

Evergreen Academy

Alternate Scene – Ryder’s Point of View

Ryder

“What are we doing here?” asked Ezra. “Why aren’t we meeting in the Knight room?”

The four of us stood beneath the bleachers. We should all be in class right now, but I could write “Knight Business” with my shit on a piece of toilet paper and hand that in for a free pass out of class. If someone found us under here, there was nothing they could do about it.

“Isn’t it obvious what we’re doing here?” Jaxson jerked his head toward the track. “Staring at Valentina—again.”

My jaw clenched. *Why does he say it like it’s fucking weird? She’s marked and we’re Knights. We’re supposed to watch her.*

“Not that I mind the view,” he went on. “Damn, she’s fine.”

“No, she isn’t,” I snapped.

Jaxson gave me a crazy look. “Are we looking at the same girl? She’s about as close to perfect as a mere mortal can get. If only she’d agree to a fuck,” he said mostly to himself. “Mmm. Look at her stretch.”

His words pulled my gaze to her. Valentina lifted her arms above her head, took hold of her wrist, and tilted over into a backbend that drew her shirt up over her bellybutton. Then she bent forward and grabbed her ankles, wriggling her ass for the world to see.

I bared my teeth. Hot, corrosive anger pumped through my veins and pooled in the pit of my stomach. It made me sick. Valentina fucking Moon made me sick.

“Who stretches like that?” I said. “Showing off her pert little tits and her barely-there ass every chance she gets.”

“So you have noticed,” Jaxson said, smirking like a smug shit. “Just admit you think she’s pretty, Ryder.”

My nails dug half-moons into my palms. What was Jaxson trying to prove? Sure, she was attractive. She dressed better now. Wore jewelry she shouldn’t be able to afford and learned how to put on some damn eyeshadow. That I noticed didn’t mean anything. And that I watched her sometimes meant even less.

“I think she’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen... when she cries.”

Silence followed my statement.

I watched Valentina move onto the track.

“When are you going to tell us why you hate her so much?” Ezra asked. “This isn’t Knight business for you. It’s personal.”

I pressed my lips together, not bothering to acknowledge I heard.

“Yeah,” Maverick spoke up. “What’s the story? Because last night at the party was next level. Did you really hire a private investigator to track down her father?”

“She’s marked. I did what I’m supposed to do.” I punched the underside of the bench. “Not that it worked! Why the hell isn’t she in her room packing her bags? She doesn’t even look upset!”

Jaxson shrugged. “She probably decided not to give a shit over a guy she never met.”

“Then I’ll have to do better next time,” I said as Valentina took off running. Only my friends heard me, but it was for her. It could only be for her.

“You did good with the spring break video,” I said to Ezra. “Can you find— What the hell?”

Valentina tripped and hit the track none-too-gently. I surged forward and smacked into the bleachers. The pain barely registered as Valentina lay still on the ground. The only person near her was Natalie Bard.

Coach lost her mind shouting something at Natalie and she took off down the track. The corrosive anger stoked into an inferno.

“Jaxson, didn’t you give the order she’s not allowed to be touched?” I asked. My voice was low and controlled.

“That’s right. I did.”

“Then you’d better bring Natalie to me. We need to have a chat.”

He nodded.

The three of them left to take care of it. I inched out from under the bleachers when they were gone.

Ciara carried Valentina across the lawn to the main building.

“I’ll be the one to break you, Moon,” I whispered. “I promise. It’s the way it’s supposed to be.”

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