Okay hi guys its sirene here, i AM posting this story in episodes but this is the full document. And I will be constantly updating this document with every new episode. Aaaand this document is going to be linked to my bio. This story is really my first time writing romance and mystery together so any feedback is always highly appreciated. Enjoy. Happy reading!



Author's note:-

Oh my stars, if you're reading this right now, I can only hope the very best for you in your life. It is such a big thing for me to have an outlet to share my own scriptures and manuscripts in. I really really hope you enjoy this story woven by words.

Character introductions:-

1) Elizabeth Liana Sterling

2)Theodore Brooks Calloway

3) Persephone Grambs

4) Chase Greens

(i) Elizabeth (main female protagonist)

Elizabeth “Lizzie” Sterling is a guarded girl. With platinum blonde hair and grey eyes, she’s always been a beautiful, kind soul. Academically vicious, Theodore and Lizzie have been rivals for countless years. Her father, Ethan Sterling owns a Steel Enterprise. Despite belonging to old money, she has always been the overlooked child. Always considered inferior to her siblings. She had a long period of depression throughout her early teenage years, resulting in multiple self-harm scars and suicidal thoughts, due to which she is still learning to live her life again.

(ii) Theodore (main male protagonist)

Theodore “Theo” Calloway. Lizzie’s best friend and academic rival, son of Wyatt Calloway, the business alliance of Ethan Sterling and being a master chess player. He plays hockey in his leisure time and takes great pride in his appearances. (Yes, yes he IS a fashion icon). Having topped his grade since childhood, along with the one girl who he….secretly has feelings for. He also enjoys painting whenever you don’t see him in the library.

(iii)Persephone Grambs

Persephone “Sef” Grambs, is Lizzie’s best friend. Having dreams of being a fashion designer, she is suppressed by her parents who force her into the sciences. She enjoys sketching in class. With red hair and amber eyes, this girl surely carries the attitude in her self-designed handbag. So much for a girl who has the co-captain of the debate club wrapped around her fingers.

(iv) Chase Greens

Co-captain of the debate team along with his best friend Theo. Having come from old money, he still acts ridiculously humble with his “own choice” of wearing one single shirt on rotation. With brown hair and grey eyes that only have a gaze on Persephone, he also happens to be fond of archery, his pet dog. And the sport itself too.

Book playlist:-

1) **Earrings-Malcolm Todd**
2) **Babydoll-Dominic Fike**
3) **Bloodstream-Alyssa Grace**
4) **Chihiro-Billie Eilish**
5) **Young and Beautiful-Lana Del Rey**

6) **Thinking Out Loud-Ed Sheeran**
7) **Manchild-Sabrina Carpenter**
8) **FRIENDS-Marshmello & Anne Marie**
9) **I wanna be yours-Arctic Monkeys**
10) **505-Arctic Monkeys**
11) **Nicole Kidman-Adelà**
12) **Invisible String-Taylor Swift**
13) **West Coast- Lana Del Rey**
14) **The Cure-Olivia Rodrigo**
15) **Paradise-Coldplay**
16) **False God-Taylor Swift**
17) **Cinnamon Girl-Lana Del Rey**
18) **Genius-LSD, Sia, Labrinth**

Playlist on spotify ♡
https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3e5IxSpNRAZsJfb3TVJEAD?si=1HgDYsqzTTyuEiLhkbSs5w&utm_source=copy-link&pt=87e0eac72ccd63c48bdb53c0de6d3bf5

Chapter 1

(song of the chapter⇢ Earrings by Malcolm Todd)

Blurred faces and memories.

~~*Elizabeth Sterling*~~

Lizzie

Extra, extra, read all about it, Lizzie's in her feelings and she can't get out of it. The usual.

I thought to myself, as I stood there in my striped tee and denim trousers as I stared down at Theo with a disbelieving expression on my face, clutching what only seemed to be a xerox of a blurry photograph. Of my mother, and his aunt, as kids, with the same brunette woman's head between their shoulders, kneeling in what happened to look like a garden.

If you're wondering how I got here...well... I wish I knew mate. I really do. But as for now?

Let me talk.

"Are you kidding me?" I squinted, barely making meeting his cerulean depths with my own in the blasting sun.

I dragged his hand and pulled him with me to the nearby shed. Courtesy of Mister Greens to let us "youthful lads mingle" in his garage shed which he used once in a month anyways.

Theodore stumbled back a bit, catching himself promptly, holding the rusted edge of the shed. He buttoned his pale blue button-down again, as he always did with his always loose top blue button always when he was nervous. I would know. I know him the most. He ran one of his pale hands through his brown hair, which seemed almost like a dream of a guy I would like or be sexually attracted to if only he wasn't my childhood best friend.

All thoughts aside, he doesn't even like me like that. Like the girls at my school think he does. People talk too much. But then again, you stop talking back when the tiger stops biting, and you're finally out of strife again. Because that's what we do, is it not?

We act, and we act, and we act, on this meagre stage of this petty life of ours. My mere fifteen years in this Earthly realm has taught me more than my teachers and parents and books ever could.

"Mom and dad told me to clear up the attic. They said it's what again? Oh yeah. Apparently it has 'sensitive' objects. Mine they said. So now I'm the one who has to do it. Gods.." Theo said. Snapping out of my stream of consciousness, I went back to observing the photo again.

The woman's ears were adorned with jewellery.

One caught my eye.

A glittering six-diamond piece.

Dior 1970s spring collection.

My grandfather's last gift to grandma before he went *missing*.

——————₊⁺₊⁺ ◘ᔑ ♡ ᔕ☐ ⁺₊——————₊⁺

Chapter 2

(song of the chapter↣ Bloodstream- Alyssa Grace)

I know I'm a bitch, mam.

~~*Elizabeth Sterling*~~

Lizzie

“Are you deliberately setting me over, young lady? Because if you are—”, my mother’s voice entered my skull. By now, I’d learnt to mute it. Turn it off. Completely numb myself to these knives. I always knew that I was never a wanted girl. The “mistake”. The “slut”. The “problem child”. Sure my parents were conservative, but their larynx was not.
“Did you hear me, girl?” My mother looked at me through the rim of her second coffee that day. She abruptly turned around. Her face contorted into a scowl as she watched the boiling milk tip over the edge of the pot. She didn't move to turn it off though.
“See what you did. You made me burn milk. Do you know how much this costs? 4 dollars. Can you earn that much? A recovery fee? Of course not. Keep looking at boys like him, and you’ll be the useless tramp you are. You like it, don't you? Being the bane of my existence?” She strode towards the kettle and nearly smashed the buttons. With more force than she needed to.
I gulped nervously, tucking the photo below my grey-rose sweater. Nan knit it for me last winter.
Isabeau Sterling, I think.
The only woman who never hesitated to treat me like family.
I stood there, in the middle of the kitchen, shifting my hip away from the edge of the kitchen counter, like I’d been burned. My gaze lifted to mam, who was now clutching the window sill, sipping on her coffee, looking at the floral garden outside in the backyard, over the rim of the yellow cup.
Steam fogged up her glasses, and she took off her thin-rimmed glasses, placing them on the counter.
“I was just asking—” I somewhat managed to retort before she glared at me, a silent *no pushing this further*. I lowered my half-raised hand, and retreated to my room.

“Nah, she didn’t even let me finish”, I said, moving my pawn in a Sicilian defense.
“Ah, so it seems.” Theo looked up at me, unimpressed. I gulped and shrugged, looking out at the street. Miri told me that it’d rain today.
Hn...it didn’t. That’s funny. I think.
“What seems like what?” I replied, moving my knight.
“How you still didn’t realise that Mrs. Sterling is *clearly* hiding something.” He smirked. A bit. A bit, right? I think. I cleared my throat, as we resumed the game in silence. Nobody quite knew what to say after that.

xxxxxxxxxxx

“And...checkmate.” I knocked over Theo’s King with my own with a flick of my fingers, finally breaking the loudest silence. I dusted my hands, deliberately loud.
“Does check-mate mean you’re going to check who my king’s mating with?” Theodore bit his lip, and looked at me through his long dark lashes, and smiled.

So *brilliantly* smiled.
The left corner of his lips twitched more upwards than his right and that, in my defense, made all the difference from the other boys. They couldn’t charm without being crude, they couldn’t say a nice thing without a sex joke and I was just tired. In general.
I was tired of boys.

I was tired of men.
I was tired of people.
I was tired of my own family.
I was tired of my friends treating me with camaraderie just to then know that they pity me. Oh well, can't really help that, can I?

"No." I tilted my chin upwards, resting my head on my steepled fingers. "No, I'm not checking who your king will be mating with. Only if that someone happens to be my queen...then we've got a problem here."
"You would make a good mom." He crawled to the worn blanket at the far corner of the treehouse. "Really, I mean it." He opened a pack of gummy bears. I don't like the sound. Too loud. Ugh.
He extended his right arm towards me, offering them silently, I shook my head abruptly.
"So eh how did you approach your mom?" He popped one into his mouth, crossing his ankles, as he leaned back towards the east wall of the treehouse.
"I went up," I took a deep breath, and drifted my gaze downwards. "She didn't..quite have the patience to entertain my wast—"
"No."
"What?"
"No. You can't say that." He put down the packet.
"Say what?"
"I asked you. I didn't ask how your mom degraded you. Again. Now. Go on"

And so I did.

"And Liz?"
"Yeah?"
"Your dad's adopted by the way."
That—that was the last thing he said before setting off on his bike.
Fucking bastard.

——————₊⁺₊⁺ ◘ᔑ ♡ ᔕ☐ ⁺₊——————₊⁺

Chapter 3

(**song of the chapter**↣ I wanna be yours-Arctic Monkeys)

~~Theodore Brooks Calloway~~

Theo

I'm pathetic

1..2..3

I counted in my head, as I fastened the emerald buttons of my forest green blazer. I fixed the metal school crest with the phoenix; tied my tie around my neck, a noose around myself, an ironic metaphor.
What an irony
Physically, this tie could be the tightest cord and it still couldn't be as firm as the effect a certain blonde could.
I could have a thousand guns, and she could still disarm me with a single smile.
I could be the wittiest philosopher, but she possessed the power to reduce me to a fool.
A *pathetic*, *lovesick*, fool.

The word echoed in my mind.
Lovesick.
But no.
No. I was not sick of *her*.
Never of *her*.

Elizabeth Liana Sterling was undoubtedly the only person in the whole wide world, who had the power to lower me to my knees but she would instead use it to flick my forehead instead.
She was *kind*.
She was *intelligent*.
She was *witty*.
And most of all, she was a *real* human.

Despite being my best acquaintance, her and I were still rivals.
If *she* got a 100, I got a 100 too.
If *she* got 99 and I, a 100, surely she would get a higher grade than me in the next one.

Lizzie was the only solid example of "*keep your work life and personal life separate*".

And yes, I, again, would be competing against the girl I loved—platonically or not that I am not sure of—but yes, I had to. The debate would be held in approximately 5 hours. And I had to win. ~~*Dear God, please bless me so I don't get fooled by her eyes*~~.

I hope she doesn't despise me for hiding this from her.
I pushed the too-familiar thought down my throat and set out again.
Another ride.
Another smile.
Another day of seeing her—*her*—and knowing I knew more about her than she ever would.

———————₊⁺₊⁺ ▫ꓤ ♡ ᘜ☐ ⁺₊———————₊⁺

Chapter 4

(**song of the chapter** ›› Paradise-Coldplay)

~~Elizabeth Liana Sterling~~

Lizzie

Devils and Angels Have The Same Faces

I sat down at the lunch table, where my best friend had already kept a seat. She was putting on—I mean—reapplying her lipgloss.
Hm.
Different brand—I think.
"Persephone?" I tapped her shoulder. She puckered her lips one last time and closed the tube, before finally turning to me.
"Yeah?" She rested her chin on her palm, keeping her elbow on the white, plastic table.
"Your gloss. Which brand, girl?" I picked up my slice of banana bread from home. I'd made it myself. I was a pretty good cook.
"Rhode. Wait. You like my lips?" Persephone put down her gloss. And put on a smug expression, familiar on her face.
"I—I mean yeah?"
Biting her lip, she said, "You should see the pair I've got down under".

....
....
...
No. Nonono. God why is this bitch my friend?

"Sef." I tried to rewire my amygdala again.
"Yes?" She blinked, sweetly. She had the face of an angel and her tits and brain worked with the devil. And yes, somehow this goddamn idiot was my source of solace.
"What the fu—" I tried to sputter the first thing that came to mind at least to make myself start talking again but I got cut off when she said,
"Fuck what?"
"You"
"You wanna fuck me? I thought you wanted to fuck Theo instead" Her hand shot up to the left side of her chest, lips parted in mock hurt.
"NO! Ew. He's my friend! F-r-i-e-n-d-s. Okay? That's so disgusting" I dragged a palm down my face.
"No it's . You've gotta get your priorities straight girl. I'm only doing what's best for you." She placed a hand on the upper part of my back, and wiped an imaginary tear from her face.

I sighed.
“You’ve got a debate last period,right?” She straightened, steepling her fingers under her chin.
“Yeah. I actually do. So I might be going to the library. And then maybe some reading—"
“Then you’re going over to Theo’s.” She smirked smugly, biting one end of her lip.
“Wait–How do you know that?” My eyes widened slightly.
“You told me that you’re gonna be at his place for today and tomorrow since your mom and dad are out of town yesterday on the phone. Anywho. So. Whatchu planning to do there? I heard he has a king sized bed in his room.”

It was only 20 seconds too late for me to realise why Sef had been pursing her lips and biting her cheek. I felt a heat behind me. I turned my head. And of course.

I knew it.

——————♡——————

~~Theodore Brooks Calloway~~

Theo

Condensed feelings

She looks up then, staring up at me through emerald irises. Her almost obstructed eyes peeked through long dark eyelashes.

“Ready...for the debate in three hours?” I say.

“More than *you*.” She suddenly stands up, her chair scraping lightly on the floor.

“Oh...playing fox and hen are we?” I say, raising an eyebrow. She stands on her tip-toes.
Points a finger to my chest.
“You didn’t specify the roles, *Mister Calloway*.”

“Did not.” I lower her hand. “..yet”. I boop her nose. “But will” I turn sharply on my heel and leave.

The only rival I would gladly cherish.

———————₊⁺ ◘ᔑ ♡ ᔑ☐ ⁺₊———————₊⁺

Chapter 5

(**Song of the chapter**⤑ Cinnamon girl-Lana Del Rey)

~~*Elizabeth Sterling*~~

Lizzie

Vaporised feelings

" Hold me, love me, touch me, honey
Be the first who ever did

I sang quietly in my head, as I strutted through the school hallway, heading to the library. I'd walked away from Theo. And I had to. I had to. I don't think I can see him the same these days. Its—its not something I can figure out.
All my life, I have been articulate with my words. "Well-spoken", perhaps. But never had I ever felt like *this*—this..this–this *blasphemous* state of mind. I wanted peace.
I wanted to confide in someone.
I wanted someone who didn't treat me like shit.
I wanted someone who didn't pity me for being treated like shit.
I wanted *love*—I wanted *delirium*. I wanted *bliss*.
I—I
I want him.

No.
Nonononono. No. No. Nonono. No. No. No.
NO.
"1..2..3...
I forced myself to breathe through the cascade of emotions crashing over me like gentle waves hugging the coarse sand. Like a little bird on a rough branch. Like a feather stuck on a sharp thorne. Like a little fly in a pitcher plant.
A thunder of pain erupted on my forehead. I'd bumped into the 7 feet tall cedar doors of the library. I opened them quietly.
And then I started reading for what might've been the toughest argument in my life.

———————₊⁺ ◘ᔑ ♡ ᔑ☐ ⁺₊———————

Chapter 6

(**song of the chapter**↣ False God-Taylor Swift)

~~Elizabeth Liana Sterling~~

Lizzie

I didn't know I could do that

A wave of pain shoots through my skull. I wince. I taste the metal on my lip, and wipe it off, trying to ignore the obvious sting of exposed flesh.

Another blow.

I refuse to move. I refuse to let her see me weak. I refuse to see myself weak. Vulnerable. Unguarded. No.

She wants me to be *dependent*.
She wants me to be *complaisant*. She wants me to have *conformity*.
I ditch the spiking through my head.
I ditch the softer approach.
I move.
In a second, she's glaring at me, as I snatch the shattered, bloody piece of glass from her hand and raise it at her.
My hand is dripping *red*.
I'm *seeing* red too.
And suddenly I'm 14 years old again, in my mom's kitchen, standing in a striped rainbow shirt and a bow in my hair.

"Liz?"

The warm voice breaks me out of my flashback.

I startle.

“Here for reading?” The oh too familiar figure leaned against one of the shelves. His stretched arm on the shelf showed off a set of broad shoulders I’d always failed to acknowledge before.

“Did you think I was in here for something else, Calloway?” I didn’t get up from my seat. I closed the book so he couldn’t sneak a peek at my study material.

He sighed, and ran a hand through his usually perfectly brushed brown hair. Today it was...untidy?

It looked good on him though.

“I never said anything.” His lips curved upward. Just a little. “Do you always have a habit of overthinking? Oh wait. I forgot. You always do. But—” He interrupted himself, by walking to the other end of the library to grab a short stool, and bringing it back to my seat. Theo sat on the stool, barely holding his stout frame. “—you would rather die than admit it. Because you think that ‘being smart’ and being an overthinker are the same thing.”

“I do not.” I said defensively, almost letting a sliver of annoyance slip by.

“Yes you do.” His lips curved fully upwards now. Not even hiding the glint of amusement he had. And was thoroughly savouring.

I sighed in exasperation and stood up, tucking the book into the nearby shelf.

“If you wish to stand and gape in a fucking library with nothing else to do, you are free to do so.” I said over my shoulder, opening the door of the library.

“I could gape at you instead.” He bit the right corner of his lip.

“That’s really funny, Theo. Ha ha. How hilarious.” I deadpanned. The sarcasm was dripping onto the ornate wooden floor now.
Theo didn’t say anything.
Now, you see, usually, I would’ve had to *record* this. Theodore Calloway being quiet? I’d bet my life that it’s impossible.
And here we are.
“No, seriously though. You don’t usually say things like that.” I raised an eyebrow. “Why’d ya say that?” I crossed my arms across my chest.

“—beca–b..because.. because *I love you.”*

I paused.

I stood there speechless.

My mind—a concoction of spiralling thoughts came to a *standstill*.

Actually came to a fucking standstill.

My pulse fluttered.
I don't know why.
I don't know how.
I don't know when.
But I knew.
I knew that *this*—this was it.
It.
The moment I'd been waiting for.
The moment we had been waiting for.
"Tell me you're joking." I inched closer. One step. One step towards *insanity*. One step towards *salvation*.
One step to heaven.
He shook his head. "No." He fidgeted with the button of his shirt.
"You're not kidding..are you?" My pulse beat under my collar-bone.
"Do I look like I'm kidding to you?" He looked up then–and I think it was at that moment, that I realised the sheer sincerity of his words sinking into my flesh.
I have never seen him like this.
I walked forward. And placed my hands on his shoulders.
I was panting, and I didn't know why. And I loved that I didn't know.
His hands rose up. Carefully. As if handling something made of glass. As if I was glass.
And leaned down—

A sudden sound at the door.
A sudden intrusion.

"Ah. Mister Calloway. Rare to see you around here at this time." I saw Miss Payne walk in, dropping her Fuchsia bag on the counter. It was only then that she noticed me standing close to Theo. *Too* close.
She smoothed her blouse with the swipe of her palm, and sat down at the counter.
Miss Eleanor "Elena" Payne was one of the senior teachers in our school, with a history of more than 20 years of experience being a librarian. And yes, she was revered by everyone. Including me.
But at that moment, I couldn't hate her less.
So much for that bag I was so envious of.

"Oh. Good afternoon, Miss Payne. Miss Sterling and I were just browsing around here for the upcoming debate." He said, abruptly moving his hands away from my shoulders and straightening up.
He smoothed out his sleeves and his slacks. Running a hand through his brown locks, tousling his hair.

I took one deep breath in. One out. One in. One out.

1..2..3..
3..2..1..
a...b..c
T..B..C
No..no..no
I pushed the last thought out of my head and gave a quiet bow to Miss Payne.
"Yes indeed. Mister Calloway and I were browsing about the," I looked around the library as my gaze fixated on a babylonian history book. There's my scapegoat. "about the history of the ancient civilization of Babylon. It's a...very possible topic with a lot of uhm...debate over certain aspects..Thats why."

"Her father's daughter afterall.." I heard Theo mumble. I nudged him in the crook of his elbow.
Miss Payne smiled. Her smile lines were visible again. She clasped both her hands together and took one step forward.
"Well, good luck to both of you. Equally. And remember, it's a debate. Not your SAT. Just relax and focus. Okay? I'll be here in the library if you need me. Farewell sweethearts." She smiled. And her honey-coated words still couldn't ease the sudden urge I had to be violent. In...many fucking ways. I can fight dirty, okay?

Theo and I nodded and stepped out of the library. I had to bag that book so as to build a solid foundation of the blatant lie.

"What were you saying about me being my fathers daughter? It sounded idiotic." I sneered at him as soon as we set our feet outside.
"Nothing." He didn't even spare a glance at me.
"No no. It's not *'nothing'* when *you* say it's nothing. And when—when you say it's nothing, it must be *something.*" I clicked my teeth shut when I realised I was being too wholly loquacious with a boy who wasn't even talking to me.
"*Elizabeth.*" I stiffened at the use of my full name. He finally turned to look at me. I gulped. "I said, it's nothing.—"
"No." I cut him off.
"Yes."
"No."
"Yes."
"Then why'd you say that? Of course I'm my father's daughter. Fortunately or unfortunately that is not your matter to dictate. You're hiding something, Mister Calloway."
"Who said I was? Who said I wasn't? And who told you that you have to be so insipid all the time, Miss Sterling. The world doesn't revolve around you." My heart clenched at the sight of his cold gaze. I felt exposed. I tugged on the neckline of my shirt. It didn't help.
It was then that I saw his hands.
Fidgeting.
Theodore never fidgets.
Not unless he's—
"Goodbye."

And just like that,
He walked out on me.
For the first time in seventeen *fucking* years.

———————₊⁺ ◘ᔑ ♡ ᔨ☐ ⁺₊———————

Chapter 7

(**song of the chapter**↣ Genius-LSD, Sia, Labrinth)

~~Theodore Brooks Calloway~~

Theo

Debating reveries

"Babylon's collapse in 539 BCE was caused by internal moral decay."

I stared at the words shown on the screen by the school projector.

"Come now. Teams of five. You have, " Mister Halverson checked his wrist watch. A thin gold band with a maroon dial. ", about 10 minutes to jot down any notable points with your team members. After that, the first team can decide if they are for the motion," He shifted his gaze to our team, ", or against the motion. May the best win. Your time starts," He waited for a few moments.
One.
Two. Three—
"Now."
I immediately looked down at my own wrist watch, and straightened my cuff links. *Again*.

"Theodore. "
I saw Zayden stalk towards me.
Zayden Ashford.
I actually do despise him, but what can I say? When push comes to shove, you do what you've got to do.

I smiled. It didn't reach my eyes.
As intended.

You see, it's not that Zayden had done anything objectively wrong. Or at least in public.
But Lizzy did mention something about him "staring at her too long" and being a "creep".
The name maims my reverie again.

Lizzy.
Viper.
~~Elizabeth~~.
I look away—almost instinctively to Team 1. I see a blonde head stooped over the table, turned to the right as a brunette, I assume Persephone, jots down notes on their team paper.

"Theodore."
I hear Zayden again. And this time around, I'm almost inclined to raise my voice by an octave but it lowers instead.

"I am not deaf, Ashford. You need not shout in my ear. It is unbecoming of your, *ahem*, high standards that you behold of yourself."

I drew out a sharp exhale, forcing myself to focus.
Focus.
Concentrate.
Not the time for dilly-dallying.

~~*Or for thinking about her*~~

"Theodore? You grabbed the sheet from the counter, right?" Carter arched his brown eyebrow at me as a question. I nodded and handed the blank A4 sheet over to him, carefully; so as to not tear the paper that we'd write on, our team's chance to win.
Win against *hers*.
The thought spiked my chest again as I forced myself to straighten up.
"Maddox, you got five pens?" Chase strode to Maddox Partridge, who was timidly holding 5 black ball point pens. He gave them to Chase. Who then distributed them equally among us.
Just as we'd revised.
"Oh—kay. So what do we think Team One's gonna choose? For the motion or against the motion? Or...eh y'know? So maybe we should prep some points as the bare minimum? For both topics?" Carter said, brows furrowed.
Zayden leaned back in his chair. Cracking his knuckles, trying (and failing) to suppress a yawn.
I pushed back the urge to tell him that his tie was dangling like a stuntman from a high rope. No need.
"I suppose that seems like a rather good initiative." I agreed.
Chase rested his chin on his left palm and drew a straight-line dividing the paper into two.
One side read *-points for the motion.* The other read *points against the motion.*

"Okay. So what are we thinking of as the main points?" Carter looked at each one of us.
"Firstly, I think we should mention the death of Hammurabi? Because—like, he made that codex, didn't he? The code of law—" Zayden was cut off by Maddox.
"OH YES. The code of *law* ! YES. Shit—I almost forgot that oh yeeeeeeah baby we are SO back."
My nostrils flared and I don't know whether that was to hide genuine embarrassment or exasperation.

Welcome to my life in the debate team.

Ten minutes had passed in mumbles and quiet mutters growing around us like poison ivy.
We'd made five basic points for both sections.

"Alright. Team A. Are you for the motion or against the motion?" Mister Halverson said.

"For the motion." Stephanie said, standing up in her place. In her hand was a very thoroughly filled sheet.

My gaze raked over Team A. An all-girls team.

It wasn't a school forced policy. It wasn't even an unwritten rule. The girls and boys just preferred being in separate teams—a concept perplexing me since childhood.
Ladies being uncomfortable around boys?
I mean—I never really questioned it out loud, knowing how the other boys treated girls.
The objectification of women throughout history always makes me nauseous. The way women were treated as objects. As a "use and throw". As mere instruments of pleasure rather than the vastly divine souls they had or the intellectual minds they possessed, or of their hands which made magic.
All of it. Reduced to slavery.
I feel bile up my throat.
I push it down.

"In our team we have made the following conclusions. The fall of the Babylonian civilization—" Stephanie began reading out the paper, her hands occasionally making unsuggestive gestures. "—the last king of Babylon, King Nabonidus had mostly prominently damaged the internal authority and stability of the vast empire. He imposed a ten year long exile on himself and left his son, Belshazzar as co-regent. Belshazzar was clearly not suitable enough for the task which led to the corruption which started their own downfall. Secondly—" She flipped the page and bit her lip. Just once.
"—Secondly. King Nabonidus had also caused an internal revolt in the empire by severely fracturing the kingdom's religious beliefs. He started preferring his own Moon God, Sin over the people's patron deity, Marduk. Thus, leading to a religious revolt within the citizens." She folded the paper abruptly and kept it on the desk. I steepled my fingers under my chin.
A very good point made by Team-A
Maybe also by her
No.
I gulp down the familiar feeling down my throat and feel the sudden need to excuse myself for adjusting my slacks.
Too low.

I spun my black ball-point one lazily between my fingers and decided to give the first point to Chase. He has a strong voice, useful for the first argument if we want to impress the judges. Which we do

“Team B is against the motion. I request the respective speaker to stand up.” Miss Grey said, from the ornate wooden desk at the front of the hall.

Chase stood up and cleared his throat. Just once.
“Our team has concluded that the fall of the Babylonian civilization was simply due to superior Persian military strategy.” Mister Halverson nodded, as he jotted down something on his notepad. Probably the scores.

“Around 540 BCE, Cyrus the Great, founder of the Achaemenid Empire, led the Persian army against Babylon. Supported by local discontent, his forces reportedly diverted the Euphrates River, allowing troops to enter the city under its walls. According to Greek historian Herodotus and eastern texts, the great city Babylon was taken in one night.” Chase said, leaning one side of his hip against the table.

“Alright, alright. You may sit down. And the question of opposing Team A?” Mister Halverson asked, finally looking up from his clipboard.