

Rosie hates Fridays. It may seem strange to most people, but then again, most people aren't Rosie. She sighs while looking over the grey façade of the giant boring box that is the High School building. She clutches her textbooks and silently dreads the moment she has to walk in and face her biggest fear... Advanced Applied Biology Lab.

She doesn't even have the luxury of getting it over with quickly. Unfortunately, it's her last period, so all the joy she'll get from Fine Art will have worn off by the time she gets there. It's just going to be 90 minutes of confusing chemical chains, complicated formulas, and Mr. Chen telling her to 'try your best.' What's that even supposed to mean? What does he think she's doing?

She can already hear the jeers and feel the condescending looks she'll get when she asks for help, because though she isn't the only student struggling to pass science class, she *is* the only student to not be good at anything else. Well, anything the *school* deems useful anyway.

The School for Children of Prominence's main goal is to facilitate the growth of tomorrow's leaders... Or at least, that's what they tell everyone. Honestly, Rosie thinks that's just some gimmick the school board tells wealthy parents to keep them paying the exorbitant tuition and shipping off their kids. The SCP faculty loves to proudly boast about it's success rate, 99.5% of graduates get high paying government jobs, or whatever. Which is why it loathes the .5% of students who aren't good at math, or science, or hand to hand combat. Students like say, Rosie, for example.

Her apprehension grows with each reluctant shuffle she takes towards the HS building. She secretly prays that if there are any nearby benevolent entities, they'll somehow prevent her from making it to the door, or preferably just seventh period.

Maybe she should've been more specific, because as soon as she finishes that thought, a hard shove to the shoulder causes Rosie to go careening forward. Her books fly ahead of her as she shoots out her hands to protect her face from the concrete. Her right knee takes the first hit, ramming the ground hard and sending a painful jolt up her thigh to her hips. The momentum pushes her forward, grating the delicate skin of her palms on the rough ground. The oxygen in her lungs vacates on impact, then sharply returns with a pained yelp. Rosie mentally curses the universe for actually doing what she wanted for once, then turns to face her assailant.

Oh great, just her luck, a pack of giggling buffoons stand behind her, covering their mouths in a pathetic attempt to hide their glee. The Vapids, as Rosie has taken to calling them, are a particular subset of teenage angst that are the self-imposed enforcers of high school etiquette at the SCP. Wearing a tacky blouse is a punishable offense of up to 3 weeks of social isolation. Flirting with another girl's boyfriend... Well, it depends on the girl. Standing up to a member of the Vapids though? You might as well kiss your dating life at the SCP goodbye.

Vanessa, their alpha, a gorgeous girl with porcelain skin, piercing green eyes and wavy auburn hair, glares at Rosie with disdain. "Why don't you watch where you're going?" she asks while tossing her long, luscious locks over her shoulder.

Rosie painfully rises to her feet and glowers back at the ginger headed jerk. "*You* ran into *me* Vanessa." She says while straightening her glasses. The frames are pretty thin, so she's pleasantly surprised to find them completely unscathed. The same could not be said for her knee which is radiating a deep throbbing pain. She pushes down the pain, and spins on her heel to scan the courtyard for her runaway textbooks.

That was a mistake, her center of balance is thrown off by the dead weight of her right leg and she has to stagger to catch herself. A cascade of giggles fall over her while she struggles to regain her stance, and then, as if her day wasn't bad enough, the first bell rings, notifying students that homeroom would start in five minutes.

Rosie squares her shoulders and quickly pats down the wild mess her dark curls had become. She refuses to be the butt of Vanessa's jokes any longer. With her head held high she walks proudly towards the entrance, though it would have been a little more convincing if she weren't hobbling so much.

Several groups of students casually stroll past Rosie's limping form, including the Vapids, and in the passing Vanessa leans over to whisper, "Well then it might be safer for you to stay out of my way."

Satisfied that the dead horse had been thoroughly beaten Vanessa straightens and breezes past Rosie. Rosie glares at Vanessa's pastel colored back with a retort on the tip of her tongue, but the moment is lost when one of the Vapids brushes up against Rosie, throwing off her balance again.

While Rosie scrambles to keep herself standing, one of her runaway books makes the unfortunate mistake of being in Vanessa's direct path. Vanessa steps forward aggressively, kicking her leg up hard and sending the book spinning as it slides under the thick hedges lining the front of the building. She slowly turns to Rosie with an exaggerated apologetic look. "Whoops," she says innocently.

Rosie ignores Vanessa's goading, and picks up her pace, determined to not be late. Vanessa rolls her eyes and turns back to the front entrance. "See you in class," she calls out to Rosie in a sing-song voice. "I do hope you can make it inside by first period," she says with a smirk. She makes a point of eyeing Rosie's busted leg then turns with a flourish of her long skirt and disappears through the entryway. Her followers don't even try to hide their laughter this time as they flutter behind their leader like ducklings following their mother, funneling in through one of the double doors.

Rosie finally gets to the hedges just as the last of her schoolmates make their way into the HS building. She tries to squat down to retrieve her book but realizes that if she does, she won't be able to get back up without support. She bends at the waist in a few different positions, but she can't quite angle her arm far enough under the bush to reach her book. She stands and lets out a frustrated breath while pushing her hair out of her face. While she racks her brain for a solution, a friendly voice sounds out behind her.

"Need a hand?" It asks. She turns to find Mr. Cruise, the head facilities manager, or as he liked to joke, the glorified custodian.

Mr. Cruise is a warm friendly old man and easily Rosie's favorite on-site staff member. She was enrolled at the SCP when she was just a baby, so she's basically known him her whole life. His round rosy cheeks, neatly trimmed beard and square glasses were staples of her childhood. If she'd ever broken a toy or scraped an elbow Mr. Cruise was always the one there to fix it. She views him how she imagines most other teens would view their grandfathers.

Rosie smiles shyly at him and gestures to her now slightly bloodied khakis. "How bout a leg instead?"

The elderly man chuckles, though his brows knit in concern, as he walks over and crouches in front of her. "Now how'd that happen?" he asks, inspecting her injured knee.

Rosie knows from experience that's it's best to handle situations like the one with Vanessa on her own, so she scrambles to come up with a plausible explanation. "Oh, you know... I fell," she says as flatly as possible.

Mr. Cruise's sharp steel grey eyes miss nothing, and he flashes her a dubious look. She laughs nervously adding, "Again."

Mr. Cruise lets out a long sigh and rubs the back of his neck. Suddenly, he looks up and over at the hedges. "Is that *your* book under there?" he asks, pointing to the textbook that is now covered in leaves and bent open by branches.

Rosie nods and rubs her forearm nervously, saying, "Yes sir. I'm, uh, having some trouble getting it out... Would you mind... Um..." She makes a pulling motion in the air, then points to the bottom of the bushes.

He laughs and shakes his head as he reaches under the foliage. After a few attempts, he manages to tug the book out of its wooden prison, leaving several leaves and a twig sticking out of the torn pages. He looks it over sadly before standing and handing it back to her. "You really ought to be more careful Miss Jay," he says disappointedly.

She bobs her head and peeks over his shoulder. Her other book lay open just behind Mr. Cruise. She really hopes he doesn't notice so she can skip a lecture and hurry to homeroom.

She should just stop wishing for things as Mr. Cruise catches her glance and turns around. He sighs again as he turns to pick up the other book, and hands it back to her with a frown. Rosie chuckles and smiles abashedly as she takes it from him. The cover, which had already been somewhat faded, now bore several more significant scratch marks.

"Alright," Mr. Cruise announces, "Let's get you to the nurses office."

Rosie's eyes widen unintentionally. If Mr. Cruise takes her all the way to the Hospital Building, she'll definitely miss Homeroom and Vanessa will have won. She quickly blurts out, "N-no, no, it's ok, I'm totally fine! I don't need to see a nurse."

Mr. Cruise frowns at her and puts his hands on his hips. "Miss Jay I really must insist--"

Rosie cuts him off before he could continue, “Mr. Cruise, really, I’m fine, I promise. It’s not *that* bad!”

To prove her point she straightens her leg and puts a little weight on her bad knee. A fresh wave of pain washes over her, and she hopes Mr. Cruise doesn’t see it on her face as she bares her teeth in a forced smile.

“See,” she says in a chipper but strained voice, “I just need to walk it off, that’s all.”

Mr. Cruise looks doubtful, but he doesn’t appear to want to press the issue. He lets out another long sigh before saying, “If you’re that determined to get to class, then at least let me escort you there. I’d hate for your teacher to think you were playing hooky.”

Rosie nods, just a little too enthusiastically, and Mr. Cruise cocks a brow at her making her laugh nervously. She clears her throat and gestures towards the HS building. “We should get going if I’m gunna to make it in time.” Rosie says.

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Mr. Cruise knocks on classroom 26-C’s door a few times before pushing it open gingerly. The entire room, including Rosie’s teacher, Mrs. Gomez, look over and stare at the odd duo in the threshold. Blood suddenly races to flush Rosie’s cheeks under the pressure of dozens of eyes.

When Mrs. Gomez turns her body to face them, her protruding pregnant stomach points like an accusatory finger at Rosie. “Ahh, Mr. Cruise,” Mrs. Gomez says with a smile, “It seems you have found my missing pupil.”

Mr. Cruise takes off his faded denim baseball cap and nods to her in greeting. “Mornin’ Maria,” he says, reciprocating her smile with his own, “She’d have been here earlier, but it seems there was little accident this morning...” He trails off as he points at the blood on Rosie’s pant leg.

Upon looking down and seeing the small red stain, Mrs. Gomez lets out an audible gasp and covers her mouth. She looks back up at Rosie with concern in her warm brown eyes, “Oh no! Are you alright?”

“I’m okay Mrs. G,” Rosie mumbles quietly. Her face probably matches her namesake now, as she continues to blush furiously. She stares at the dingy white tiles on the floor in mortification and hopes this interaction will be short so she can get to her seat and get on with her day. She can physically feel the curious stares of her classmates bearing down on her.

Mrs. Gomez’s eyes are clouded with worry, but she turns to Mr. Cruise with a smile, “I’ll take it from here Ed. Thank you for making sure she got to class safely!”

He tugs his hat back on with a nod and a small smile. Before he turns to leave, he pats Rosie on the shoulder and says, “Just try ‘n stay safe for me, alright kiddo?”

Rosie nods numbly while keeping her eyes glued to the floor as her class breaks out in giggles over his statement. Mr. Cruise squeezes her shoulder once then makes his way out the door, meanwhile Mrs. Gomez works on getting the rest of her students settled back down.

When the room is quiet again Mrs. Gomez addresses Rosie directly. “How about you sit up here with me for today?” Mrs. Gomez gestures to a small stool by her desk. “I can call for an escort to the Hospital Building once homeroom is finished.”

Rosie looks up and waves off her teacher, with what she hopes is her most sincere smile she says, “That’s not necessary Mrs. G. It’s just a little scrape.”

Mrs. Gomez pegs her with a look that to an outside observer wouldn’t seem threatening, but Rosie knows better. “Even a small abrasion can get infected Rosita. Please. Sit.”

That wasn’t a request. Rosie sighs in defeat. She limps forward as straight as possible and plops herself down on the skinny wooden seat. She fixates on the ground in front of her while she waits for homeroom to end, lest she accidentally lock eyes with one of her classmates.

Rosie had walked in halfway through the 10-minute-long homeroom, yet it feels like it’s stretching on for an eternity. Mrs. Gomez’s soft voice rambles about assemblies and extra

curriculars while the analog clock ticks steadily behind them; a constant reminder of the looming inquisition Rosie will face when she gets to the nurse's office. Why couldn't she go *after* school? At least then she'd have an excuse for why her homework wasn't done, *and* she'd have enough time to come up with a plausible explanation for this morning. Stupid well-meaning adults, ruining Rosie's plans.

Eventually the bell signifying the end of homeroom rings, and the still room instantaneously explodes with chaos as students rush to leave. Rosie can sense the flurry of disorder but doesn't dare look up. Instead, she counts the little black specks in the tile directly in front of her. She gets to 34 when Mrs. Gomez places a gentle hand on her shoulder. Rosie relents and peeks up to see that the room has been cleared out save for her and her teacher.

Concern is etched into Mrs. Gomez's pretty face as she gazes down at her pupil. "Rosita," Mrs. Gomez starts, "This is the fifth 'accident' you've had in 2 months! I am worried for you mija. Please, tell me what is going on."

Rosie looks just above Mrs. Gomez's eyes and focuses on the space between her brows. Rosie won't be able to get away with lying if she looks directly into Mrs. Gomez's eyes. Her teacher has a knack for sniffing out the truth. "Nothing is 'going on' Mrs. G. I just... Keep forgetting to tie my laces..."

Mrs. Gomez is unconvinced and slowly looks down at Rosie's perfectly tied shoelaces then back up to Rosie's face. She raises a haughty brow and says, "If that is too difficult a task, I suggest you talk to your guardian about providing you with better footwear."

Rosie looks away from her teacher's intense stare and fidgets with her fingers, unsure of what to say. Mrs. Gomez sighs heavily, and Rosie looks back at her while biting her lip, afraid she had upset her kindhearted instructor.

Mrs. Gomez's eyes are hooded, and she looks exhausted as she says, "Please, Rosita. I want to help you, but I can't if you won't let me. Whatever it is you're going through can stay our secret, but please, talk to me."

Rosie flinches but stays silent and fiddles with the hands in her lap. A part of her is aching to share this burden with someone, it's not like she has any friends to vent to, and Rosie knows that Mrs. Gomez means well, but if she gets involved the principle will too, and if Vanessa gets punished, Rosie's punishment will be worse.

The school has rules on how far it can punish its students, but the students themselves do not. Just because Nessa won't be able to torture Rosie herself, doesn't mean she can't send her flying monkeys out to do it for her. Rosie's already pathetically sad life will turn into utter Hell.

After a long and awkward silence, Mrs. Gomez gives up on getting a response and waddles to the landline phone on her desk. She calls Facilities and asks for a medical escort to drive Rosie across campus. Once she hangs up, she calls another number, and informs the nursing staff of Rosie's ETA, giving them a brief description of Rosie's injury. She nods a few times while listening to the voice on the other line, then writes something down and hangs up.

She smiles at Rosie while fingering the post-it note in her hands. "I have some bad news. It seems there has been an outbreak of flu in the Elementary School and the Nursing staff are very busy today. They still want me to send you over, but it will take a few hours before you can be seen."

Rosie represses the urge to groan aloud, and instead asks, "So, I'm going to be there all day?"

Mrs. Gomez's smile becomes a tad strained, "No my dear, just most of the day, but fortunately you should make it back in time for seventh period."

The groan forces its way out of Rosie's airways as she buries her face in her hands. Rosie *really* hates Fridays.

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