

I pushed the door open into my room with a scowl still on my face. What's worse than having someone like Lianna in your classes? Having them live in the same damn building too, so that when you come back from your last class, you're following the same route. It's the most awkward thing ever and I couldn't stand it. We had both awkwardly waited around after class so we didn't walk back at the same time, and had ended up playing the worlds weirdest game of chicken.

I'd cracked first, walking briskly back to the dorms with the knowledge that she was probably staring at the back of my head the whole time. Even now as I pushed into my room, my skin still hadn't stopped tingling from it. She was so intense, and in turn, my reaction was pretty damn intense too. It was all so hard to deal with, and I just could not stop thinking about the whole situation.

"Hey!" Aimee chirped from inside as she heard the door open. "You ready for later tonight? I've gone and bought us some drinks using my cousin's ID, if you want some, you can pay me back whenever."

"I thought we weren't allowed alcohol in the dorms?" I asked wearily, moving over to my partition and dumping all my crap on the floor.

"Do you see a checkpoint?" she laughed. "If they find it, I'll get in trouble, but it's not like they go hunting for it or stop us at the gates."

"True," I replied, flopping face first into my bed.

Aimee was hard to deal with when she was happy and I... wasn't. I just wanted to wallow in my misery thank you very much, and her perpetual good cheer was ruining that. I heard her rustle around for a moment, then walk around to my side, followed by the creak of my computer chair.

"Hard day?" she asked, softly, as if sensing that I wasn't in the mood.

"Lianna is an asshole," I replied, grumbling into my pillow.

Aimee gave a warm hum of sympathy. "What happened this time?"

"We had our first life drawing class, and I was really excited for it, but she made it crap. She was really mean, and then that made me angry, so I was mean back. Now I'm upset with her for

being mean, and myself for being mean. It sucks, she sucks,” I said, still mumbling into my pillow, because for some reason I was blushing and I didn’t want Aimee to see.

“Sounds fun,” she joked, and I felt hand come to rest on my back, beginning to give it a comforting rub.

Oh no, I couldn’t be grumpy with her good mood if she was giving me a back rub! Damn, she had moves. What struck me as strange however, was that I was perfectly fine with her touching me. I wasn’t normally okay with that kind of thing.

Shifting my head so I could get a look at her, I asked, “Is it weird that we’re already friends like this? I feel like we’ve been friends for a year, not a week.”

Shrugging, she continued to rub up and down my spine with comforting movements. “Some people just click I guess.”

I couldn’t think of anything to say in response, so I just enjoyed her hand moving across gently my back for a while. She was a good friend, I wished I’d had someone like her when I was still crushing myself up into that little box in my mind so I could pass as a guy. Eighteen years of my life spent trying to deny who I was to first myself, and then the world. The trauma of doing that to myself had dealt would be something that I was working through for the rest of my life.

“Do you want to go out for a walk?” Aimee asked sympathetically. “Maybe we could go cafe hunting, find something to eat before tonight? Get a coffee to help keep us awake even?”

“Not really, but it might help, so I’ll make myself go,” I said, with a grimace. Gosh It was hard to make myself do things like this. “Let me just check my rank first to see how it’s going.”

I opened my phone and brought up the league app, sorting through the menus to check my ranking. I’d actually forgotten to check if I’d actually made it into master when the ladder updated overnight. I was in luck! A few of the people above me had actually lost points! Yes! That hopefully gave me a bit of leeway so that I didn’t have to worry while I was at the party. I’d probably still fall back down out of master rank by tomorrow, but my ranked points were at the stage where it wouldn’t take a huge effort to get back in.

“Alright, looks like I’m safe,” I said, pocketing my phone, already feeling my Lianna induced frown easing.

“Safe?” she asked, getting up from my chair to go and gather her purse for the expedition.

"I'm ranked within the top four thousand players in league right now, but the ladder updates once a day, so I have to keep playing to maintain that status," I replied shyly.

My parents and the people I knew through them had always laughed and subtly mocked me when I got excited about something like league, so I was always a bit hesitant to talk about my achievements within the game with anyone who didn't play it.

"Wow that sounds impressive. How many people play?" she asked, and I swear she was just humouring me, but her expression seemed genuine enough.

"I'm not sure, at least a couple million," I murmured.

League was a popular game, one of the most popular of all time, if you believed the numbers they released, although companies liked to inflate them to seem more popular than they were.

"Wow!" she said, seeming happy for me. "That's a lot of people! Nice job Gladie!"

I took a second to analyse if she was actually interested and happy for me, and I realised with a jolt of happiness, that yes... she did actually care!

"Thanks," I grinned, feeling a slight heating on my cheeks. It felt weird to get praise about anything, let alone league. It was only my friends and my old art teacher who'd really given me praise in the past. A portion of the blush was probably due to the nickname too, it was a lot to handle at once.

Leaving the dorms with a smile on both our faces, we bantered our way into the nearby shopping district in search of cafe food and coffee. As soon as Aimee had mentioned coffee, I'd started craving a mocha like my life depended on it. Some people might fault me for wanting a mocha with vanilla cream in it, and to those people I would nervously smile and stare at my feet. I mean tell them to leave me alone. Yeah, definitely that, and not the other thing.

Aimee grinned and called me a white girl when she heard my order, and then told me that she was too, and ordered an equally white girl coffee. It was nice to have a comrade in coffee tastes. With our coffee orders done, we also got some muffins, and a bowl of fries to share. It was all apparently part of the plan to get some food in us before the party, so we wouldn't just get drunk off the fumes of whatever we were drinking. I knew that I was a lightweight, and as we chatted over the food, I learned that she was as well.

It was on our way back through campus that I spotted something that I just could not ignore. The little square we were in was being used by some clubs who were trying to get in a few extra days of recruitment. One little booth in particular grabbed my attention and held it firm. I couldn't ignore this one, even though I knew what sort of people would be in it. Our college had a League club!

"Aimee, come. I need to sign up to that club!" I said excitedly, grabbing her by the arm and dragging her towards it without waiting for a reply.

When we got there, we found two guys in club hoodies talking behind the desk. No one else was around, so I walked up to them. "Uh, hey. Can I sign up?"

"Do you play league?" one asked, his stubbly face scrunching up into a look that said, *I bet this girl doesn't play.*

I felt my eye twitch, and that competitive fire I always had when I was playing lit up now within me. Bitch, you were on. I did more than just *play* league.

"Yup," I said, smiling through his rudeness.

"Okay. Put down your details on that form," he said with an eye roll.

"Thanks!" I smiled again, being as overly cheerful as I possibly could.

It was hard to be nervous in front of these two. In this particular aspect of life, I knew I was better than them. They'd be begging in my DMs in no time, asking for me to carry them in through ranked matches.

"What support champion do you main?" the other guy asked.

Did he just assume I played support? Was it because I was a girl? Girls *always* played support right? No, we were more than capable of throwing people like him across the arena.

I looked up from the form to give a little, ever so slightly menacing chuckle. "I play mid. I main Akali."

“Mid? As in you play the middle lane?” the first guy with the gross oily stubble asked, obviously not believing me.

Oh this was too fun. I could hear Aimee give a little snort from behind me. She had no idea what was being said here probably, but she had to guess I was about to put these two hyper nerds in their places.

“Yes,” I nodded, pretending to go back to filling in their form.

“Do you play ranked? What rank are you?” the second guy asked, also sounding like he didn’t believe me.

“I’m in low master,” I replied as casually as I could, struggling to keep the grin off my face.

Watching their faces twist through a whole cornucopia of emotions made me feel so good. Of course they settled on more disbelief. They were probably the types to rage in chat when I trashed them, calling me a cheater or whatever else they could think of.

“What? No, I don’t believe you now. You’re just making fun of us,” the first guy said, snatching the form out from in front of me.

There it was, my time to lay it down on them.

“Oh?” I asked, getting my phone out and flicking to the app. I turned it around and showed them the ranked screen with a smirk. “Here.”

They could see it was the personal overview screen, which meant I had to be logged into the account at least.

“No way!” the second one blurted, trying to take my phone from me to see it better.

“Oi,” I frowned, pulling it back. My phone! “Can I have the form back now?”

“Dude give her the form back, you idiot. Why do you always have to be a dick?” the second guy said, punching the first in the arm.

Oh this was too funny. Now they were both suddenly going to be my friends. The first guy handed the form back to me, and I filled it out properly with the smuggest look I'd ever worn in public on my face. I felt almost dirty with how I'd played them.

"Thanks!" I said, my voice dripping with too much sweetness, and passed the form back. "See you later!"

"Yeah! See you later um," the first guy said, looking down at the sheet. "Glade! Um, here's a card with all the club info on it."

I took the card and then dragged my friend away from the booth, and we walked in silence until we were out of earshot and vision, then she grabbed my arm with a laugh.

"Oh my god, that was so fucking great!" she grinned. "Where did calm and confident Gladie come from? She needs to come out more!"

"Yeah, I don't know, it's funny. I meet so many people like them online, and trash most of them when I play against them. It's just hard to be intimidated I guess," I shrugged with a shy smile.

"My roomie is a total boss!" she exclaimed. "What do they actually do in that club?"

"Dunno, I have a link to join their group online, so I guess we'll find out," I said, showing her the little card I'd gotten.

"Nice! You have to tell me what happens!" she giggled, seeming very excited by the prospect of my dunking on some rude guys.

Giving her a chuckle, I shook my head, "Oh I'm not going to like, make a fuss or whatever. That just leads to drama and drama leads to me hiding anxiously in my bed."

"Right, no shit stirring then," she smiled, looking a little disappointed.

My friend was incredible, but also ridiculous, I thought as we continued back towards our dorm.

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Aimee and I walked down the street towards the brewing storm of alcohol fuelled shenaniganry. The party was already getting underway when it came into sight, and my first thought was to wonder how this wasn't already being shut down by the cops. Seriously, with this much underaged drinking in one place, you'd think they'd be here just waiting for the first frat guy to open a bottle of beer.

Since it happened every year, I doubted the cops weren't aware, which meant there must be some sort of underhanded deal going on. It was rather hard to ignore the loud music coming from multiple homes, the pilfered road cones blocking the street off and the horde of people already drinking out on the front lawns.

Aimee had definitely been right about all the houses in the street getting involved too. They all had their doors and windows open on this warm night, and people were moving in and out freely. Often that movement was through the windows, because drunk people I guess.

Despite my nerdy appearance back in high school, and my overwhelming shyness, I'd still found myself at a few drunken parties or gatherings. People always assumed the nerds weren't holding their own parties, but we had, and I still had a fear of apple cider from one particularly intense event.

"Okay, let's go find my friends," Aimee said as we moved into the growing mess. "They're from my classes, so they might be a bit boring for Gladie the artist."

"I don't mind non-creatives," I said with an amused snort.

"I know, but I'm just saying, I won't blame you if you find some artsy people to hang out with," she smiled, patting me on the arm.

I blinked, "Are you trying to get rid of me?"

"Not if I can help it," she said seriously. "But I think that master game playing, drawing and painting Gladie is going to get bored by me and my basic as fuck friends."

"No! You're like, the second most interesting person I've met at college!" I blurted truthfully.

“Hold on, *second* most interesting?” she asked indignantly. “Who’s the first? Does this mean I have to fight them now?”

Oh crap. No no, she was the first right? Who was the second? Why had I said she was the second most interesting person? Why was Lianna popping into my head like this? Surely it wasn’t Lianna who was first?

“I don’t know... I just said...” I stammered, trying and failing to figure out what had just happened in my brain.

“Little. Gladie,” Aimee said with suspicion, poking me in the stomach. “That is the stammering of a girl with a crush.”

“What?! No! I don’t have a crush on anyone! I don’t even know if I’m into girls or guys!” I squeaked in protest, feeling my face flushing already in counterpoint.

“Now you’re blushing,” Aimee said, like a detective who’d just realised that her suspect was lying to her. “Who is it huh? Who keeps popping into that pretty little head of yours?”

“No one! No one!” I protested weakly.

I didn’t have a crush on Lianna! She was mean! Plus, I couldn’t like girls, that would be bad. Mum would throw a fit. Being trans? Yeah, that’s okay. Being gay? No, that was not okay.

I mean, she hadn’t said it in so many words, but I could tell by the way she’d thrown about a million heterosexual romance novels at me the second I was finished with my downstairs surgery. I had been swept away in a deluge of muscled men flexing their damn hardest on book covers, their swooning woman off to the side.

“Fine,” she smiled like she was not at all done with this. “You keep your secrets.”

Having dropped the subject for now, Aimee the bloodhound went off in search of her friends. We found them sitting in a circle on someone’s increasingly battered lawn, and they were already laughing and drinking their way into the night.

Aimee rolled on up to them squealing and all that, and they all greeted us just as enthusiastically. I was dragged into their circle like we’d all known each other for a million years,



and Aimee started passing me drinks. I had no idea what the drinks were, but they came in little plastic shot glasses and tasted of all sorts of crazy flavours, so they were definitely drinkable.

I met a guy with the name Yavin of all things, who was very obviously trying to flirt with me, but it wasn't really landing home. I tried to be interested, especially after my recent thoughts of Lianna, but even in my increasingly inebriated state, I could see that it wasn't going anywhere, at least with Yavin.

I met some other cool people too, and suddenly I found myself fumbling with my phone as some girl decided we were going to be besties and drunkenly demanded that I put her number in my phone. The ones nearest me had been fascinated by Aimee's rather embarrassing drunken ramblings about me and how great she thought I was, and how I was definitely into "a guy called Finn." It was fun, but it was also very exhausting.

Then came that dreaded time that must be faced while drinking at a party. Finding the bathroom. I'd ended up being passed a beer, then given some swigs of someone's vodka, and politely declined the apple cider that had been offered. All of this while Aimee and I continued to giggle about the weird flavours that the little shots had in them. My least favourite was the coconut and ginger one, it was really awful, and I'd spat it out onto the ground.

Asking where to find the toilet within the nearby house, I stood up and wobbled my way inside. I may have drunk more than I should have.

The people inside the house were having just as much fun as we were having outside, and I really hoped that they would do a little to clean up, because it was looking pretty trashed in there.

I found the bathroom easily enough, and double bonus, it was mercifully empty of both people and vomit. I wiped the seat down with toilet paper just to be safe, because I had to worry about that sort of thing now.

When I came out of the bathroom, I made my way back through the house towards the lawn, but somehow I got turned around, and ended up in the backyard. It was full of people, who appeared to be passing around something that did not smell like a normal cigarette. I turned around to go back the way I'd come, when my eyes landed on a certain black haired, dark eyed girl.

Lianna was in the corner of the yard... no, she had tried to hide herself there, as far out of the light as she could get. She was sitting with her back against the fence, her eyes closed. She

didn't appear to be moving either, was she alright? Concern hammered its way to the forefront of my mind, and I rushed quickly over to the fallen girl.

She definitely wasn't conscious, and for a heart stopping moment I thought something awful might have happened to her. When I looked closer however, I couldn't see any sign of... a struggle or anything. Where were her friends? Or the people she'd come here with? Why was she alone and unconscious?

With a sigh, I made the decision to sit down and look after her. No matter how much I disliked her, I couldn't leave her alone at a huge party like this. I pulled my phone out as I settled next to her and sent Aimee a quick text to let her know I was both safe and not coming back straight away.

Looking at Lianna like this, her head rolled to one side at an uncomfortable angle and her chest rising and falling with each deep breath she took, she looked... nice. Like someone I'd like to get to know and make friends with. I wish we hadn't started off on such a bad foot. There was a part of me that couldn't blame her for being mean to me either, I mean, almost everyone was a bit of a dick to people they didn't like. It was human nature right?

Her head did look uncomfortable like that though, so I shifted closer to her and using my fingertips — I didn't feel comfortable touching her too much — I shifted her head onto my shoulder. There, that should be comfier at least. Now to just wait and see if she woke up. That would be an interesting conversation.

I must have drifted off for a little while, because the next thing I knew was that Lianna was shifting next to me. She sat up and blinked blearily around, her eyes falling on me as I was doing the same.

"Glade?" she asked, her voice full of confusion and none of her usual venom.

"Hi," I murmured. "You were passed out and alone so I um... I came to keep you company."

"You did?" she asked, a note of vulnerability hidden in her slurred words. "Why?"

"Yeah, I mean... I couldn't just leave you there? A girl unconscious and alone at a party?" I said, because like, it was kinda obvious right?

"Where did the others go?" she asked sadly, and I realised she was definitely still very drunk. "I met... I met some fun people and... now they're gone and... now it's you."

"I don't know," I said gently, wincing slightly at the way she said, *now it's you*.

"Damn, I totally got abandoned," she frowned, then turned her eyes on me.

She just sat there and stared at me for a minute, and I felt my heart start doing all sorts of weird little flips. Then she smiled, and it stopped altogether for a second or two.

"Why do you have to be so pretty?" she asked with a sigh. "It's hard to hate you when you're so damn pretty."

Oh gosh. Oh dear. Lianna thought I was pretty? Now I was totally blushing, and I was so very thankful for the dark corner we were in. She wouldn't be able to see me blushing right? I really hoped she couldn't see my heart doing a drum solo on the inside of my chest either. Oh no, wait... why was I reacting like this? This was how the girls in my mother's books reacted when a hot guy came along... but Lianna was definitely not a hot guy.

I tried to open my mouth and reply, and what little words that had been in my mouth were sucked out when she laid her head back down on my shoulder and hummed to herself.

"I don't like you," she told me, but her tone was anything but sure, and I think I started throwing sparks. What was happening! Drunk Lianna was cuddling up against me! Oh my gosh, oh my gosh... this was too much... fuck!

Was I going to pass out? Why did she smell so nice, even through the alcohol. Oh and her hair was tickling my cheek and every inch of skin that it touched was fizzing and popping almost painfully. Almost, but instead, it felt so... good. No, actually I wasn't even sure if good was the right word. It felt intense.

"I really don't like you," she slurred again. "But you're so pretty and you're so good at your abstract style and... shit. I think I'm like totally jealous."

"But you're so good at realism! And you're super pretty too. Your eyes have like so many shades of dark in them. It's crazy, how do you fit so many in there?" I asked before my own stupid drunk brain could stop and think.

"You think I'm pretty? You were looking at my eyes like that?" she asked, sitting up to stare at me again.

Because they were the current subject, I was hit with the full force of those eyes. They were so dark right now, a deep, abyssal black that had me almost falling into them. Wait, I actually was leaning towards her. Stop that! My body was betraying me!

“Y-yes, you’re so pretty I can’t think,” I nodded, very lost for words now. Just, none of them. I think I left them down the side of my mattress? Or were they in my pocket?

“I still don’t like you though,” she frowned, but it was a confused frown and crap *shit* damn, I found it cute.

“I don’t like you either,” I nodded, like it was the most sane thing in the world to be telling someone who was like *right there*. Someone who I was totally being... weird over. She was definitely pretty though. I mean, anyone could see it right? Her face was just so damn... drawable.

“Okay,” she nodded seriously, her head dipping a little too far as she lost control of it slightly. “We don’t like each other.”

“Yup,” I said, but my damn lips went all smiley and stuff.

“You have pretty lips,” she told me, her eyes zeroing in on them like she was suddenly very hungry.

“That’s a weird line,” I giggled. “Isn’t that, like, something that a movie villain would say?”

“Oh my god, you’re right. That did sound really weird huh?” she giggled along with me. “They are nice lips though!”

“Thanks,” I grinned. “I made them myself!”

“That was like, just as lame as what I said,” she accused me, her head tilting slightly to the side as she smiled back. Her smile was so nice, oh my gosh. It made my stomach do all sorts of weird flippy things.

“That was pretty lame, yeah,” I laughed. “I’ll shut up now.”

“I will...” she started then she looked like she’d just had an incredible idea. “I will make sure you shut up!”

Then she leaned forward, and suddenly I couldn’t breath. Lianna was... she was kissing me?! Why? Oh her lips were so damn soft. They were a little wet, but that was so not something I minded. Wait, I should kiss her back. That was what you did in situations like this right? I didn’t know, I’d never been kissed before.

As soon as I started kissing her back, I felt my whole body light up like an ammo depot that had been set on fire. I felt so warm, so hot, and my body felt like there was little pops of feeling going off all throughout me. This was incredible.

Not a moment after I started kissing her back, her tongue was all like, hey there! And I was like, yes, come and meet my tongue. Then they became friends. Touchy friends. Her hands were on me too, and she used them to pull us both closer together. I couldn’t help it when my hands went up to rest tentatively on her shoulders. They were such nice shoulders. Small, because she was small, but I could feel how they were also kinda strong.

We broke apart slowly, I really didn’t want to stop, and I don’t think she wanted to either, but I think we were running out of air. It was hard to tell when your brain was all spinny. When we made eye contact again, I took in an awed breath. Her eyes were lidded, and she was looking at me in a way that sent warmth to pool between my legs, and I think my inner thighs started twitching. Wow! I had never felt like any of this. Holy crap!

I opened my mouth to speak, but her hand was there faster than I could use words. “You said you’d shut up.”

Nodding that yes, I actually had said that, and I totally should unless I wanted to say some really embarrassing things. Then, before I could really register it properly, two of her fingers dipped into my mouth. That action lit me on fire. My whole body was on fire. Could she see the way I was burning up?

With her fingers in my mouth, I couldn’t help but flutter my tongue across them, and I watched with more than a little satisfaction when her mouth opened into an O of surprise. She didn’t take them out though, so I kept giving them little licks. She seemed to be liking it? She was breathing really heavily.

She pulled them back out quickly after I gave them an exceedingly long lick that sent blissful shivers up and down my skin. Why did I just enjoy that so much? Lianna was staring at me and

then her fingers in surprised awe, and I could see her hand shaking. Then she did something that made me choke. She stuffed her fingers into *her* mouth and grinned at me.

“That’s so dirty!” I squeaked, my voice beyond shrill. “Also, really kinda weird!”

“You’re the one who started licking them,” she mumbled around her fingers.

“You’re the one who put them in my mouth!” I exclaimed.

“That is true,” she nodded, her fingers still between her smiling lips.

I stared at her in disbelief. Who was this girl? Was this the Lianna behind the angry frown? She was totally crazy! I was also totally crazy, because I’d just been licking her fingers. This was... like, really far out of my depth! What did I do now? What did *we* do now?

“You are so not what I expected,” I blurted, then tried to frown. “I still don’t like you though.”

“I still don’t like you either,” she told me, taking her fingers out of her mouth finally. Her big smile was totally betraying her words right now though, and I think mine was too.

Gosh her smile was so nice... so pretty. I really liked it when she smiled. I should figure out how to make her smile more. Unfortunately, my admiration of her smile was interrupted when my phone went off, and I fumbled it out of my pocket and then squeaked and dropped it when the bright light burned my eyes.

I moved to pick it up, but Lianna was faster, answering the call with a giggle, “Hello! This is Glade’s phone! Who am I speaking to?”

I heard a feminine voice on the other end, but I couldn’t tell who it was other than that. Please don’t be my mother, please oh god do not be my mother.

“Yes, she’s fine!” Lianna smiled, giving me a very poorly executed wink.

More mumbled words I couldn’t hear on the other side, and then Lianna was replying. “Yes! I’ll get her back safe and sound! Okay! Bye!”

She hung up and passed the phone back to me with another terrible wink. Turns out there was something she was bad at after all. Winking.

“Your friend says we should get back to the dorm because she’s worried about you. It’s my job to get you back safely!” she smiled, then tried to stand up.

She failed, and tipped over onto the ground. In turn, I tried to stand up, and I was marginally more successful than her. Wow, when had I gotten this drunk? Shouldn’t I have sobered up a bit with the nap?

I offered a hand to her, and she took it gratefully, wobbling awkwardly to her feet. Using each other as support, we stumbled off down the side of the house, not bothering with the maze inside. Getting back to the dorm was going to be an adventure, but getting home after a night drinking was *always* an adventure.