

Covetous (Part 1)

Victoria Nelson was just a teenager. At least, she was happy being “just a teenager.” She assumed that eventually she would become an adult. She was kind and more than a little pretty, with her shiny, straight red hair, tall, graceful, body, and pale white skin. However, no matter how hard she tried, very few people wanted to be with her. Sometimes, in her more angst-ridden moments she feared that it was because they sensed something wrong with her.

Or in some cases, she thought, watching Angelica and several of her bitchy friends terrorizing a mousey, scared girl, they're just too superficial to think twice about the daughter of a disgraced politician.

The terrorized girl, Victoria assumed, was new. She had never seen this girl around the school. Victoria knew it was possible she had missed someone, but her memory was near perfect.

As Victoria closed the gap between her and the bullies, she heard some of the enlightened conversation. “You’d think that she’d at *least* get glasses with fashionable frames, wouldn’t you?” Angelica asked in her nastiest voice. She then plucked the plastic, 1950’s style glasses off her victim and put them on. “Oh my god! I feel like talking about *Star Wars* and other boring crap just wearing these!” Her three friends, Allison, Tamara, and Jade, snickered. Victoria, however, was not amused.

“Aren’t you going to be late for class?” she asked the girls. She was one of the few girls in the school who could match their height without heels, so the effect was satisfyingly intimidating. Angelica coolly took off the stolen glasses. She didn’t turn to look until after they were off. “So,” she said as she flicked the glasses to the ground and stomped on them, “*you’re* defending *her*? I thought you’d just hate her for what her dad did to your dad.”

“Being trapped with you four,” Victoria said, “is probably punishment enough. Now go be bitches somewhere else.” Tamara rolled her eyes. “Oh, come on, Ange. Its not worth it. I mean, she won’t be able to *afford* going here much longer.” The four laughed as they walked away, high heels slapping across the concrete floor.

After Angelica’s crew walked out of the dingy hallway and turned left, Victoria turned to the harassed girl. She squinted at Victoria, trying to make out her face. Victoria then realized the girl couldn’t see without her glasses. “Let me get those for you,” she said, bending down and picking them up. “Wow,” she said, “these are really sturdy.”

“Then I guess,” the girl said as she took the glasses from her, “I’m lucky they were the only frames that could support the lenses.” She stared at Victoria, her blue eyes multiplied to ten times their normal size, and finally said, “You’re Victoria Andraste

Burlington. Your father is Merrick Burlington, who is currently serving time for campaign fraud, numerous counts of corruption, possession of illegal substances, domestic violence, multiple counts of fraud, statutory rape..."

"Okay," Victoria said, with some force, "I get it. Before you tell me about the rest of my family, can you tell me a little bit about you?" The strange girl blinked. She fidgeted with her blue sweater marked with the FBI logo and shuffled her feet. "I'm Melissa Whitney. My father..."

"...Is Mike Whitney, the agent who put my father in jail for said crimes." Victoria finished for her. She continued on. "What class do you have? I could show you how to get to it if you're lost."

"Advanced placement world history. I memorized the floor map and class lists." Melissa said in her dull monotone as she walked down the hallway. "I read on the web site the teacher is doing a unit on the island's history as 'it is the appropriate time of year.'" Victoria shuddered, remembering the horror stories that Mr. McCormick had told them so far about Darkhenge Preparatory School and the Darkhenge Islands.

"Halloween is actually the best time to talk about this kind of thing," she said as she followed Melissa. "Everything from Johnathan Darkhenge's private castle where he took abductees to the fucking serial killer who lived in the factory in the factory... brrrrr!"

They came to a staircase leading up. The sound of a herd of students came from behind a door at the top. "This is the one. Come on." Victoria said. Melissa, however, stood still. "Was Angelica right? Do you hate me? You have been acting hesitant around me since I first spoke?"

Victoria smiled. "I don't hate you. You're just... a little weird. Honestly, from what my mom tells me, your dad did me a favor by busting my old man. Come on, we're late already." Melissa nodded, and they opened the door, and stepped into a beautifully paneled corridor. Victoria had to grab Melissa in order to stop her from heading in the opposite direction.

"Mr. McCormick moved his class to 206," Victoria yelled, in order to be heard over such enlightened conversation as "Man did I get some," and "Like, he was sweet, but he was so geeky." Eventually, they made their way into Mr. McCormick's room, the noise of the hall shut out by the room's soundproofing as soon as the door was closed.

"Finally," Mr. McCormick said, his dry Boston accent coming from his desk at the back of the room, "you're here." The class consisted of about fifteen other students, including Whitney and her friends. The room was also wood paneled, with a large touch-screen TV instead of a chalkboard and several maps, including a world map and a map of the Darkhenge Islands. The windows of the class looked out over a stormy sea beneath a crumbling cliff and one of the island's constant thunderstorms. The thunder was also blocked out by the soundproofing. Mr. McCormick continued on. "Of course, the one day I needed everyone to come in early, everyone gets here on time."

Though he seemed aggrieved, there was an element of dry humour in his voice. He turned to Melissa. "You're Melissa Whitney, right? Pleasure to have you with us, take a seat anywhere." He turned towards the rest of the class as Victoria and Melissa sat down. "All right," he said with an air of resignation, "please open your books and get the handout I gave you."

He paused. After a minute, he smiled. "Hey," he said happily, "maybe there won't be a code red today!" Immediately after speaking, the principal's voice came over the intercom. "Attention all students and teachers: code red. Please clear the hallways, lock the doors, and get into the corner of the nearest room." Mr. McCormick mimed the principal talking in her baby voice she always used when talking to students as he locked the door. Angelica laughed at this. Despite the fact she never got away with anything around Mr. McCormick, he appeared to be her favorite teacher.

As the students got into the corner, Melissa whispered to Victoria, "Victoria, have you noticed how good the sound proofing is?" Everyone looked at her. "So?" Allison asked, "what does that have to do with anything?" Melissa stared back. "It means," she said, an edge of nervousness in her voice, "that someone could, in theory, blow the door off with primacord and subdue us without anyone in the next room noticing."

As she said this, lightning struck just outside the window. No one heard any thunder. "See?" Melissa said. After that, everyone was silent. The only one who wasn't disturbed by the pronouncement was Mr. McCormick. He simply used the code red to grade papers. Victoria admired his nerves, and, if she wasn't imagining things, so did Angelica.

So it went for ten or fifteen minutes. Then the door burst in and four wet men dressed in black shirts, cargo pants and ski masks and armed with assault rifles came charging in. One used his position near the door to cover them, while another went around the side to get an angle on the other half of the students. The other two stood up on desks to aim their guns at the terrified students. By the time anyone except the masked gunmen realized what had happened, there were four red lines moving over the group of students in the corner.

"Do not scream, attempt to contact anyone from outside or attempt to escape," one of the gunmen on the tables said in a calm, yet firm tone. One of the boys, the class smart ass regained his wits enough to ask, "or what? You going to shoot us?"

There was a coughing sound from the weapon of the gunman who had just spoken. The boy fell back right next to Victoria, a small hole in his forehead. Everyone began panicking.

"Hey!" A slow, calm voice came from outside. "Didn't he just tell you not to scream?" A short man dressed in similar clothes to the other gunmen came into the room. However, instead of carrying an assault rifle, this man carried a large revolver with strange and disturbing designs etched on the barrel in one hand, and a briefcase in

the other. Victoria couldn't tell what they were as they were too vague, but they seemed to move when she didn't look at them.

"Well," the new man said as he walked into the room, surveying the now quiet teenagers and teacher through the holes in his ski mask, "as you all guessed, we're all going to be taking a field trip. For your own safety, I would ask you all to remove your cell phones and give them to one your chaperones." He then pointed to the new corpse with his revolver. "For an example of what could happen to you if you don't follow our guidelines, look at that guy." He spread out his hands, still holding the revolver and briefcase, and continued, chuckling. "If you ask me, he doesn't look too happy." He nodded to the previous spokesman. "Get 'em outta here. You have five minutes."

The gunman nodded as his leader left. "All right, move out between the two of us on the desk. Leave cell phones, tablets, e-readers, and anything else that can transmit wirelessly on either of the desks between us, then head out the door. Move!" They all complied. When they got out into the hallway, they saw four more gunmen, as well as the leader. "Mr. McCormick," the leader said in his slow, deep drawl, "The leaders, I find, should take point. Would you care to come with me? We're just heading to the fire exit two rooms down and through the Forest path."

"Right now, anything that doesn't get me, or my students shot, would be an honor and a privilege."

"I like the way you think, Mr. McCormick."

They walked, the terrorist leader and Mr. McCormick in the lead. They walked down to the rain-slick path. The terrorist leader whistling something, but Victoria couldn't make it out. After walking through the path in the woods, they came to a black van and two black SUVs. Sitting in a gap between the van and the second SUV were five of the school's security guards. One was carrying a shotgun, and the rest had small, black pistols in holsters. Four were arranged in a U-shape flanking someone who appeared to be sub-chief of security for the co-ed building. The building they just had class in.

Victoria didn't need to hear the sub-chief ask, "Where's the money?" to know that they had betrayed them. The lead terrorist simply threw his briefcase over. The sub-chief greedily hurried over to open it. Once it was open, there was a blinding flash and all the students dropped. Despite having her face pressed in the mud, Victoria could hear the sound of several somethings slamming into metal.

She raised her head up to see the leader of the terrorists walk over to the sub-chief. "YOU LYING, CHEATING BASTARD!" The sub-chief cast this curse into the rain and thunder, as he lifted his pistol. The terrorist, however, fired first. It hit the target in the shoulder, spinning him around. The sub-chief's weapon dropped to the ground, and the terrorist kicked it away. "I COULD SAY THE SAME THING ABOUT YOU," he responded, yelling to be heard above the storm. "I MEAN, YOU SOLD OUT YOUR EMPLOYERS!" He said this as he walked around the man to stand by his head. "YOU

SOLD OUT THESE KIDS!” He gestured at the children with his free hand while aiming the revolver at the sub-chief’s head. Then, he asked the sub-chief in the manner of someone telling a story, “SO THE QUESTION I’M ASKING MYSELF IS: WILL HE SELL ME OUT?”

The terrorist unloaded his gun into the sub-chief. After the first shot, however, Victoria’s head exploded with pain, and she was temporarily deafened and blinded. By the time her vision and hearing had returned, the lead terrorist was leaning over the sub-chief. Despite the fact he was whispering, Victoria could hear every word the terrorist said to the sub-chief’s corpse. “The answer was, ‘yes, Jack, he will sell you out.’ Of course, you figured that out, didn’t you?” He then rose up and yelled, “ALL RIGHT, STUDENTS AND FACULTY INTO THE VAN!”

All the students rose to their feet. Two of the terrorists opened the doors to the van, while the others covered the students. The van was a cargo van with barely enough room for all of them. After they got in, the doors slammed shut. Then they heard a hiss.

Victoria looked to the front of the van and saw the gas sprayer. It was a series of shower heads that had their hoses on the other side of the partition that separated the drivers from the hostages. Clouds of a semi-transparent gas billowed from the shower heads. The screams of her classmates were short: once they breathed in the gas, they keeled over. As Victoria lost consciousness, her vision blurring and specks of black and red swimming across it, she noticed that whoever designed this gas had been very clever: despite blacking out she could still breathe. Then the darkness completely obscured her vision.

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