

"I don't think she's worth all of this."

"Shut up Collin, You know nothing about love."

"Love?" Collin wrinkled his nose in disgust. "What about cooties?"

Lucas scoffed.

"What you haven't thought about it? You could get sick."

"As if. Amara doesn't have cooties," Lucas said peering around the corner. "The coast is clear, come on." The boys darted into the open corridor and behind a set of lockers.

"You don't know that."

"Yeah I do, pretty girls don't have cooties duh."

Collin looked at him, his brows furrowed. "It's not too late to turn back you know? Mrs. Lawrence wouldn't even know we'd left."

"I'm doing this with or without your help." Lucas said, glancing around the lockers. He turned back to Collin. "Am I going to have to do this alone?"

Collin sighed. "No."

"Come on then." Lucas motioned and they ran into open classroom.

Collin followed.

The walls of the art room were covered in murals and pieces that must have been older than them. The room was filled with paint splattered tables and in the far corner sat the teacher's desk, bearing the weight of stacks upon stacks of art. Lucas weaved his way through the tables and began to shuffle through the stacks. "Be my lookout okay."

"Yeah, okay." Collin stood by the doorway leaning against the wall. "What's so special about this art anyway?"

"It's the best picture I've ever drawn. It's perfection I'm telling you-"

"Yeah, but why do you need it now?"

"For Amara."

"Couldn't you give it to her after we get them back?"

"No." Lucas turned to his friend "Think about it. It would be on the wall in the hallway for a solid month or two. By the time I give it to her she'll have seen it. I have to do this now."

"Fine, but could you hurry up?" Collin looked out the rows of windows. Outside their class was on the playground.

Lucas ignored him. "I think I found our class." He thumbed through a stack of wavy paper. "Yeah, there's your's, and Sara's and- Found it!" Lucas carefully slide the colorful art from the stack.

"Let me see that," Collin said as he weaved through the tables. "I wanna know what I the fuss is about." He took the painting from his friend. The painting was a self-portrait with unaligned eyes and a wide spaced out smile. But the crowning jewel were the flames shaped like bubble letters. "We became criminals for this piece of garbage?"

"It's not garbage." Lucas snatched the art from his friend and carefully rolled it up. "And besides, it's not like you're one to talk with your portrait's got elephant ears."

"Yeah, but I'm not passing it off as a gift-"

"Yes, Mr. Adams, I do believe the art department is in need of new facilities. When you see the state of the art class you'll understand what I mean," the Vice Principal's voice could be heard out in the hallway.

The boys shared a moment of panic before diving underneath the desk, pulling the chair in after them.

Loud footsteps entered the room one pair of clicking heels belonging to the Vice

Principal and a pair of men's dress shoes could be seen in the few inches exposed from under the desk.

"Yes, this is disconcerting," the man replied.

"Precisely. The room is too small for all of the tables needed and there's only one sink to rinse out brushes." The woman's eyes roamed the room. "And look at this!" She marched over to the teacher's desk. "Look at all of this art. There's nowhere to put it. Mr. Brown has to keep the art not on the walls piled here. It's absurd."

The man followed her to the front of the desk. "Yes, I see your point. The arts have been receiving less funds."

Under the desk Collin wriggled his nose.

The Vice Principal was wearing perfume. The scent invaded their space.

Lucas almost gagged but stopped himself just in time to notice Collin. He shook his head frantically sending a glare in the boy's direction.

Collin's nose twitched and his mouth opened.

"I'll be informing the board of this problem at the next meeting." The gentleman said glancing at his phone. "I really should head back to the office--"

"Nonsense. You need to see the auditorium." She ushered him towards the door.

The man stopped.

Collin's eyes fluttered closed.

"What's wrong with the auditorium?"

Collin began to sneeze and Lucas clapped a hand over his friend's mouth. The sneeze was muffled but the boys still sat there in a few seconds of frozen horror, their eyes wide and bodies rigid.

"It was built in 1960," The secretary responded, pulling the gentleman down the hallway.

The boys looked at each other before grins spread across their faces.

"I can't believe we got away with that," Collin said, laughing.

"Nah, I knew we'd be fine." Lucas climbed out from underneath the desk. "Coast is clear."

Collin followed suit but stopped Lucas before he could get to the door. "Wait, are you sure you want to give her your self-portrait?"

"Why wouldn't I?"

"Well, aren't gifts supposed to be about the other person?"

Lucas looked at him for a moment before his face broke into a grin. "Trust me, the girls like me. Any of them would love to get their hands on this," he said, pointing to the scroll.

"If you say so."