

BENDING PLANES

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Chapter One: Those who live in the dark

The car came to a halt in the parking lot adjacent to the villa. It was fairly big even for a parking lot and added even more to the already existing grandeur of the villa. As the engine stopped roaring, in sync with the radio, and the car's interior lights came on, Lily took a deep breath. Only the distant, muffled sounds of loud music could be heard amidst the gentle rustling of leaves with the night air.

"Let's go." The girl in the driver seat said, reaching for the door handle.

Lily grabbed her hand.

"Wait!" she cried. "You sure I look ok?"

Through her face, Lily could make out annoyance as the girl rolled her blue pupils for what seemed like the twelfth time that night.

"Yes, Lily. You look fucking amazing. And it's a high school party, not a beauty pageant. Nobody is going to shoot you in the head because you didn't apply eye liner like every other whore in this gathering."

If that was intended as a joke, it didn't make Lily laugh. She tucked a strand of her dark-brown hair behind her ear and stared at herself in the car's rearview mirror.

A face of a girl who seemed to be about seventeen stared back at her with Dark brown eyes. She had a small straight nose with a petite mouth which looked very odd to her eyes. Her dark-brown hair, which she had spent nearly thirty minutes setting perfectly, looked a little messy.

Her expression radiated an aura of nervousness; she knew something awful or very embarrassing was going to happen tonight.

"It's not because of competition, Syd." Lily said, not looking at the girl next to her.

"Then what, Jeremy?" Syd asked and laughed lightly.

"It's not funny goddammit, I am freaking out!"

"I am sorry." Syd said and then smiled. "Hey, chill out. You look really good. I am sure Jeremy will say the same to you."

“If I don’t look good, I will make us both look bad.”

“But you do, okay? You do. So, stop freaking out.”

That didn’t convince her.

“Why am I even here?” Lily asked, rhetorically, expressing her frustration. “Why did I even decide to come here.”

Syd sighed.

“Lily Brown. You look great and it’s a stupid party. To be very blunt with you, nobody is even going to pay attention to us; they will be too busy getting shit-faced.”

“But they will! Jeremy is the captain of the fucking basketball team for go-”

“Speaking of which!” Syd said pointing out a car coming into the parking lot. Lily’s heart dropped as she saw the yellow Chevrolet park opposite to them. The front lights stopped and out came two boys who looked to be about eighteen – very tall, very muscular and very handsome looking.

One was an Asian guy with long dark hair – Jimmy Paul, the soon-to-be homecoming king. Jeremy Myers was the captain of the Basketball team but it was Jimmy who was the real MVP. Academics and sports were a breeze to him. He had won their school seven gold medals in Varsity tournaments and had been top of the class thrice. He came from a family of rich, pretentious people who owned half of town. The most popular kid at school, that’s who Jimmy was. But no amount of gold or silver ever changes your attitude – he was a prick, a downright horrible asshole that Lily hated from the depths of her soul but ended up meeting up with almost every week because he was dating her best friend, Sydney.

The other was the most perfect human being Lily had ever seen on earth. He was tall and lean had perfect hair the shade of Dark brown, messy but slightly combed to one side. His muscles contracted and relaxed beneath his shirt when he moved. He had coffee-colored eyes and a coffee-like attitude; energetic and strong. Jeremy Myers, the captain of the school basketball team, the nicest person to ever exist and Lily’s crush since the time he transferred three years ago.

Suddenly, Lily wanted to hide in a corner; to crawl up as a ball and never unwind herself again.

“I don’t want to go to this party.” Lily said. “I can’t. I am both mentally and physically incapable.”

“You do and you are. Come on, Lily! It’s just a party. Okay? Relax! We are here to have fun! Party, dance, get wasted and, if we are lucky, laid.”

“Gross.” Lily’s tension lifted a bit.

“You heard me. You and Jeremy Myers.”

“Stop.”

“Oh, you know you want to be in his pants. I mean, I do.”

“GROSS! SYD!”

Sydney laughed as Lily punched her lightly on the shoulder.

“I am joking! I AM JOKING! OW! STOP!” Syd cried, in the middle of her laughter.

Lily’s mood felt a little elevated. Syd smiled too.

“Ready to get wasted and die of alcohol toxication at an early age?” Syd asked.

“Let’s get this over with.” Lily replied.

And with that, they both opened the door of the car they were in and greeted the two boys.

About five minutes later, Lily was walking adjacent to Jeremy through the doors of the villa. It was a wild party. There were seventeen, eighteen-year-olds dancing and chatting, dressed in posh outfits. There was alcohol being served everywhere. Kids were drinking or puking or both. It was gross, it was messy, it screamed teenagers.

Music was blaring loudly – some EDM garbage nobody listened to but everybody was bopping their heads to anyway. Lily too was tapping her feet. Usually, she was quite carefree when it came to parties like this and would utilize any occasion to get to dance with her friends. However, the nervousness of being in the presence of her crush was overpowering her. Lily felt eyes on her and Jeremy as she walked. Curious ones, angry ones and most importantly jealous ones.

Syd and Jimmy were chatting away (how they were able to listen to each other with loud background music was beyond Lily).

“Wild party, huh?” Jeremy shouted, next to her.

She turned to look at him. His expression was one of clear annoyance at the music. He wanted to shut his ears, so did Lily. Jeremy Myers, every girl at school was crazy for him. Lily didn’t blame them; he was perfect in every way.

Human beings desire perfect. We are drawn to perfection like a moth is drawn to a flame. We like to cling to it, because it evens our imperfect selves out.

Jeremy was perfect. He was a varsity athlete, perfect student. Made for Ivy leagues and premier institutions, he seemed to catch everyone’s eye after he moved to Lily’s high school three years ago. Immediately he made his mark by landing seven

three-pointers in the first basketball practice and he kept at it in class, by paying close attention to lectures, asking interesting questions and scoring almost perfect A's all the time. With all his accomplishments, it was quite clear why everyone liked him. So much so, that everybody in the party was staring at him...and at Lily.

"Yeah. Really loud though, huh?" Lily shouted back.

Jeremy bent forward.

"What?"

"I said...it's really loud, huh?"

"WHAT?"

Lily sighed.

"IT'S REALLY FUCKING LOUD, HUH?"

"YEAH! Sure is..."

"The fuck are you two losers shouting for?" Jimmy shouted.

"What?" Lily shouted back. Jeremy laughed at that.

They greeted Tessa, the one who was housing the party, took some booze and stood nearby, drinking and chatting. Lily could feel eyes on her; curious ones and jealous ones. She wished they would stop staring.

They were away enough from the loud music to hear each other properly without shouting.

"So..." Jeremy began. "What's up?"

He was trying to start conversation.

"Eh, you know, fucking my grades up, stressed for college decisions, the usual. What's up with you?"

"Frankly, same. What else is there to do at this point?"

"Yeah...times are stressed. I wish it would just be over."

"Same. I want to be done with all the stress and shit and want to party without it lingering on my mind."

He took a sip out of his cup. She watched him do it. He let his drink sit in his mouth for a few seconds before swallowing it. When he did, his neck muscles twitched as the liquid went down to his stomach. Lily cursed at herself. She was always so observant with this stuff.

“Something wrong?” Jeremy asked.

“No. Not really.” She said and took a sip. The alcohol burned her esophagus as it went down. It was irritating; the smell, the taste, the aftermath. Her head wiggled around slightly. God, she hated booze.

“How do people drink this stuff?” she heard herself say. She wasn’t meant to say that out loud.

Jeremy looked at her.

“Not a fan of beer?”

“Not a fan of alcohol.”

“Oh, non-alcoholic, huh?”

“I prefer the phrase: doesn’t suffer from liver damage.”

Jeremy laughed at that. She liked it when he laughed. He had a way of laughing, bending a little backward, smiling so widely that his eyes shut forcibly, tilting his head slightly to the left and letting out a small laugh. He looked very cute when he laughed. He looked very cute in general.

Suddenly, a girl brushed by them and winked at Jeremy. Lily’s heart sank in her chest as the girl did that. She gave Lily a little death glare and walked away.

Fucking slut. Lily thought.

But this act made her aware, again of the eyes on Jeremy and her. She wished they would stop staring at her, jealous. They had “friends” they had come with to this party tonight, why wouldn’t they leave her alone?

Jeremy gave a polite smile to the girl which made Lily’s heart sink even further. He caught her staring at him and his expression changed.

There was silence between them for a few seconds, contrary to the environment around them which was wild and noisy.

Lily took another sip of the beer, she didn’t like it but there was something about it, a dry thirst in need of quenching, that wanted her to drink more.

It burned but the taste didn’t make her feel like vomiting. It could even be classified as...good.

“I thought you didn’t like drinking.” Jeremy said.

I thought I was your fucking date. Lily thought.

“I don’t.” Lily said, taking another sip. Her vision went a little hazy after that.

Jeremy let out a small awkward laugh. They drank in silence for a while. There were still a few people staring at them.

“You uh...want to dance?” Jeremy asked, politely. Lily’s head spun, literally.

“Sure.” She replied.

The staring reached its peak when they began dancing together. Stares turned to wincing and frowns; evident messages written all over the expressions: *I want to fucking kill her* or *That ugly slut with the basketball captain, what the fuck?* or *What’s so special about her?*

What was so special about her? Lily did have very good grades, but that’s not a factor someone takes into account when asking you out for a date. She wasn’t even as pretty as compared to others in her grade or even Sydney. Then, why had he noticed her? Why had Jeremy asked her out?

“You notice someone staring at us?” Jeremy asked her.

“As a matter of fact, I have. All fucking evening.” Lily replied.

“For real? That creep’s been staring at us for that long?”

Lily frowned.

“Creep?”

Jeremy stole a glance at someone behind Lily. Lily looked back and saw a guy with dark curly hair, a striped shirt with a black jacket on and wearing off-white trousers staring at them. He immediately looked away when he noticed them staring in their direction.

Lily turned back and frowned.

“He’s jealous of me.” Jeremy suggested.

Lily let out a small laugh.

“I think he is jealous of me.” She suggested, smiling.

“Oh, fuck off.”

Lily laughed, lightly.

“He has been staring at us the entire night, you said?”

“No...I don’t know...I didn’t...”

Jeremy frowned.

“I get the feeling we were talking about different people?”

Lily sighed.

“Who were you talking about?”

“Everybody.”

“Huh?”

“You didn’t notice? The girls have officially given me death threats without uttering a single word.”

“Why?”

“You.”

“Me...? Oh.”

Jeremy looked around and sure enough he noticed that a little more than one person was staring at them.

“Well, shit.” Jeremy swore. “You know, I never get women.”

“I don’t get us sometimes either.”

“Is the staring bothering you?”

“Well, duh!”

“Sorry. That was a stupid question.”

“I wish I was like Syd; not giving a fuck about anything. Speaking of which, where are they?”

Jeremy looked around.

“Probably making out somewhere. I did see Jimmy sneak a vodka bottle out. He is probably getting Syd wasted.”

“Gross. I don’t know why Syd hangs out with him. He is such a freak.”

“How so?”

“All he wants to do is get in her pants. Isn’t that evident to you? Aren’t you like his best friend or something?”

Jeremy sighed.

“Jimmy is...difficult.”

“That’s one way of saying he is a fucking asshole.”

“Jeez. You guys do not like each other, do you?”

“What’s about him to like?”

“What’s about him to not?”

Seriously? Lily thought.

“There’s a reason why everybody stares at you and not him.” Lily said. “Even though he is the homecoming king, he is a bully. I thought that much was pretty fucking clear to everybody. I mean, he openly harasses Juniors in the corridors! I thought you guys were friends how did you not know?”

Jeremy looked down momentarily.

“We are not like...best friends. I don’t think you can even categorize us as friends, actually.”

Lily was confused.

“Like...yeah I hang out with him...sometimes after school. But we are not really like...homies, you know? We are just...two people on the same sports teams who talk a few times but we don’t really get along. I don’t even know why he tries to fraternize with me.”

“Oh. Well, he is a fucking dickhead.”

“You guys sound like you have a history.”

“Oh, there’s no timeline to us...we are just two people who never got along well, ever.”

“Why?”

“Differences in nature, I guess and also the fact that I don’t do drugs, bully kids and fuck prostitutes unlike a certain homecoming king.”

“Jesus! He is top valedictorian with that shit under his belt? How does nobody know about this?”

“Oh, every pretentious fuck has secrets they don’t want to reveal to the wider public.”

“How do you know about this stuff then?”

Lily swallowed. Then they came back – the memories – like dribbles of water from a tap, trying to fill her jar of emotions to the brim. Only in this case, the dribbles were but a roaring river, violently forcing their way in, trying to break through the dam of her emotional capacity. She tried not to burst under its pressure.

“Do you want more beer?” she asked, trying to change the subject.

“Uh...sure...” Jeremy replied and watched as Lily went to fetch a few beers. Her expression had changed completely from a nervous mess to a sad wreck. He shouldn’t have asked that question.

He noticed the creep still staring in his direction with his peripheral vision. The hell was his problem?

When they got tired of dancing, they stood in a nearby corner and drank beer out of their plastic cups. The alcohol had begun to taste better to Lily after the fourth cup. The world seemed to revolve and shift as people around her danced. The music seemed a lot louder and the colors seemed a lot more vibrant; she wasn't sure if that was a good thing. They had been chatting about academics, school, family and other redundant shit all evening.

"So..." she heard herself say.

"So...?" Jeremy replied.

"Why me?"

The fuck am I saying? She thought.

Jeremy looked confused.

"What?"

"Out of all the girls you could have picked to take out to this party, why me?"

Jeremy's eyes expanded and he swallowed. Then he looked down for a few seconds as if he was thinking for an answer and looked back up at her, blushing.

"I don't know...I just..."

"...go on..."

He doesn't need to. Shut up.

"I just...found you cute...I guess..."

Her heart gave a little thump.

"...you guess?" she heard herself say.

Stop. She thought.

Jeremy gave off a small, awkward laugh. Lily wanted to laugh too, but she found herself staring at him dead cold. She chugged her cup of beer and the world seemed...radiant. Her head was now spinning.

"Lily, are you ok?" Jeremy asked.

Fuck no.

"Oh, I am feeling lit, thank you for asking." She replied. "You want a refill?"

“No...I don't think you should get more to drink.”

Lily agreed with him, internally. However, her hand reached out to a nearby person's cup, which she kindly took from his hand and drank all the beer out of.

“Hey...what the fuck?!?” the guy said. He was a lot taller than her, wore a cap backwards with khaki pants and a white shirt. “That was my fucking beer, asshole!”

Lily turned to see him, or his hazy projection thanks to the alcohol. It was like her brain had transcended to another plane of existence.

‘I am sorry’ is what she wanted to say but it came out as:

“Whatchu gonna do, skater boy, kick my ass?”

“Don't fucking test me, hoe!” He lunged.

“WOAH! WOAH! WOAH! Buddy! Buddy!” Jeremy got in between them. “Let's not get angry, okay man? She is just drunk, alright? There's more beer!”

The skater boy frowned at Lily angrily and so did a few of the people around him.

“Control your stupid girlfriend, Myers.” He ordered.

A few people around them were staring at them weirdly. The creep was still there, too.

Jeremy turned to Lily. “Let's get out of here for some time, okay?”

“No, I want to fight this guy!” Lily heard herself say.

“No, you don't, Lily.”

“Whatchu say, bitch?” the skater boy asked.

Lily got in fight or flight mode and punched the guy across his jaw. He was about to raise his own fists when a few of his friends stopped him.

“She is drunk, bro!” one of skater boy's friends said. “Chill!”

Lily was ready to punch the shit out of this guy, even though she definitely wouldn't have stood a chance against the big, bulky dude.

Skater boy's friends pulled him back and Jeremy dragged Lily away too. The commotion caused a few more people to stare in their direction.

Lily could hear a few of them whisper:

Look at her.

Poor Jeremy must be tired of her.

Why the fuck did he ask her out to this party?

A strange anger rose in her.

“I am not scared of you, punk!” she shouted, to the skater boy.

“Fuck off, you crazy bitch!” he replied.

“Pussy!” she laughed.

“Lily, stop talking.” Jeremy whispered trying to cover her mouth with his hand.

He dragged her away from the party towards the exit as she laughed, it was a loud and deep laughter fueled by more alcohol than dopamine.

“What the hell, Myers?” She demanded as he dragged her out of the villa. “I thought we were partying.”

“I think you have partied enough for tonight.” Jeremy said.

The world seemed radiant, metaphysical. The alcohol was messing with her head. She wanted to fight that skater boy. She wanted to fight the girls who stared at her, jealous. She wanted to fight that creep who was now staring at them through the window of the first floor.

“The creep’s still staring at us.” She began, looking at the creep straight in the eye.

“I am aware.” Jeremy replied.

“Of course, you are, Mr. Perfect.”

“...pardon?”

She felt powerful. She felt euphoric. She felt alive.

“Why are there two moons?” She said looking up at the sky.

“Because you are drunk, Lily.” Jeremy replied.

The swimming pool outside was jam packed with teens playing catch with a plastic ball. Their clothes were wet from the dip, they were consuming beer like it was a replacement of water and a few were howling like absolute idiots.

“Hell yeah!” Lily shouted at one of them in encouragement as her and Jeremy passed by the pool.

The guy who was howling smiled back.

“How’s the water?” Lily asked.

“Nice and cold.” The guy replied.

“Mind if I check?”

The guy laughed.

“Not at all.”

“Lily-” Jeremy began.

Lily escaped Jeremy’s clutches and jumped into the pool before he could say anything. The water splashed everywhere and a few drops even hit Jeremy. He winced slightly as that happened; him and water weren’t really on good terms. He preferred to stay away from it.

“Sick dive!” One of them shouted, as Lily emerged from the water.

“Thanks.” She spoke.

Then they all stared at Jeremy who swallowed because he knew what was coming next.

“C’mon in Myers, the water’s nice and cool!” One of them shouted.

Jeremy smiled back politely.

“Nah, I am good man.”

“C’mon in, Jeremy!” Lily said.

“No. Lily, I am not that good with water.”

He gently backed away when suddenly people grabbed him from behind. He tried to get out of their grasp but couldn’t.

“Yo, what are you guys doing?” he asked in terror.

“CANNONBALL!” one of them yelled as they pushed Jeremy into the water with them.

“Stop!”

SPLASH!

The water hurt his insides and his heart throbbed wildly in rejection of it. Suddenly, the basketball captain, the perfect scorer, the valedictorian, the ivy head and the perfect human being felt like a caged bird. The water wasn’t welcoming. The flame within him was doused and an old fear gripped him.

Lance. He heard someone say, it was someone familiar.

His heart ached when he heard that voice.

Dad? He called out. No, he couldn't be there.

Lance!

Dad? He called out again. It was him. No way, he was still...

Lance, help!

He wanted to cry, but no tears came. He desperately clawed to the surface of the water.

Dad he thought.

When he emerged out, Lily and so many others were laughing looking at him. He reached for a nearby edge and gripped it tightly, afraid of drowning.

Jeremy looked around, there was no sign of him. No, how could there be? His dad had...

"Can't swim, Myers?" One of the guys teased. "Water too cold for your liking?"

Jeremy didn't say anything.

"It's fun, huh?" Lily asked getting closer to Jeremy in the water.

"...sure." Jeremy said, shivering from the cold and terror of the old memories.

"You guys care for a game of catch?" One of the girls asked.

"Sure thing!" Lily said. These guys were drunk, yet sober enough to be nice to them. The girls were not staring at them weirdly either.

One of them got out a plastic ball and passed it to Lily. She passed it to Jeremy who didn't even notice it. He was in the cold water, breathing heavily, staring down into the deep water.

"Pass it back, Jeremy!" Lily said.

When he didn't reply she got close to him and took the ball floating near him.

"Lily, I think we should get out." Jeremy suggested.

"Bullshit. This is fun." She replied and passed it to another person.

"Lily, please."

"It will just be a few matches."

Jeremy clicked his tongue and got out of the pool. The familiar voice still echoed in his head.

Lance!

“Myers, what the fuck?” Lily asked. “C’mon! Have fun with us!”

Jeremy didn’t reply, he just breathed heavily. Lily wanted to console him but she was way too drunk.

“Fuck you, I thought you were cool!” she said.

It might have just been because he was soaking wet from the pool, but she saw tears trickle down his eyes.

“Whatchu crying for?” she asked.

WHY DID YOU SAY THAT OUT LOUD? She thought.

“I am not. You are drunk.” Jeremy said, his voice slightly breaking.

Lily got out of the pool and sat beside Jeremy. She gathered her bearing a bit. The world seemed a little less radiant.

“What’s up?” she asked him.

He didn’t reply.

“You guys in, or out?” the others in the pool asked.

Lily looked at them, then at Jeremy, then back at them. Something about the water had shaken him and it wasn’t the cold. She felt like an asshole who forced him to do something he didn’t want to.

“I am out. What about you Jeremy?” Lily replied.

Jeremy swallowed as he looked down at his feet.

“Same.” He spoke.

“kay!” a girl said and they began playing again.

“Lily, I think I need to go home.” Jeremy told her.

“Huh? Why?”

“I uh...feel a little sick.”

Bullshit she thought. But she didn’t want to be more of an asshole to him.

“Okay. Can you drop me home too?” she asked.

Jeremy let out at a sigh of relief.

“Yeah.” He spoke.

Lily smiled. She got up, still drunk and turned to the people in the pool, as if ready to announce something.

“Well, it has been a good one guys.” She began. “Thank you for inviting me- “

She paused. Her saliva began tasting bad.

“Continue?” one of the girls said.

Lily grasped her mouth and gagged.

No.

No matter how much she tried to resist, it forced its way out of her system; out of the stomach, straight up the pipe and right into the swimming pool. The teens rushed away in terror as the vomit spread all throughout the pool.

“Oh fuck.” She replied.

Then the insults came.

“Gross! What the fuck?”

“Hey, what the hell?”

Jeremy quickly snapped out of his little trance and grabbed Lily.

“Sorry, about that.” He spoke. “C’mon Lily.”

And they headed towards the parking lot.

The parking lot was deserted. There were a lot of cars everywhere but Syd’s car was gone. Her and Jimmy were probably on third base by now.

Jeremy looked visibly shaken. Lily felt a little sober now, after the puking. The world still was moving around frantically but she felt sober enough to apologize for what she did.

“Hey that’s ok. You just had a little too much to drink.”

“I am sorry. I am a mess.”

Jeremy smiled, politely.

“It’s okay, we all are.”

“Can I ask you something?”

“Yeah?”

“What was that about? Back at the pool?”

“Eh?”

“You looked quite shaken.

Jeremy's expression changed. He looked down and didn't say anything.

"Hey, you can talk to me." She spoke.

He sighed, as though choosing his next words very carefully.

"Basically, I can't swim." He spoke.

"Oh." She replied back. "Holy shit, that's surprising."

He laughed awkwardly.

"Why?"

"I mean, you are perfect at everything so I figured you'd be perfect at swimming too."

Jeremy turned red a little bit.

"Sorry, I kind of ruined your fun, huh?" he asked.

"No, it's okay, I embarrassed us earlier with the beer thing and finished it with a spectacular fountain of puke." Lily replied.

He laughed.

"Yeah, I see why you stay away from alcohol."

"Yeah..."

They walked up to Jimmy's car and Jeremy took out the keys.

"Jimmy lent you his car?" Lily asked.

"Yup. I am supposed to return it to him tomorrow morning. Quite surprising really."

"Mighty generous of him."

"He probably has like ten of them in his dad's garage anyway."

Lily laughed.

"Hey, so you didn't really answer why you asked me out?"

"Oh." Jeremy began. "I don't think that matters though, does it?"

It does to me.

"Why don't you tell me? Just out of curiosity."

"I said I found you cute."

"Correction: you *guessed* that you found me cute."

Jeremy looked at her. He then sighed, looked down and blushed slightly. He fidgeted with the car lock.

“You are really pretty, Lily. You seem very kind and helpful. Last basketball match I saw you staring at me. It was like you were cheering me on. I don’t know why, but I found myself mesmerized by you. Then after the match, Sydney found Jimmy and I and told me you about you and how nice you were to people, and how shy but crazy fun to be around, when I asked. So, I guess...I developed a crush on you.” He said.

Lily’s heart skipped a beat. *Fucking Syd*. She thought. This was so insane. The one person who Lily had a crush on for such a long time, confessed to her. It was like a scene right out of a romance.

“That’s crazy.” She said.

Maybe he didn’t hear her properly but Jeremy looked a little disappointed. “Yeah, I guess I am crazy.”

“No, no! Like I have a crush on you too.” She said.

Jeremy looked up at her and their eyes locked.

“Oh.” He spoke.

Was this really happening? Did she really just confess to him. It seemed like time had stopped. A parking lot wasn’t really a romantic place, but it didn’t matter. They didn’t say anything, just stared at each other in the moonlight. And without uttering a single word, the message was delivered on both ends.

But the wave of happiness went as suddenly as it came, interrupted by a nosy intruder.

“Lance McDonald?” a voice said.

Lily and Jeremy turned to see a familiar face. The black curly hair and off-white trousers, the striped shirt and black jacket ignited an anger in Lily. The creep was here, and he was disturbing their moment; *her* moment with Jeremy.

Jeremy frowned at him. But it wasn’t a what-the-fuck-can’t-you-see-we-are-busy-here kind of frown; it was a frown of awe. As if the creep had spilled his darkest secret and Jeremy couldn’t figure out how he got to know about it.

“...or wait...I think you go by Jeremy Myers now, don’t you?” The creep asked.

Jeremy paused for a second before replying.

“I don’t know what you are talking about.”

“No need to hide anything. I know who you are.”

Jeremy looked at him, looked at Lily and then back at him.

“Wherever you are from, whoever sent you, tell them I don’t care. I gave up on my old life. I am not Lance, not anymore. I am Jeremy. And I am going back home, goodnight.”

“You know you can’t. You have noticed *they* have surrounded your home.”

Lily was very confused. What was going on? Who was this guy? He seemed to know Jeremy. Who was Lance?

Jeremy swallowed and continued.

“I am not the old me anymore. Whatever advantage you all were thinking I would lend you in The War, you were mistaken. I want to lead a peaceful life away from all that. And here I am. So, if you would excuse us...” Jeremy said, opening the door of the car.

“You can’t run from your fate. No matter what plane you run to next, what name you disguise yourself with, you are first and foremost the Fire Blood Dreg.”

The what? Lily thought.

Jeremy looked at the creep with a bigger frown on his face. He was fuming.

“What plane are you from?” he asked.

“Three-A” The creep replied.

“...who sent you?”

“Arthur Rowland.”

That name seemed to change the expression on Jeremy’s face. Whoever he was, Jeremy knew him well.

“What does old one-hand want from me?” Jeremy asked.

“To protect you.” The creep replied.

“From who?”

“From *them*.”

Jeremy scoffed.

“I don’t need your protection. I am not coming with you.”

The creep sighed.

“Well then I am willing to force you.”

The creep took out a knife from his back pocket. Lily's heart began beating fast. She had no idea what their conversation entailed, but she knew the creep was bad news.

"You won't." Jeremy scoffed. "Not in front of *her*."

He pointed at Lily. The creep eyed Lily as if scanning her with X-ray eyes. Lily was alarmed but tried not to show it. He then looked back at Jeremy.

"You have no idea what I am willing to do." The creep said. "I was ordered to bring you back with me and I don't plan on going home empty handed."

Jeremy stepped forward and laughed lightly.

"What rank are you, boy?"

"Does it matter?"

"I don't want to kill anybody young."

Lily looked at Jeremy. *What did he just say?*

"Bold of you to assume I will let you."

The two boys stared at each other with blood-thirsty looks on their faces. Lily felt very scared. What was going on? And why was she caught up in this? This was not him; this was not the Jeremy she knew. No matter how angry he would get, he wouldn't threaten to kill someone.

Suddenly, Jeremy backed away.

"If Arthur Rowland wants me to side with him, then tell him to come to me himself. Tomorrow, 4 PM. I don't think I need to tell you my address? I guess you have all stalked me enough."

The creep thought about that for a while, then put the knife back in his back pocket.

"*They* are still near your house." He said.

"Trust me." Jeremy began. "*They* have been for a very long time. I will handle them."

"If this is a trick, you will have made a strong enemy."

Jeremy opened the car door.

"I have three planes after me already, boy. I don't think another one will be quite a threat."

Jeremy unlocked the door of the passenger seat and motioned Lily to sit inside. She obeyed, clearly freaked out.

“You shouldn’t involve the heretic.” The creep said pointing at Lily, who felt very intrigued by the word he used to describe her. *Heretic*.

“Why? Are you one of those *purists*?” Jeremy replied.

“I am not. I am concerned for her safety.” The creep replied.

“Worry about yourself.”

Jeremy started the car engine.

“Well then, remember my plea, boy.”

The creep watched as they drove away.

“Blank!” The creep heard someone call his name.

He turned to see a woman in her early twenties with white hair, round glasses a slim yet sexy figure walk toward him. She was wearing formal attire.

“I told you not to engage.” She said.

“I wasn’t going to wait until he left.” The creep, who was called Blank, replied.

“And?”

“He wants to meet Arthur in person. Tomorrow, 4 PM, his house.”

The woman slapped him across his face.

“Moron. It’s obviously a trap. Why didn’t you object?”

“Because I would, literally, be at his throat by now, if I didn’t.” he told her. She clicked her tongue. “Honestly, that outcome would have been a lot better. But *you* had to tell me to be passive.”

The woman laughed in mockery.

“You honestly think you would have stood a chance against a Dreg?”

“Oh, trust me, I would have been better than you.”

She grabbed him by the collar of this shirt and stared him dead in the eye.

“Don’t fucking reply to me in that tone of voice.” She said, in a cold voice.

“Or what?” he challenged, staring at her angrily.

The woman winced at him. “Just because you made it into field work at the merry age of seventeen don’t think you are cool. I am the alpha here, boy, and you will obey me. Is that understood?”

Blank swatted her hand away from his collar.

“Whatever.” He spoke.

“We are going after them.” She announced. “We are sorting this business out, right now.”

“He won’t listen.” Blank said.

“Then I will force him to.”

“So, you think *you* can fight a blood dreg?”

“Obviously not. I am not a fool like you are. But he would reconsider once he gets to know his life is in danger.”

“What?”

She pointed off in a distance. At first, Blank saw nothing but shadows. On concentrating however, he saw a few of the shadows move.

“Are those-” he began.

“Yes, it’s *them*.” She finished.

Lily was unsure whether the alcohol was making her hallucinate, but she was now in Jimmy’s yellow Chevrolet with Jeremy riding at thirty miles per hour towards her home, or at least she assumed she was. There was a silence between them that Lily was afraid to break. But she was curious and confused, more the latter than the former, so she opened her mouth.

“What was that about?” she asked.

Jeremy didn’t reply. He kept frowning and checking the side and rear-view mirrors, even though there was no car behind them.

“Jeremy, can you please talk to me. What the fuck was that about?”

He still didn’t reply,

“Who was that creep? Who is Arthur Rowland?”

“Stop talking.” Jeremy replied in a tone that shook Lily; it was very authoritative. But Lily rebelled.

“He said something about ‘them’ surrounding your house. Who are *they*? Are you in trouble?”

“No. Stop.”

“Are you a runaway? Is that why you transferred to school three years ago?”

“No...kind of...stop.”

“Wait...you are not a drug dealer...are you?”

“No.”

“Are you a criminal?”

“No!”

“But you threatened that guy with death-”

Jeremy stepped on the brakes. The car came to sudden, screeching halt. He turned to Lily with an angry look on his face.

“CAN YOU SHUT THE FUCK UP, HERETIC?” he shouted.

There it was, the word again. *Heretic*. It intrigued her so much so that she nearly overlooked the complete shift in attitude in Jeremy. This wasn't him. The Jeremy she knew was nice to everybody, the basketball captain, the ivy league student with coffee-brown eyes and coffee-like attitude. The Jeremy she was in the presence of now was a rage-filled wild animal.

“That creep called me that too. What does it mean?” Lily asked.

Jeremy grabbed his hair in frustration. His perfect image was being ruined bit by bit in Lily's eyes.

“Jeremy what the fuck is going on? I told you that you could talk to me. Why are you keeping-”

“My name is Lance McDonald.” He interrupted.

“Wha-”

“I am a class S wanted criminal from Plane 5B”

“But you said...wait from whe-”

“I have associations with the cult of convergence.”

“...wait you're a cultis-”

“I am wanted across three Planes for my valuable information for victory in The War.”

“three wha-”

“I am also the Fire Blood Dreg.”

“You're going too fas-”

“Did you understand a word I just said?”

“No-”

“Exactly. So, stop talking. Heretics like you will never understand...and why should you?”

If Lily was confused originally, she was thoroughly perplexed now.

“You can’t just do that. What the fuck are you talking about. Are you on drugs? ...Am I on drugs? What is a dreg? What do mean ‘plane’? Like the ones that fly in the sky? Wha-” she began

“Hush!” Jeremy said.

“No! I won’t ‘hush!’”

“Stop talking!”

“Then tell me-”

“STOP! Look!”

He pointed outside the car. There were no houses nearby, only hordes of trees and street lights. In the dark of the streets, she could see the silhouette of a figure walk gently towards them, swaying from side to side.

Jeremy tried to start the car but it wouldn’t comply.

Lily stared at the figure, there was something very wrong about it. On closer inspection she noticed there were more than just one.

“Fuck! C’mon!” Jeremy cursed, trying to start the ignition.

Lily got the feeling Jeremy knew what that was and that it would harm them. Her heart began beating a little faster.

As the figure got closer, Lily looked at in horror. It was humanoid...but not quite. It looked to a little disfigured. Like someone had cut off the limbs and pasted them back in a different place with super-glue. Whatever it was, it wasn’t human.

It made a raspy noise with what Lily assumed was its mouth and walked gently toward them, swaying from side to side.

The car engine suddenly roared to life and Jeremy hit the gas.

“...what the fuck...what the fuck was that?” Lily asked, in a scared tone.

“They found me...” Jeremy mumbled to himself.

“Jeremy WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT?”

“A Daemon.” He spoke.

“A Demon? Like those things from Hell?”

Lily was surprised how easily she accepted that information. Demons and ghosts and all mystical creatures of that sort didn't exist. But that disfigured entity could be nothing else.

"Oh, trust me..." he said. "...the hell they are from is much worse."

"Wha-"

He looked at her.

"Lily. Don't freak out. I will protect you. But for god's sake stop asking questions, it's pissing me off."

"That wasn't human..."

Jeremy sighed.

"It isn't...not an-"

Suddenly a figure appeared right in front of them. Lily screamed, Jeremy cursed and turned the handle bars to the right. The car lost control and violently spun off the pavement. There was a sound of glass shattering, then all went black.

Lily she heard someone say. The voice was muffled. She tried to open her eyes. Her head was spinning and her body hurt. Her hair was sticking up and her arms were too; she realized she was upside-down.

"Lily!" the voice was a little louder.

She opened her eyes. Her head was spinning, violently so. Her arms felt weird and she couldn't feel her legs at all.

"Lily!" Jeremy called.

She didn't reply. He was right outside the car and opened the door to her seat. But he was upside-down. He covered her head, unfastened her seat belt and got her out of the car. Her legs hurt as he did.

"Ow." She mumbled and a sharp pain struck her in the chest when she did.

Her vision was hazy but she noticed the car was lying upside down on the pavement.

Jeremy dragged her a couple of feet away from the car. There was shattered glass everywhere. There was a fire near the car, but it didn't seem to originate from it.

"Can you walk?" he asked before staring at her legs which seemed to be immobile.

No. She thought, but her chest hurt when she tried to say it out loud, like thousands of needles poking outwards from her body. It didn't hurt, but she could feel open wounds all throughout her body; red lips opened wide, spewing out blood.

Then a few raspy voices came from behind them.

Jeremy carried her and began running. He stumbled a bit while getting up. She could hear the voices getting louder. What was going on? Who was chasing them?

"Shit." Jeremy cursed.

All around them were trees, they were near a forest of some kind. She recognized the road; Syd and her had taken it while coming to the villa. The expression on Jeremy's face was one of pure terror.

She heard an explosion behind them; the car had detonated.

"I will protect you." He was mumbling. "I will save you."

He began running faster now. Lily's head was spinning. The raspy voices got further and further. Jeremy took a turn into the trees nearby. The *crinch-cronch* of the leaves and twigs sounded very loud in the quiet forest. Lily watched as the trees ran past them. Jeremy was panting like a dog and sweating profusely. Whoever...or whatever was chasing them, Jeremy did not want to contact them.

After running for a good long while, Jeremy stopped to take a little rest. He was panting wildly. He looked back and cursed, then looked around and put Lily down next to a tree.

He looked back anxiously then turned to Lily.

"Lily." He whispered.

This was a dream. It had to be. Some kind of a hallucination caused by the alcohol. She wanted to drift off to sleep but he slapped her lightly on the cheek to keep her awake.

"Lily, please listen to me." He pleaded. "There's way too many of them. I tried fighting them but it's no good. The Water dreg is here too. I don't think I will be able to-"

Suddenly an arrow came flying by and pierced him straight in the shoulder. Lily wanted to scream. If this was a nightmare, she hoped it would be over. Jeremy let out a grunt. His shirt started oozing out blood. A little fell on Lily.

"I will try to ward them off. But I don't think I will be able to finish all of them off. If I don't make it, please cut my heart out of my chest."

“Wha-”

“Squeeze out the blood. As much as you can and get it to 101 A, Flare Apartments at 4 PM tomorrow. That’s my house. Meet up with that creep and Arthur Rowland. They will take the Dreg to safety.”

“Wha-”

“Promise me, Lily. Cut my heart out and run. As fast as you can. Please. Promise-”

Another arrow pierced his neck this time. He dropped to the ground, choking. Blood began spurting from his neck and mouth. Lily stared awestruck as he coughed up blood and struggled to breathe. The next moments were even more bizarre.

He took out the arrow from his neck and if by magic, the wound began sealing up. Only then Lily noticed an even more bizarre detail: Jeremy wasn’t wounded at all. They had both been in a car crash and while Lily was covered from head to toe with open wounds in need of immediate medical attention, Jeremy didn’t look wounded at all. There was a sizzling sound that filled the air as his wounds closed, like something burning, followed by familiar raspy voices that seemed to be coming from all around them. They were all around them.

“Remember what you must do, Lily.” Jeremy said and got up. “Cut my heart out and run.”

Lily vision was still hazy but she tried to snap out of it and get up. Every inch of her body hurt. Blood oozed out like a flowing river forming a little puddle where Lily sat.

Jeremy looked at all blood and sat back down immediately.

“Lily. You’re...bleeding all over...” he said.

No shit, genius. She thought. She felt a strange anger on him. She didn’t really know why but she blamed Jeremy for her pain.

He scanned Lily with his hands hovering over her as though trying to find a singular source of the bleeding. The problem was that it was everywhere.

“Oh no.” she heard him say. “Oh fuck no.”

He didn’t seem to be concerned about the bleeding, no, he seemed to concerned about something else.

The raspy voices got louder. They were getting closer. Jeremy got up and scanned his surroundings. He had a look of terror on his face. He glanced at Lily then at his surroundings.

“Dammit.” He cursed.

He turned to Lily and gave her a look that sent shivers down her spine. He knew he couldn't do anything to help her. Even if he carried her, she would bleed to death. He couldn't save her; there was no point in trying to. The perfection that was Jeremy Myers looked very pathetic in Lily's eyes.

"I am sorry." He said. "I thought I could save you and the dreg. But I can only save two out of three of us. I..."

Tears trickled down Jeremy's eyes, they were tears of helplessness. He closed his eyes momentarily and muttered words that would haunt her for years to come.

"I wanted to save you Lily. I really did. I am sorry." He said, and ran.

"Wait. Come bac-" Lily, managed before coughing up blood. Had he really just left her?

The voices got louder. This was it. Her body ached. Her head hurt and her vision was blurry. The ribs in her chest poked out like needles and it hurt when she tried to breathe. Her legs were probably broken, she couldn't move them. Her hands were surprisingly unharmed. She felt very sleepy. It would be so nice to just drift off, accept the quiet embrace of death. She had often thought what dying would feel like. She always thought it would be painful, that it would drag her into an abyss of helplessness and slowly, painfully consume her, enjoying every bit of sadistic pleasure it got from her suffering. No, it was more inviting. It felt like slicing through warm butter, like a loving, gentle hug. She felt like she was running to her mother.

Mom, she thought, and images of her family came rushing back. Memories of her first bicycle ride, of her mother making bacon, of her sister Gwen playing tennis with her, her brother George beating her at Smash Bros., and of her dad...leaving all of them.

The raspy voices got closer. Her head began to spin violently. Even if those abominations didn't get her, she would die of over bleeding.

She would die here, all alone. With no achievements to speak of. She didn't even go to college. She didn't even kiss her crush on the lips...and, how could she? He had left her all alone to save himself.

She hoped he would do something good with his life. He would go to a prestigious college, meet a girl far more pretty than her and marry her while Lily's corpse rotted in a graveyard.

She closed her eyes as tears began to fall.

Suddenly the raspy voices seemed to move away from her. They seemed to be running towards somebody else. Immediately the thought of Jeremy came to her

mind. He was the reason why they had followed them, or at least that's what Lily presumed had happened.

There was a strange quiet as she waited for something to happen, then she heard a cackle of a fire. She smelled something burning; it was both distant and right in front of her. She opened her eyes and saw her clothes had caught a bit of a fire. She jolted herself awake and began to try and douse it. After a few attempts her jeans finally stopped burning. It was then that she heard a distant scream – it was Jeremy's.

It was a blood-curdling scream that echoed through the night. Then it got muffled by louder, far more disturbing noises of chewing, of crunching and of swallowing. Without looking, she knew exactly what was going on. *They* had caught up to Jeremy.

She thought of helping him, then she reminded herself that he had left her. As messed up as it sounds, she slightly enjoyed the sounds of bones being crushed, his flesh being torn into and his helpless screams.

He had broken her heart, and now *they* were breaking him.

She looked up at the sky. It was a starless night sky, illuminated only by the moon. It looked tranquil. Five minutes passed. Then ten. Lily knew because she counted.

Why was she counting? *I should just fall asleep* she thought. It was so much easier. Then the raspy voices came again. They got closer and closer and Lily knew, that they had come for her.

Good. She thought. No more hurt. She could drift off and let the malformed abominations eat her, like they ate Jeremy. It would be so simple to just drift off. But no, something within her wanted to live. It was the same thing that still wanted to go to college, that still wanted to kiss Jeremy Myers on the lips right after a tight slap across the face. It was the same thing that wanted to see her family again, to tease her sister, to beat her brother at video games, to help her mother with cooking and to kill her bastard dad one day.

It was the same thing in her, that refused to let her die for she had so much to do and so much more to discover.

She twitched, tried to move her legs. Then she turned and fell face first onto the leafy, dirt floor of the forest.

Move. She told herself and began crawling. Bit by bit, she forced herself to move. First the right hand that pulled her entire body, then the left. Her legs were definitely broken. The voices got closer.

Move. She told herself. She tried getting up but her legs were jelly. She stuck to crawling and increased her speed. She wanted to escape them. She wanted to live.

Move. She told herself, and so she did.

Then came a roar from deep within a forest. It was hollow, deep and definitely didn't come from one of the abominations. It sounded much bigger, much more ferocious, and much hungrier. The abominations stopped and stared deep into the forest.

Crunch. Something snapped its jaws deep within the forest, and Lily got the feeling that it wasn't done.

The abominations let out a collective screech of terror and began running away from whatever was within the forest. There was a sound of twigs breaking as if something was running.

Crunch. Another one gone.

Lily was terrorized. Any moment, she could be the next victim to whatever it was.

Crunch.

There was a raspy screech.

Crunch.

Then there was a roar again that made every strand of hair on her body rise.

"Move." She said out loud. Every cell of her body hurt when she did.

Crunch. Whatever this new thing was, it was getting closer. Eating more of those Demons.

Lily crawled faster.

Crunch.

Rip. Crunch.

Her heart began beating fast in her chest.

Crunch

"Move."

Crunch.

"Move!"

Rip. Tear. Crunch.

Suddenly two demons ran just a few feet beside Lily – disfigured abominations and one of them was holding a bow and arrow with what seemed to be its hands (except they looked like feet). One moment they were there the other, a great beast lunged at one of them. It bit into the archer.

Crunch

and swallowed it whole.

The other abomination tried to bite its paw with what Lily assumed was its mouth (except it was on its head) but the beast grabbed the abomination's entire torso by its sharp claws, that seemed to shine in the moonlight like they were made of iron, and ripped it apart with its teeth, that seemed to be made of the same.

Rip.

It bit into the demon.

Crunch.

Lily stared at the big beast that sniffed the air looking for more prey – it was a wolf, bigger than any Lily had seen, as big as a house. Its claws and teeth seemed like they were made of Iron and part of its rib cage was exposed. But the most bizarre detail about it was that it was entirely made of a black liquid that dripped onto the forest floor. It was blood. Somehow Lily knew it was Blood. Except it was infected beyond comparison.

The beast then turned to Lily, and she could feel her heart sink into her chest. Its eyes were a deep, blood-red and they were filled with nothing but hate. Lily thought she could see her own fears in them.

It snarled and growled and got closer.

Lily felt tears trickle down her cheeks.

“No. Please.” She begged. “Stop.”

The beast didn't listen, it only got closer.

“Help.” She spoke. “HELP!”

But she knew nobody was coming to help. She raised her hand in retaliation as the shadow of the great beast loomed over her. It split its jaws and for a moment she could smell its breath – the stench of rotting corpses.

Its enormous snout enveloped her and before she could run, before she could call again for help, before she could do anything

Crunch

Lily woke up with a start. She looked around, breathing heavily. Her clothes were wet, presumably from the sweat. She got up. From her window, early morning light was leaking in. The sky was turning a shade of deep blue from black; dawn was approaching.

She glanced around her room. It was the same as ever – no leaves, no forest, no crashed glass, no car, no blood.

Some of her clothes were sticking out of the wardrobe as they always did because she was lazy to neatly arrange them. Her backpack was in a corner. Her walls were lined with pictures of her friends and her family. There was a digital clock showing the time: 5:57 PM. The two doors that led downstairs to the rest of her house and the bathroom, respectively were shut tight. A wall mirror was attached to one of the doors of her wardrobe.

There was no sign of any demons, any wolf or any Jeremy, except for a polaroid of him on her desk that she stared at most evenings.

Sweat trickled off her forehead as images of her nightmare burned into her mind. God, she hated her head. It was all that it was – a bad dream. She looked outside the window, soon it would be morning.

Birds had begun to chirp. Soon everybody would wake up and it would get busy. She tried to get her breathing into control. As she rubbed her eyes, images of her nightmare came back – the party, the creep, the disfigured human-like abominations, the car crash, the pain, the blood, the bite.

She took a deep breath and tried forgetting about it.

That's all it was. She told herself. A stupid dream.

It seemed so real, but it's all it was – a nightmare.

After all, why would Jeremy choose someone like you? And demons? Really?

She stared at herself in the mirror on her wardrobe. A girl with messy dark brown hair stared back at her with her blood red eyes. Wait what? Lily blinked and stared again at the girl in the mirror – she had dark-brown hair and eyes; Lily was just tired. As memories of the nightmare faded, she noticed her eyes were wet, like she had been crying.

A lingering feeling had come over her. Not remorse over the nightmare or it's cruelty, no, but loss. As if she had lost a part of her. But...what?

From a distance, Blank and the white-haired girl stalked her through the window, carefully crouching so as to ensure Lily didn't notice them. The white-haired girl was fuming. She was made in-charge of this mission but Blank, the cuck that he was, wasn't obeying any of her orders.

"Now what?" The girl asked.

"Now we wait." Blank replied.

"For what?"

"For her to show signs."

The girl scoffed.

"And what if she doesn't?"

"She will."

"Let's just say she doesn't."

"She will."

"How the fuck are you so sure? How do we even know it's her?"

Blank gave her a stare.

"You are not serious?"

The girl looked at him.

"Lance McDonald is dead. All we find in the spot where we found his body are twelve daemon corpses and one teenage girl, still breathing. What does that tell you?" Blank said.

The girl sighed.

"I hope you are wrong."

Blank grunted.

"Why?"

"Because I don't want a fucking heretic as the new Fire Dreg."