

“We need to get supplies,” Aimee blurted, causing me to jump in my chair, my pencil dragging a haphazard line through my drawing.

I groaned as I looked down at the stroke, deciding right then and there that I was going to be throwing this one away. Didn't matter really, I'd been doing it mainly because I was bored, but it still sucked. Couldn't even erase the line because I'd take a whole bunch of lines out with it. Not worth the effort.

Pulling myself out of mourning, I turned and looked up at her from my chair. “What do you mean?”

“We need snacks and stuff! You know, junk food. Sup-plies,” she said, emphasising the last.

I looked down at myself for a moment and grimaced. Junk food and I had a complicated history. I needed to put on a bit of weight, but I just couldn't bring myself to do so. It had taken a lot of effort to get to where I was now, and I was scared that if I put on weight, the fat would go to places that would leave me looking less feminine. Better to stay “waifish” as she'd called it. Buuut... on the other hand... Chocolate.

“Alright, but where to?” I asked. “Got a place in mind? They don't exactly sell junk food down at the hall offices.”

“Yes, I have just the place! There's a supermarket down the road a little that sells a bunch of baked goods they make on site. Wanna check it out?” she asked almost too eagerly. Actually scratch that... baked goods. Yes please.

“Yes!” I smiled, pushing myself to my feet and grabbing my purse. “Show me where these baked goods reside!”

“You're such a dork, I love it,” Aimee laughed, putting on her shoes.

We got ourselves ready to go outside, which for Aimee meant taking her top off and putting a bra on, much to my discomfort. She seemed absolutely fine with getting topless in front of me, and frequently she did it without warning. As for me, I normally kept my bra on until it was time to sleep, even if it got a little uncomfortable sometimes. My bra was a sort of armour against my old, forced masculinity.

I was definitely feeling that discomfort now after my second long day of college, although this day had become a little more interesting than yesterday. They had actually started to teach us things. It was all groundwork so far, but anything was better than health and safety stuff. Unfortunately, Lianna had still been in all my classes, giving me a glares every now and then just to make my day that much worse. It seemed like as the hours wore on though, she was mostly just content to ignore me. That was absolutely okay with me.

“You call me a dork, but you’re the one who named your dildo,” I commented as we left the room.

“That is perfectly normal, thank you very much,” she said, flicking her hair with mock hauteur.

“I haven’t named mine,” I said offhandedly.

“You have one?” she asked incredulously. “Why? You’re like... who do you even imagine when you’re using it?”

I shrugged, not really sure what to say. She still hadn’t realised I was trans, and I guess I wanted to let her keep thinking that, although she probably wouldn’t mind. It didn’t really matter one way or the other in the end though.

“No no, this is too juicy for you to just shrug your way out of it,” she insisted, almost tripping down the stairs in her haste to make determined eye contact. “This could be the key to the mystery!”

“The mystery... wow, you’ve given my confused sexuality a name? Is there a capital M in there?” I laughed.

“Well there wasn’t, but now there is. The Mystery,” she said, rolling the words around like she was tasting a wine. “I like it. The Glade Mystery.”

I gave a sigh and rolled my eyes, only to be distracted when I realised something. I’d just been bantering. That had been banter! Did that mean that Aimee was like, already my friend? Bantering was a friend thing that friends did and... I had a friend!

“Aimee?” I blurted, unable to contain myself. “Are you my friend?”

“What? Huh? Um, well... I’d like to think so, why?” she said, looking a little confused.

"Nothing," I grinned, feeling like an idiot for being so excited to have a friend, but not really caring. Friends were good.

My good mood was dampened slightly as we made our way to the door out of our building, and Lianna stepped through it coming the other way. She looked up and saw me, her eyes narrowing. Then she very purposefully closed the door right as we got to it, walking away without a word.

"Well that was just a little fucking rude," Aimee commented.

"She's been in all my classes," I sighed, walking over to the wall to swipe my card and open the door.

"Oh that's rough," Aimee winced. "Let me guess, she's been throwing dirty looks at you the whole time."

"Yeah, most of the time," I nodded sadly.

"Not all the time?" Aimee chuckled softly. "She takes breaks?"

"Sometimes she gives me weirder looks. I can't figure out what they mean," I told her as we left the dorms entirely.

"Huh. What do they look like?" she asked idly, checking her phone as we walked down and out of the college grounds.

"I don't know. Intense, I guess. Not bad though just... intense," I said, unable to put words to the way she looked at me sometimes when she thought I wasn't paying attention.

Aimee stayed silent for a moment then grinned at her phone. I don't think she'd been paying attention. "Aw yes, I have a date!"

"Wait really? Just now?" I asked, feeling very interested how that had all worked out just now.

"Who is she?"

"My date is a he... actually," she said thoughtfully, her eyes boring into mine suspiciously.

“Oh, sorry,” I mumbled, breaking the disarming eye contact to look at something else. Anything else. Aimee didn’t push it, and we continued in silence.

As we walked, my mind wandered back to Lianna, as it had so often been doing recently. I was getting annoyed with her. Sure, I’d broken her laptop, I felt terrible about it... but she was making it her mission to hate me. Like, why? Why was she that angry? It was just mean and... unnecessary.

She’d taken a jab at me today in class, some finely worded sentence that meant nothing to the rest of the class but had referenced my clumsiness. The whole thing sucked and she was making it worse by the day. No actually, she was making it worse by the *hour*, and the whole thing was made even harder by the fact that my rebellious eyes just would not stop drifting over to look at her, like I needed to keep her in my sights in case she jumped me or something.

We made it to the supermarket that supposedly had the baked goods, and I watched in awe as Aimee filled a shopping basket to the brim with various snacks. I was content to grab two large chocolate bars off the shelf, knowing it would take me a week to eat them. I was just... bad at snacks. I got so focused on whatever I was doing that they’d sit there on my desk and gather dust. It did not seem like Aimee would have the same problem with her snacks though.

“Alright, I’m getting these cookies here in case the date goes badly tomorrow, because you always need comfort food after a bad date. Then there’s my movie snacks in that corner there. I think I still need studying candy though,” she said like she was planning the invasion of some country or other.

“Who is this guy by the way?” I asked offhandedly, still in awe of the growing mountain of junk food in her basket.

“He’s called Jack, really tall, really buff. So buff, oh my god. He’s a sophomore, and he’s pretty nice. Very chill too. I met him in the line for food this morning and we sat down to eat together, which by the way, you should have been at breakfast,” she said happily. “Why weren’t you at breakfast by the way, I asked and you just grumbled at me from under the covers... nevermind, doesn’t matter. This guy... kinda funny he’s called Jack, since he’s... jacked. Bet he’s hung too.”

My mind reeled for a moment as she babbled. That sounded way too much like my friend Jack for comfort, and then she went and mentioned the hung part and I felt a bit of bile in my mouth. Oh god no, I did not want that mental image.

“Right,” I said quietly. “Bet he is.”

“His friends were a bit weird though. Can’t remember their names, I wasn’t really paying attention to them,” she was saying, continuing to talk about Jack, who was almost definitely the same Jack I was friends with.

We left the store while Aimee was still talking about Jack, and I was starting to feel very physically sick with anxiety. If she actually ended up dating Jack I was going to get seen and found out for sure. I mean... plus, Aimee could do better than Jack. She just seemed... she seemed like she needed a guy who would be doting, and Jack was anything but that.

I found my chance at revenge for Aimee’s gushing on our way home. On the other side of the street from us, I spotted it. An art supply store. Heaven on earth. The black hole of money, where my wallet and allowance went to die.

“Aimee,” I blurted, surprising her out of a description of Jack’s eyes. “We’re going over there.”

“What? Why?” she asked looking over in the direction I was pointing.

“Because I want to,” I said stubbornly, already walking towards the nearest crosswalk.

Rushing after me and struggling with her bags, she asked, “What is that place?”

“It’s... an art store,” I said with breathless excitement.

Art stores were incredible places. Each paintbrush, each pencil and each canvas screaming out its potential to me. The possibilities and ideas always came in a heady rush as I imagined the uses and techniques that a certain brush or ink pen would allow me to do. I saw the wall of sketch books in each store and imagined the graphite I would fill them with. Gosh... and don’t even get me started on the watercolours.

“I think you’re drooling,” Aimee giggled as we closed in on the store.

“Wait, what? Am I?” I asked, wiping at my mouth worriedly.

“No, I was joking!” she exclaimed.

“Wow, mean,” I pouted, trying to fight my damn reddening cheeks.

“You’re so easy to tease,” she grinned.

I gave her a mock glare and turned away, walking into the store. The store was like any other I’d been in, which was exactly what I’d wanted. There was an entire section for easels, another for canvases. I spotted the fabled watercolour section in the back instantly, and made a beeline for it. I hoped they had some new colours in. I was always looking for that perfect blue. I don’t know why. Something about a rich, deep sky blue was just so exciting.

Deep reds in watercolour were a close second. In fact, any oversaturated colour was something I loved. I was all about throwing huge, garish, in your face colours on a work rather than sticking to the more muted realistic versions. I just really loved colours I guess.

I started moving for the watercolour section, but didn’t make it there as I swerved to the side when I saw the wall of sketchbooks and pads. I needed a new one after all, because my current one was getting closer and closer to full. I stood and stared in open wonder at all the different choices. There was a cute one with white flowers on a blue background that I really liked.

I grabbed the blue one and continued onwards towards the watercolours only to stop when I reached the acrylic paints. I needed to buy like, all of them. I hadn’t brought my set from home, my parents wouldn’t let me, even though I needed them for class. I started grabbing paints left, right and center, my hands rapidly filling with them as I decided I needed more and more.

“I think you might need this,” Aimee commented dryly after a minute, handing me a shopping basket.

“Oh! Thank you!” I said sincerely, dropping all the paints into the basket and then taking it from her.

“Fuck, are you even real?” Aimee chuckled. “You’re so fucking cute, you’re making me wish I was like, at all romantically interested in girls.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, looking up at her in surprise, momentarily knocked out of my zone.

“Exactly what I said,” she winked.

“Oh,” I murmured, still very confused. Then my attention was caught again by more art supplies and off I went.

I rushed around the store, mirroring Aimee's earlier display with her snacks. I did need a lot of art supplies though, so I made sure to get everything I could think of. I could tell that I'd be back here many times over my degree. I didn't just get things I knew I needed though... I got more. I got several things I probably didn't strictly need. There was this one really strange looking brush, I had no idea what it was for, but I wanted it so I could play around. It just looked interesting.

Eventually, my friend got sick of it and ordered me to buy my stuff and get out of the shop because she wanted to eat her snacks and watch a show or something. I did as she asked after a lot of pouting, and spent far too much of my parent's money. They wouldn't notice, so it's not like it mattered, but I was only meant to use that card for college costs, and my purchases hadn't been strictly college related. Most of them were... but not all.

When we got back, I stayed in our room for all of five minutes, only long enough to dump all the stuff I didn't need before I rushing out again.

I took a bunch of painting stuff with me, off on a mission to find the workroom that us juniors were allowed to use. I didn't want to get paint everywhere and have to pay to get the carpet replaced or anything like that. So I packed everything into my art bag, placed my big headphones on my head and headed out.

The workroom was a fairly nice space in a newer part of the college, with wide open windows and lots of light. It was great for doing artistic stuff, and I guess that was the point. I dragged one of the high wheeled desks over into a corner and locked the wheels, then went in search of an easel. This was going to be a practice piece more than anything else.

Earlier in the day I'd drawn a quick sketch of Akali, my favourite champion from league, in the midst of fighting a bunch of generic dudes. Carefully taking the drawing out now, I taped it to a board and set it on the easel, then started my ritual.

My ritual for painting was to find a set of songs that matched the mood of the piece I was working on, then I'd throw them into a quick playlist and hit shuffle. I don't know why, but I just needed the emotions in the work to come out and help me. It was hard to explain.

The painting was tricky, because I was using acrylics as my medium. Acrylics were a great medium for a lot of things, but they dried much faster than oils, forcing you to either put a substance into the paint to slow the drying process, or just paint faster. I personally liked the pressure of it all. The idea that I needed to work fast and get it right, or it would all be ruined and I'd need to paint over everything.

I decided I was going to do more of that colour play that I'd been so keen on recently. I swapped colours out at random, and I started to get really into it. A lazy swipe of paint here for background detail, swap out the black of the character's hair for a dark purple, then replace the skin tones entirely with more reddish purple. It was a wild and erratic piece and it was so much damn fun.

I was almost finished when I caught a figure in the corner of my eye and turned to see who it was. Lianna was standing there watching me, her bag half placed on a desk, but it was starting to fall off.

I slipped one headphone off my ear and cautiously asked, "What?"

"You were dancing," she said quietly, almost gently, then she blinked and frowned. "What are you doing to your piece. The colours are all wrong, even I can see that. The perspective is funny too."

"Um, I don't know. I'm playing around with abstract colour use and stuff. It's fun," I said defensively, avoiding her eyes and looking at my paints instead.

"Right, you're one of those people," she said in a tone that indicated she was less than impressed. "I prefer to try for realism."

I flicked my eyes up quickly to catch her expression, and found her eyes on me. We stared at each other for a long time, and even if I found it incredibly uncomfortable, I couldn't look away. I was trying to figure out what colour her eyes were. They were so dark I couldn't make it out. I was assuming they were brown, but there was always other possibilities.

"Realism is boring," I replied finally, replacing my headphone on my ear and turning my back to her.

It was hard to get back into my groove again though, I could feel her behind me, her very presence sitting in the back of my mind like a mild headache. I was grumpy and pissed off at her by the time I had finished my work. I'd had to concentrate way too hard to work past her being there, and my painting skills had suffered. I needed that groove.

I packed up my things, doing my best to ignore her as she flicked glances over at me. Why couldn't she just leave me alone? Damn this sucked. She sucked. I had thought she might be okay, but she seemed to just be all rotten.



I gave her one glare as I left the room, throwing it into her deep dark eyes like a parting quip in an argument. Then I felt a nervous sort of wriggling in my chest as her eyes did that thing they'd been doing to me. I had no damn idea what it was, it was like anxiety but... not as bitter. Whatever, she was awful and I was going to do my abstract colour play whether she approved of it or not!