried to protest.

"You're not supposed to see me, Con-!"

He pushed her back down firmly. "I'm not supposed to hear you, Hayleigh. Now shut your cock sheathe or I'll tell Jayce just how much of a gutterslut he's been fucking."

As first period proceeded, Conner was not gentle with her; however, every chance she got, Hailey spurred him on to keep going.

"Tell me again what a bitch I am."

"I deserve to have my stupid mouth silenced with cocks, don't I."

"Of the dozens of dicks I've sucked this year, this is by far my favorite."

"Why did I waste my time on morons like Jayce when I could be sucking mmmf!"

She was like a wind-up toy. Impale her on his cock and get her mouth primed, then give her a breather and let her say something whorish and self-effacing. Or, well, kind of self-effacing, considering the face. He kept giving her more and more breaks just to see what she'd say next. When she finally blurted, "face fuck the bitch outta me!" Conner couldn't help but laugh, and even he didn't know if it was spitefully at Hayleigh or at Hailey's inadvertent hilarity.

Either way, he made sure to pull her off his cock and unload as much cum as he could right in her eyes.

"Man, what did McKnight ever do to you?" he asked her after, the two of them lying side by side on their backs, staring at the underside of the stage a few feet above them.

"How do you mean?"

"I couldn't help but notice you seem to bear her an especial dislike. Or you're just an incredible actress."

“Oh. You saw that.” She sighed. “It’s nothing.”

“Come on, talk to me.”

“It’s not her. Not exactly. It’s just...” She rolled to face him. “Did you know people call us Hefty and Hottie?” Conner’s awkward delay was answer enough for her. “Yeah. It’s just crummy sharing a name with the hottest girl in school.”

“She’s not the hottest girl in school. If anything—”

“Please don’t say I am. You don’t have to keep pretending, you know. I know what I look like.”

“Pretending? Have you seen how wild you make me? Do I seem like I’m pretending?”

Hailey allowed herself a smile at that, a softer shade of when he’d praised her earlier, but still radiant. “Meet me here again at lunch?”

It turned out that ditching class had surprisingly few consequences. The editor-in-chief had always assumed it was the sort of thing that was instantly detected when attendance was taken and immediately landed you a detention. Instead, a friend in his first period had told the teacher, honestly, that he’d seen Conner in the halls and was probably just running late, so she’d just marked him tardy and that was that. It was just about the closest to getting in trouble he’d ever come, and if his teacher knew the half of what he’d been doing, he’d have been lucky to get a mere detention.

The lunchtime rendezvous was nearly as wild as first period. Citing how much he’d obviously enjoyed himself and thereby she’d enjoyed herself, she picked up with the bizarre little roleplay where they’d left off. This time they tried doggy style, each of them their first time, and she treated him to a steady litany of “fuck me like a bitch” variants right up until the bell rang to dismiss them to their next class. Conner left their private nook first, in case anyone had come in; he pinched her butt goodbye and apologized if he’d smacked it too hard. Then it was off to government to pretend it was normal that Angelica was sitting two rows down from him.

However, “doin’ her from behind,” as Owen called it, wasn’t his only sexual first that day. After Hailey sent him a picture of what she claimed was his handprint on her bare ass from the girl’s room (Conner just saw a reddish splotch), she asked him to make it up to her with a dick pic. He actually wound up getting his second tardy of the day as a result; even with his teenage libido, getting it up after so much sexual activity, and in the boy’s bathroom no less, took time.

Luckily, last period was yearbook. Now that the tutorial was behind them, today would just be a work day. Most of the staff would be busy transferring their spreads in the old system over to This Is Our Story. The hall was quiet and empty as he made his way in, a fabricated excuse at the ready. As he approached the open door, however, he heard a discussion that paused him just outside.

“... had to explain to Jayce who Conner was so he knew who to be pissed at,” said a voice clearly recognizable as Jordan’s. He was snickering even while he talked.

“I heard he was gonna kick his ass after school,” Marissa followed. “I tried to tell him it was nothing to be that pissed about, but when Hayleigh has it in for somebody... let’s just say Jayce knows where his bread is buttered.”

“That’s a really gross metaphor,” said someone. Don, Conner thought.

“Grow up, Don.” Yep, Don.

“Is he really going to?” said a voice he recognized effortlessly. Heather. All the sex in the world couldn’t prevent his heart from beating a little faster at that sound. “We don’t even know if he was doing anything creepy.”

Conner smiled to hear her put in a good word for him, even half-heartedly.

Several voices spoke over each other, some of them insisting Conner was nursing some big gross crush on Hayleigh (and Marissa suggesting maybe Hailey instead); others were saying this was the least scandalous scandal they’d ever heard of, and that they could care less.

“I don’t know why you always stick up for him,” Jordan said over the lot of those urging them to break out onto their own projects.

“Maybe Heather’s trying to photoshop Conner into a hottie of her own,” laughed Siobhan.

“I’m not... I just... Look, he’s done a good job as editor. And maybe he’s a little awkward sometimes, but he says he was... Well, whatever he says, I believe him. Way more than I do you, anyway, Jordan.”

But Jordan was still riffing on Siobhan’s taunt. “Oh man, please do not switch me and him – I couldn’t handle future generations seeing my name next to that pasty, skinny, pussy’s face.”

As Jordan’s cronies in the yearbook howled at his use of invective, he finally rounded the corner into the room. There were some snickers, some mumbled insults that he chose to ignore, and he was even pleased to see a few people seeming to look relieved his arrival had put an end to the discussion.

“Sorry I’m running late, everybody. Now, let’s talk assignments, and we can get to work.”

He ran down his list to make sure everyone knew their roles. Photographers for the cross country meet after school, someone to cover the jazz band concert Saturday afternoon, and so on. Like always, the meeting ran smoothly. Whatever he might think of their loyalties, Conner’s staff was attentive to detail and did what was asked of them. Maybe Miss C was right and he didn’t delegate enough, but he was at least pleased that when he did, they rose to the challenge.

“Anything else for the good of the order?” he asked in his usual fashion.

“Oh, actually,” DeShaun spoke up, “Miss C had a meeting, but she said we need somebody to start getting the yearbook staff spread ready.”

“It’s kind of a big deal,” said one of the underclassmen.

“It sure is – I’m on it,” said Conner. This was always one of the most important spreads, not so much for the yearbook itself, but because it was what the staff used at the end of the year to reminisce over their struggles and achievements, to relive the process of the process. He remembered last year’s end of the year party, sitting down with the old staff to watch “Fond Memories of Fond Memories,” a long and richly detailed series of photos from the year. With the tech now available, they were even holding on to those pics for class reunions years down the road.

“Actually, Miss C said you should assign it to one of us,” DeShaun said.

Conner looked around, waiting for a volunteer, but he privately didn’t want one. “Well seeing nobody else begging for it, I’ll take it off your hands. All right, everybody knows what they need to do – get to it.”

The meeting concluded, the staff went their separate ways. Some plopped down with a laptop to work on a spread, others headed off to the photo lab, and still others checked out a camera to go get some candid shots. (At least, that's what they said; they may well just go roam the halls.)

Conner hunkered down in the editor's office, leaving the door into Miss C's room open to invite anyone who needed help to come in. He double-clicked the TIOS icon on his laptop's home screen, and logged in. From there, he immediately opened a new spread, smiling as he entitled it, "The Story of Our Story." In minutes, he'd dredged up some photos from the past few months of work and began tagging them. He was relieved to be creating something with TIOS that, for once, held no promise of changing the universe. The thrill of stitching memories together was enough to let him forget the names Hailey and Hayleigh and Angelica altogether.

Adding quotes was trickier, of course; he'd probably have to do some video exploration for that, and do some asking to see if anyone remembered particulars. Conner uploaded a picture of him, Miss C, and Heather clustered around a table looking at the results of Heather's photo shoot for flag girl tryouts. A little grin stole over his face as his mind went back to that day, to how he'd been trying his hardest to not look down Heather's shirt as she bent over the photos. With breasts like those, it hadn't been easy.

He's a good editor, said her voice, echoing into his mind. *Whatever he said, I believe him.* He went ahead and added the quote, though TIOS responded with a suggested revision. *Look, he's done a good job as editor. And maybe he's a little awkward sometimes, but he says he was... Well, whatever he says, I believe him. Way more than I do you, anyway, Jordan.* Conner shuddered at the reminder of what whatever it was that empowered TIOS, and trimmed the revision to the part he wanted to remember. TIOS apparently agreed with Miss C's policy on quote editing – if it arrives at the same point, it's probably the same quote.

There it was, in a small text box in the margins. *Whatever he says, I believe him.* Conner smiled. There was no compliment as high as one given behind your back. She'd actually defended him to Jordan! Maybe she wasn't such a pipe dream after all.

Entering the quote, however, ended his brief hiatus from thinking about recent events in his love life. Did he still want to be with Heather? After all, Hailey was proving to be willing to satisfy all of his sexual needs and then some. She was incredibly sexy, and submissive in a way he'd never thought a woman could be. He had little doubt he could ask for something and have her deny him. Hell, she'd boasted as much herself.

So why did he still find himself thinking about Heather?

Physically, she was easily a match for Hailey, at least in Conner's book. Undeniably pretty, a classic blonde-haired blue-eyed bombshell. She was fairly short and a bit rounder, which some guy's might find unattractive, but she wasn't actually fat. It was just dimpled cheeks and soft curves for days – to say nothing of those breasts. Whether or not a given guy was into her, he would concede that those things were a living legend. Owen had told him once that he had it on good authority she had to custom order her bras on the internet because lingerie stores didn't carry her size. That her cup size was close to being in the second half of the alphabet. Conner took it as an exaggeration, but they were definitely more than merely big. They were sublime.

But it wasn't just the physical. If all he wanted was to hook up with a hot girl, he'd done that. Heather had always been his ideal. She was sweet, intellectual, had a big heart. She volunteered with the special ed kids, was on good terms with the popular kids but best friends

with her own kind. She was churchy, which his family was not, but she didn't thrust it in anyone's face or exclude people who were different. She never had a bad word to say about anyone, and as he'd just seen, wouldn't sit idle and listen to those who did. The past week with Hailey had been great in a lot of ways, but Heather? She was...

Standing in the doorway of his office.

"Conner, you have a minute?"

"Sure, come on in – have a seat," he said, gesturing to the couch. The very same couch Miss C had found Hailey's panties on the other day. He knew everyone was curious, but nobody had owned up to it. She settled onto the couch, and from the way she inspected her cushion before doing so, he knew she was thinking about the incident. "I think it's safe now."

She laughed. "Yeah, just... ew, right?"

"Seriously," he agreed, though his own feelings on the incident couldn't be further from the truth. What was hotter than watching Hailey in her hot new body quivering with pleasure on the end of his fingers?

Heather lowered her voice, glancing at the crack she'd left in the door. "Do you know who it was? Does Miss C?"

"Beats me," Conner lied. "For all I know, it was Miss C and she's just pretending to be mad as a cover."

Heather giggled. "A teacher? Oh, yuck. Can you imagine?"

Conner could imagine. Miss C was one of the prettiest teachers in school, and he was far from the only student who'd treated himself to a daydream or two about what she'd look like in her panties. He laughed away the thought. "No kidding. But no, I haven't heard anything. Have you?"

She shook her head. "I have my suspicions, but nothing concrete. I'm glad she cracked down though. That's really gross. You... you didn't actually *hear* anything about it being Miss C, did you?"

"Oh god no," he said quickly. The last thing he wanted to happen was have that sort of rumor get out, and with Conner's name attached to it no less. "I'm sure she had nothing to do with it."

Heather looked relieved. "Thank goodness. That'd be just too... yeesh."

"Definitely. Anyway, I assume you didn't come in to gossip about the mysterious couch undies. What's up?"

"Oh, nothing big. Miss C popped in – and back out – and told me I should work on the yearbook staff spread with you. Just to 'broaden the input,' I think she called it."

Conner forced himself not to frown. "Really? Oh. Well... sure. I mean, yeah, why not, right?"

Heather instantly discerned the source of his trepidation and rushed to empathize. "I know you don't like having anyone looking over your shoulder, and I'm sure that's not why she asked me to help. I think she just figured we get along, and if we put our heads together..."

As always, she knew how to say the right thing. "Yeah, totally. And with heads like ours, right?" Was that flirting? He wasn't sure if complimenting her head counted. Maybe later he could try it on Hailey and see how gaga she went over it.

Flirting or no, he was rewarded with that smile. "Right. So did you wanna get started today, or save it for next week?"

Conner's eyes darted to his monitor, where the spread was already begun and her quote was center screen. She couldn't quite see it from her angle, but how embarrassing would it be if she knew he'd been eavesdropping? "Let's do next week? I gotta finish doing Miss C's taxes."

He'd meant it as a joke, but Heather's eyes widened. "Seriously? Oh my gosh, she has you doing her taxes?!" In a blink, she was out of her seat and at his side. "Is that even legal?"

"I was, um, kidding," he stuttered as she took in the screen. She was bent over the desk, leaning on her palm. Her face was no more than six inches away from his; even at the end of the day, his nostrils were still filled with the floral aroma of her hair. "I was just getting some... you know. Basics."

Heather blushed to have been so gullible. "Oh gosh, I feel so stupid." Then she processed what she was seeing. Conner wanted to delete it, but she'd already seen it. No going back now. "Oh. Um... You heard that, huh?"

Conner couldn't bring himself to make eye contact. "Yeah. I didn't mean to. I was in the hall and I heard you guys, and I... I dunno. I'm sorry."

She was quiet a long moment. "I remember that," she said finally, gesturing to the picture. "That was the first week of school, right?"

He nodded. "Yep. Flag girl tryouts."

"I remember that." She gave him a lopsided grin. "I remember you were totally checking me out, too."

In an instant, Conner's cheeks were on fire. "No I wasn't!"

Like that, her grin vanished. "Oh. I'd have sworn... well, nevermind." She stood back up; with her no longer so close, he could breathe again. "Well if you heard that, then hopefully you heard the rest. Be careful after school, OK? Jayce can be kind of single-minded when it comes to Hayleigh, and for whatever reason, she's decided she has it in for you."

"Thanks. Don't worry about me – I've got a blackbelt in bully evasion."

"Oh. Well good." She walked over to the door. "Don't feel weird, Conner. I'm OK. Are you OK?"

He forced a faint smile. "I'm OK."

"Good. So, um, have a good weekend, all right?"

"You too, Heather."

His head hit the desk before the door could close.

He did not, in fact, get jumped by Jayce after school. The fact that he stayed a whole half hour late, hiding out in the editor's office, probably helped. Thankfully both Angelica and Owen said they didn't mind. That whole time, and the many hours that evening spent staring at the ceiling over his bed, was devoted to replaying the whole mortifying scenario in his head on loop. Heather had caught him red-handed nursing his crush on her. The quote, the picture, the lie... It was all too much. He couldn't even make himself answer Hailey's increasingly needful texts. Every time he glanced at his phone, Heather's voice was there to pull him back through the wringer.

It was on about the seventieth time that he saw past his shame and to the stranger issue. Namely: Heather had been acting kind of... stupid.

For many people, he'd have just chalked it up to sarcasm he hadn't caught, or just having a so-called "blonde moment." He had a few himself. But Heather didn't. She especially didn't have them one after another. She'd had to make sure he was joking about the panties belonging to Miss C. The taxes joke. How as soon as he'd said he hadn't been ogling her, she dropped it in an instant.

After the week he'd had, he was primed to look for TIOS in all the oddities of life, and this one was more obvious than most. Whatever he'd said, she'd believed.

Could it be that simple? Could a piece of software really take a few words out of someone's mouth and make them part of their behavior henceforth? It had swapped two girls' bodies and brought his step-sister from college to high school. Why not this too? Only, if his putting that quote in a spread had rendered Heather utterly gullible to him...

Angelica.

"Son of a...!"

It was just after dark when he heard her make up a story for his parents about her plans for the evening; her dad quoted her a curfew, which he had never before done. But she was a high schooler now, and high school girls had curfews. Conner peered out a crack in his blinds, and was relieved to see her hop in her car and drive off.

He was less relieved when, not two minutes later, he saw her jogging down the sidewalk on the far side of the street and fash into Owen's back yard.

"Son of a...!"

Conner grabbed his shoes and hurried to the door, telling his parents he was going to Owen's. Same curfew warning. He darted across the street, making his way around to the back of the house and leaning down to peer in one of the basement windows, the one he knew would afford him the best view of the downstairs living room.

There she was. There he was. Conner watched in a combination of rapt fascination and horror at the events unfolding before his eyes. Owen, however, happened to look up just then and caught sight of his friend peeping in the window. Conner couldn't hear him, but he didn't need to.

"Son of a bitch!"

