

# The Last Grimm: Red's Hood



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The Last Grimm  
*Red's Hood*

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## Chapter one

I did one last mirror check before leaving the comfort of my car. The curls I had been so meticulous about were now flat, my lipstick was quickly fading, and it was only nine am. I caught a glimpse of blue and black in my rearview mirror, the bus was early. Slamming my car door shut I ran across the street hoping that the driver would be nice enough to not shut the doors in my face.

Spotting an empty seat towards the back I made a beeline for the coveted area. I slid in next to the window and closed my eyes letting my cheek rest against the cold window. Snowy days always seemed to make the windows of the Port Authority buses colder than normal, and it felt so good against my warm skin. Music blared through my headphones, unable to block out the chatter of the people around me. Today was one of those days that I woke up cranky and everyone around me did not help the cause. The stress of interviewing for the internship seemed to add to my irritability.

It was already pure luck that Belinda Hexe even called me. I was positive being eighteen and a college freshman would make her toss my application in the trash, even though I did have stellar grades and experience. But she called.

The black pumps squished my toes together, and I tugged at the hem of the skirt my mother let me borrow. Business suits weren't really my thing. I dug through my oversized purse for a hair clip completely giving up on my hair looking presentable down. I fussed with a few stray strands of hair that escaped my grasp when the bus lurched forward suddenly. I could hear the brakes squealing as the driver tried to stop it from hitting something. My body was thrown forward, but I managed to throw my hands out right before my head smacked into the metal pole in front of me. The hair clip slipped out of my hand and bounced under a seat in front of me. My now loose hair swung around into my face as I braced for impact. My knees smacked against the plastic seat back in front of me, and shouts of surprise rang out through the crowded bus as people fell to the dirty floor. I watched from my seat, unable to squeeze past the large woman next to me as they struggled to get up, confused and somewhat angry. Towards the front, a toddler began to wail. My heart wrenched for her. Her mother gently bounced her up and down on her knee while smoothing the girls hair. I saw her lips moving and could only guess what she said to soothe her child.

"What the hell, man!" a teenager shouted, using a steel pole to hoist himself up.

"Sorry, folks. *Something* ran out in front of the bus," the driver said.

"What was it?" a tall and lanky woman who had very curly, brown hair and wore shorts on the freezing winter day asked.

"It *looked* like a really big dog," the driver said, standing on his perch and looking out the windows.

"Why didn't you run it over?" someone from the front of the bus asked angrily.

"I'm not running animals over. Is everyone okay?" he asked, sitting down.

"Yeah," most people grumbled.

A few weren't happy at all. They shot him dirty looks, and loudly complained that they wanted his drivers I.D. number and his supervisor's line, while someone else actually threatened a lawsuit.

*Hadn't they ever heard of an accident?* I thought to myself, astounded that they didn't realize he may have prevented an accident, saving them a trip to the hospital and

some pain.

I looked out the window and down the alley searching for the animal. I didn't see any running around. In fact, nothing appeared out of the ordinary, just the usual downtown Pittsburgh lunch crowd, appearing unstart led by the bus's sudden screeching brakes. Nobody seemed to have seen the animal either or at least they didn't appear fazed by it. I suppose it could have been some stray dog trying not to get squashed by the big tires. Directly in front of me a woman with over bleached hair, a too short skirt and well-worn boots picked at scabs on her cheeks, while rocking back and forth, muttering something to herself. She had a red hood pulled down over her eyes, but I could see her lips moving a mile a minute. She turned her head to look at me. I finally had a clear view of her face. Her eyes were sunken in and purple, her face an ashen white. I wondered why the woman looked how she did. I watched her for a few minutes with a bit of pity, but quickly diverted my stare back out the window.

"Hey. Hey, you. Girl," she said.

Too late, she saw me looking at her.

"Yes?" I asked.

"Do, do, you have a smoke?"

"No, sorry," I replied, trying not to stare at her.

"Liar," she accused.

"Excuse me?" I asked.

"You're a liar. Everyone smokes!" her voice started to rise enough to make a few people stop talking and watch us.

"I'm sorry, lady, but I really don't smoke."

She gave me a nasty look, and turned her attentions to the business man sitting next to her. As the bus rounded another corner I stood; trying to squeeze between the large, protruding stomach of the woman seated next to me and the plastic seat it pushed against. She either did not care that I fought for my life against her fat, or did not feel me being squished. Once I freed myself I finished shoving my way through people who clung to straps on the bars above their heads to the front. The horrendous mixture of body odor, dirty feet, swamp ass, and coffee breath smacked me in the face like a sack full of week-old shit.

I hated taking the bus. I should have sucked it up and parked in a damn garage down here. A Volvo was definitely more comfortable than what I just went through. I shook my head.

Stealthily, I slid my hand to my nose and choked down the vomit while trying to hold my breath. It turned out to be a difficult task. My poor lungs were on fire by the time I stepped onto the sidewalk. I gulped down the fresher air, thankful to be away from the death chamber called bus. While the city had come a long way from its steel mill roots of a hundred years ago, somehow I think Pittsburgh never lost the slight smoggy stench that still lingered in the air. I would never trade the familiar smell for any other place in the world. I blew out a puff of breath that floated toward the sky. As I followed my breathy puff of smoke up with my eyes, I saw the looming PPG towers. One couldn't help but notice them. They hovered over Market Square like a pride of lions protecting their cubs. No matter how many times I've seen them, or lived here, I was always left in awe of the magnificence. A shiver ran down my spine, but I trudged

on to One PPG Place.

Crossing the square, I couldn't help but look up at the big spires that were perched atop of the gargantuan glass buildings. The snow seemed to dance in and out of them, angrily swirling around like the Black Swan. A massive gust of wind blew in behind me as I entered the building, causing the doors to slam against the walls. I stopped and looked around the expansive lobby. Large orange-red columns stood on either side of a huge mahogany desk, which one guard seemed to be able to take care of. He huddled behind it with his feet up and a newspaper in his hands, which he dropped at the sound of the thick, glass doors slamming and stared at me.

"I need Belinda Hexe with Rosemarie Fashions," I said, looking around me.

"Excuse me?" asked the guard, who had white, balding hair, and a rotund belly while arching his eyebrows at me.

"I need to see Belinda Hexe. She is expecting me," I half-smiled at the man, but quickly bit my lip when I met his glare.

"Thirty-ninth floor," he said, not taking his eyes off me.

"Oh, okay. Thanks," my cheeks flushed and my nut-job status was sealed with him at least, "And I'm sorry about the doors. That wind. Sheesh."

"Sure, kid," he muttered.

I began to shuffle past the man, but paused. "Uh, so do I have to sign in or anything?"

He looked up at me and rolled his eyes.

"Guess not," I muttered, "Is there an office or suite number?"

"Thirty-ninth floor," he reiterated.

"The *entire* thirty-ninth floor?"

"The entire thirty-ninth floor."

"Great," I said, shuffling on my way.

The row of elevators stood, looming, against one wall. They seemed so cold and unwelcoming. I tentatively pushed the up button and waited in silence. The lonely *ding* of the elevator resounded through the desolate waiting area. A few men in suits hurriedly filed out of the small container. They were all busy on cell phones either talking or emailing. I pushed past them and stood in the tiny compartment. The only button on the very top row was thirty-nine.

I pushed it and waited as the awful elevator music started. My heart pounded even harder. One short ride and I would be with the fashion titan.

## Chapter Two

I stepped off the elevator to a dimly lit hall. The wood on either side was a rich, dark color. It wasn't a warm and inviting place. I actually had second thoughts about continuing. My professors wouldn't blame me. In fact they may be relieved that the crazy freshman decided against going after an internship already.

*It's just nerves. You're just nervous. This will be amazing for your resume when you graduate. You're the youngest candidate for this internship. Ever. Do it, Abigail!*

I took a deep breath and pulled open the glass doors to RoseMare Fashions. I never expected Belinda Hexe's office to be quite so extravagant. As I stepped across the threshold the floor changed from cold linoleum to a warm chocolate colored carpet. The walls were a crisp beige with life sized, black and white photos of models wearing some of RoseMarie's more popular looks from over the years. Large, black, leather couches sat at one end of the waiting area, and an enormous wooden desk sat directly in front of the doors with a set of large, wooden doors the same color behind it. A young, bottle-blonde sat at the wood desk chewing her gum like a cow chews its cud.

I slowly approached and gave a slight smile. Bottle-blonde sighed loudly and appeared annoyed by my mere presence.

"Hi, I'm here to see Miss Hexe?"

"Do you have an appointment?" she definitely had no people skills.

"Yes, I have an interview at two o'clock. I'm Abigail Grimm."

She glanced briefly at an organizer then back at me. Her demeanor sucked. She was definitely not an ideal receptionist. I did not see friendship blooming between the two of us. Ever.

"Sit, she'll see you in a sec," she turned back to the magazine that rested precariously on her knees.

She never pushed a buzzer or called anyone. I had my doubts about anybody seeing me in a 'sec'.

"Super," I muttered.

I spun around and looked for a place to hang my jacket. I found a coat rack that sat lonely and forlorn in a corner. I hung it then slunk to the closest love seat and plopped down. Every move I made, the couch made a rather unflattering sound. Bottle blonde side-eyed me each time.

"It's the, uh, couch?" I couldn't help but pose everything as a question to the girl.

I started to think she was intimidating.

"Yeah," she said, going back to reading her magazine.

I sat there for what seemed like hours. It was probably ten minutes. I scanned the room looking for a clock of some sort, but no luck. I toyed with the idea of checking my phone for the time, but I did not want to seem impatient. I glanced up as the door to the office opened, and another woman came in. She was older, probably in her mid-forties and must have been somewhat important because bottle blonde sat up straight and flashed a perfect smile.

"Hello, Mrs. Smith!" bottle-blonde said happily.

"Good afternoon. I know I'm early to see Belinda, but I have to be back in New York by five," she said with a heavy British accent.

“Of course, ma’am. Please go right in,” the blonde smiled again at the woman.

I sat there in awe. She was unbelievably beautiful, despite being a bit older. She had flawless, caramel colored skin; deep brown eyes and sleek black hair that had the hints of silver in it. A studded belt over a black top complimented her already tiny waist. The white slacks and red pumps seemed to just go with her.

Suddenly, I felt very under dressed.

Mrs. Smith had such an elegant glide that you couldn’t help but watch her walk. She disappeared through the double doors behind the desk. After the doors shut blondy just glared at me, I looked down at the coffee table in front of me. I lost track of the time that it took for her to come back out, but she glided out of the waiting area and through the front doors without so much as a ta-ta.

“Blanche!” a thundering voice boomed from a small box sitting on the reception desk.

Bottle blonde jumped in her seat, knocked over the magazine and spoke into the box that sat in front of her, “Yes, Miss Hexe?”

“Is my two o’clock here?” the voice demanded.

“Y-yes,” Blanche stuttered.

“Good, send her in.”

“She’ll see you now,” Blanche glared at me.

I was amazed at how she went from scared receptionist to jerk so fast. I stood and headed to where the booming voice must have come from.

Belinda’s actual office was simple, yet so amazingly beautiful. Her walls were light beige and had a few paintings of surrounding neighborhoods on them, but otherwise they were bare compared to the waiting area. Her desk sat in front of a wall of windows. The view really made the office. I could see all of downtown Pittsburgh and across the river. I could only imagine how amazing the blue lights from PNC park and the bridge looked from here.

“An amazing view, no?” Belinda asked, when she caught me staring out the massive windows.

“No. I mean yes. It’s amazing.”

“It’s why I picked this suite. I love being on top of everything.”

“Yes, ma’am,” I said, still staring out the windows.

“Sit.”

Obediently, I slid into the closest chair.

“Would you like some water?” the tall, stunning woman asked.

“No thanks.”

“Water,” she said, holding up a tall, skinny glass, “They say it’s really the fountain of youth. Drink enough and you’ll stay young.”

“I didn’t know that,” I tried to sound interested.

“It’s a bunch of bullshit,” she said.

“Oh.”

“There is no fountain of youth. Women chase a fantasy; plastic surgery, liposuction, tummy tucks. Even fancy clothes. They spend hundreds of thousands of dollars, and hours trying to be princesses when they are nothing more than peasants.”

I sat in stunned silence. I prepared for questions, an insult on all woman kind, not so much.

“We provide part of the lunacy here,” she continued.

“The fancy clothes?” I asked.

“Yes.”

I couldn't help myself, I stared at her. Her impeccable, olive skin shone in the sunlight as it came in through the windows, her jet black hair hung in loose curls down her back, and her lips were the brightest shade of red I had ever seen. The high heels didn't negate the fact she was naturally tall. So tall. I felt like such a frumpy hobo compared to her.

She stepped from behind her desk and circled me. She ran her fingers through my sandy blonde hair, stared into my pale blue eyes with her own gray ones. I had never felt so intimidated by a woman in high heels and a dress before.

She didn't say anything, just examined me. I felt more like I a slab of meat set out for inspection rather than an interviewee.

“Why do you want to work here?” She asked, her eyes never leaving mine.

I took a deep breath, ready to go into my spiel, “I have always been interested in fashion. I grew up reading RoseMarie's magazine, and when I learned there was an office in Pittsburgh, I just knew it was where I would go.”

“You are very confident about that.”

“I have to be.” I replied.

“Why is that?” Her brows stitched together, and she pursed her lips.

“If I'm not confident and don't think I have the position, I'll get down on myself. This way, I'm more positive and determined.”

“So you're a go getter?”

“Essentially, yes.”

“Good.” she said while crossing her arms in front of her.

“I do appreciate that you're seeing me. I know you prefer the interns to be older.”

“Normally, yes, I don't consider someone so young for the position, but I think you may have some potential.”

“Potential?”

“Yes. I sent for your college records and spoke with a few of your professors. You come highly recommended from everybody. I don't think I've ever heard a collective group of people rave so much about one individual.”

“You sent for my records? Do you normally do that?” I asked.

“No, but with your age and the intern application you sent in; I made an exception. I was pleasantly surprised.”

“So, do you want my resume?” I asked looking down at the papers in my hands.

“I'll take it for my files, but I already made up my mind,” she stated matter-of-factly.

“So, that means I got the position?”

“For now.”

I took a deep breath, slowly letting it out, trying to get my stomach to return to where it belonged, down below my heart. I got to my feet, forcing my legs to stop shaking, and shook Belinda's hand.

“Thank you so much, Miss Hexe.”

“Don't thank me yet. I'll see you tomorrow morning at eight. I'll have the appropriate paper work faxed to your school.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Miss Hexe?” a devastatingly handsome man walked into the room his eyes glued to the papers in his hands.

The man was young, maybe twenty or twenty-one, tall with brown hair and the clearest blue eyes. I had never seen another guy like him. His flawless features and statuesque frame kept me hypnotized. I was afraid to blink. I was afraid if I closed my eyes for even a split second I’d wake up from the dream, and he’d be gone.

“I’m in the middle of something, Connor.”

*He has a name!*

“Oh, my apologies,” he finally looked up, glancing at me, “I wanted to let you know that I fixed the bugs with the website. It should be ready in a few days.”

His eyes roved over my body, ending at my face. Our gazes seemed to collide like two Ferraris at high speed. The energy that emanated between us really shocked me. I could feel my heart skip a beat, my breath hitched in my throat, and my stomach went right back to somersaulting.

“That’s wonderful, Connor. Thank you,” Belinda said, stone faced.

I wondered if she could make any other facial expressions. She definitely had one too many rounds of Botox. All I could do was stare at him though. For whatever reason, I could not take my eyes off of him. He continued talking to Belinda, going through the papers with her while I stood there slack jawed, gawking. He let his beautiful blue eyes flicker to me and linger while he talked with Belinda. He didn’t seem to care that I had been standing there like a school girl staring at her favorite ice cream. My face flushed, and I could feel my cheeks burning. The humiliation was evident on my face. He caught me staring and I could do nothing about it.

I stood there for the rest of the time with my eyes glued to my shoes. I didn’t dare look up or make eye contact with the gorgeous Connor. I could still feel the heat on my cheeks as he left the office. It was insane to think someone of his caliber would even harbor thoughts of someone like me. Someone so plain and ordinary.

“I’m sorry about that, Abigail. Do you have any questions or concerns?” she asked.

“No.”

“Good. I’ll see you tomorrow morning.”

“Thank you again, Miss Hexe.”

I turned and quickly headed down the hallway, running right into him.

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t paying attention to where I was going,” I stuttered bending down to help him pick up the papers he dropped.

“No problem. You’re the new girl?”

“Um, yeah. I start in the morning. It was really by luck I got the position I think,” I quickly got quiet, “I’m babbling. I’m sorry; I don’t know what came over me.”

A smile crept across his face, “It’s alright. Babbling happens.”

He extended his hand to shake mine. Completely dazed by his beauty, I let him take hold of it. As our hands locked I felt an exhilarating rush run through my body. I quickly pulled my hand away and clasped it with my other. I blushed and looked down, embarrassed. I hoped he couldn’t hear my heart pounding. It felt like it could burst through my chest at any moment and land on the floor right there.

“Cool. Well, I’ll see you in the morning,” his soothing voice reverberated

throughout my body.

He flashed a smile, and I couldn't help but watch the graceful Adonis glide toward a door at the end of the hall.

Blanche, the bottle blonde, had resumed her position at the desk, snapping her gum even louder.

"Bye, Connor," she called adoringly.

I walked around to grab my coat when she saw me and the smile quickly faded.

"Good you're done," she hit a button on the intercom, "I'm taking lunch now, Miss Hexe."

"Fine," the now quieter response came through.

"See you in the morning," I mumbled.

"*You* got the internship?" she stared at me like I had a horn growing out of my forehead.

"Yeah, I start tomorrow."

"Great," she sighed while rolling her eyes.

I wasn't sure what her problem was. She must have been born a bitch. What other explanation was there? She slid into a little red jacket while I put on my own pea coat. Unfortunately we ended up on the elevator together. It had to be the most awkward ride in elevator history. Blanche stood on one side, I on the other, in dead silence. I made sure to take my time getting off and walking across the lobby, giving her plenty of time to power walk out of the building. She did impress me for half a second. She power walked in those stilettos and six inches of snow like nobody's business. That was no easy task, even I had to give her credit for that.

From the top step, I could see the red hood bob out of sight.

### Chapter Three

I tightened the scarf around my neck and felt confident enough to head to my own bus stop. Market Square was deserted and it was a relief. Most of the little shops that surrounded the place were closed down. No doubt because of the horrendous weather. One little shop off to the side still had a warm glow coming from the window. It was probably the place producing the amazing coffee smell. Despite the bitter cold and craving for good coffee, I kept going to the bus stop.

I stood near the sign just waiting I wanted nothing more than to get into my own car. Oh the heated seats and blasting hot air would definitely thaw out my poor frozen body. It was somewhat disconcerting standing alone at the bus stop though. Apparently everyone else found other modes of transportation to work, or they called off. The nylons on my legs did little to protect my skin from the bitter cold wind. This just solidified my wanting a parking lease even more.

“Hey, you!”

I turned to the voice and saw the guy from Belinda’s office quickly walking towards me.

I looked around, then back at him, “Who? Me?”

“Yeah. Why are you standing out here in the cold?”

I pointed up at the bus stop sign, “Waiting.”

“You don’t drive?”

“I do, but in my infinite wisdom this morning thought I’d save thirty bucks and park at the mall. The bus seemed like a good idea then.”

“Oh. Well, you look cold.”

“I am,” I said through chattering teeth.

“Come on then.”

“Where? The bus should be here in twenty minutes, I don’t want to miss it,” I said.

“You’re not waiting out here for a bus. I’ll drive you to your car.”

“It’s kind of far from here.”

“It’s fine. I like to drive,” he insisted.

“Are you some sort of serial killer or something? You’re being awfully insistent on getting me to go with you.”

He laughed and ran his fingers through his already messy hair, “I’m a nice guy is all. If you want to wait, that’s fine. You can freeze your tail off

He turned and started walking down the sidewalk. It was though he didn’t even care that I said no. I looked around and as an unforgiving winter wind blasted my already numb body, I ran after him.

“Hey! Um, I’ll take you up on that offer,” I smiled meekly.

“I figured you would,” he laughed. “Your name is?”

“Oh, I’m Abigail. My friends call me Abs or Abby.”

“I’m...”

I cut him off, “Connor. I heard Belinda say it.”

He laughed again. His eyes twinkled a bit, if a guys can twinkle, “Yes, I’m Connor Guy. Well, Abigail, it’s nice to officially meet you.”

“Same here,” I said, trying to suppress a smile and giggle that wanted to escape.

“Would you like some coffee?” he asked suddenly.

“Huh?”

“Coffee? Cappuccino? It’s cold and there’s a nice coffee shop around the corner.”

“Oh, yeah, sure. That’d be great.”

We took a quick right turn, and the smell of brewing coffee greeted us. It was the same coffee place I smelled walking across the Square. It was a distinct robust blend with a hint of peppermint. I'm not sure I had ever smelled a more magnificent smell before. The aroma of the different flavors wafted from a small shop a few stores down. Looking around I realized we had walked in a big circle. We were back in Market Square, so it was the same place. The green and red awning that protected the worn green store front was burdened down with snow. The vinyl slumped under the weight, and occasionally a merciless lump of white powder fell to the ground. Connor held the door open for me, and we stepped into the small shop. The wooden walls were lined with coffee, tea and coffee accessories. The store was definitely one of the most morning beverage oriented shops I’d ever been in. I browsed around looking at the different flavors. There were bolds, milds, French pressed, morning, robust, and flavored. There were different sized coffee mugs, travel mugs, percolators, and coffee snacks lined against another wall.

“You like coffee?”

“I’m a freshman in college. I live on coffee.”

“Same here. Come on, they have some great stuff ready.”

“Okay,” I let him lead me through the muddled shop to the front counter where steaming pots were sitting behind it.

A cheerful and plump older woman stood ready to take our order. Her graying hair was tied up in a loose bun and her rosy cheeks looked like they were threatening to fall off if she smiled any harder.

“Hello!” her deep baritone voice boomed.

“Hi,” I squeaked out.

“Coffee?”

“Yes. Two French vanillas with double shot of espresso please and an extra shot of vanilla in each,” Connor said pulling out his wallet.

“You’re paying for my coffee?” I whispered.

“Sure. Think of it as a welcome to the office,” he winked.

I blushed and stood there waiting.

“You two sure picked a heck of a day to come out,” the older woman, whose name tag read Peggy, said handing over the cups.

“We just got finished at the office,” Connor said, handing one of the hot cups to me.

Peggy looked at me suspiciously, “You look awful young for a business lady.”

“I’m an intern still in college for a few more years.”

She got a wide smile on her face and laughed a deep, hearty laugh.

“Thanks,” Connor waved as we headed out the door. “Now we go to my car.”

“That’s some place.”

“I go there all the time. Peg is one happy woman.”

“That is an understatement,” I said.

We walked shoulder to shoulder down the sidewalk. I didn’t even notice that the streets were practically deserted. I always knew it was cold by how many people were

out walking around or waiting for buses. A smile was plastered to my face. My cheeks were actually sore from smiling so much. Connor led me to a small parking lot halfway across the city. My feet, legs and hands were numb by the time we reached his car. I almost wished I had caught the bus. Hell, I'd be half way to my own car by now. Of course, I wasn't going to be assaulted by awful odors, smashed by other people's large bodies, and the company was vastly different. My fingers were crossed that his personality matched his devastatingly good looks.

## Chapter Four

We sat in the car as it heated up. I never sat on heated leather seats before, but I liked it. The only thing missing was a massager. He pulled out of the lot and onto the snow covered street. A few buses sat at the stops, waiting for people. He whipped his car around the narrow streets until the highway stretched in front of us. Snow didn't seem to bother him at all. I held onto the door handle watching as the skyscrapers quickly disappeared behind us. It was definitely faster than taking a lumbering bus.

"Snow tires?" I asked nervously.

"Had them put on last week," he said stepping on the accelerator to beat a yellow light.

"Great," I said tightening my seat belt.

"I've never wrecked," he smiled broadly at me.

"There's always a first for everything."

The silhouette of the mall came into view beyond the bare trees. His sleek, black BMW swung into the nearly empty parking lot. My Volvo sat at the end of the lot, lonely and snow covered.

"Well, Connor, thank you for the ride," I said, my shaking fingers releasing the seat belt.

"It was no problem, Abs," he smiled, his burning gaze smoldering into my own.

The sound of my name rolling off his tongue sounded like heaven. I felt my heart speed up a bit, my cheeks flushed again, and my poor stomach started to flip. I tried pulling my hand away, but he just tightened his grip.

"I'm glad you got the internship," he said.

"Th-thanks," I smiled, hoping my foundation concealed my flushing cheeks.

He released my hand after a few seconds and left me sitting there dazed. I shakily reached out for the door handle and fumbled to pull on it.

"Do you need help?" he asked running his fingers through his hair.

*No, but I would love to get my fingers in that hair of yours!* I thought to myself.

"No, I'm fine," I wrapped my sweaty hand around the handle a second time, and succeeded at opening the door.

I dug through my purse clumsily, cursing myself for having absolutely no game with guys. I clicked the automatic unlocker and plopped into my driver's seat. Starting the ignition, I jumped at the sound of a honking horn. I looked up and over at Connor's car sitting parallel to mine. He motioned with his hand for me to put my window down.

"What? Did I forget something?" I asked.

"Do you have a cell phone?"

"I'm sorry, what?" I asked again.

"A cell phone, do you have one?" Connor asked.

"Yes, of course."

"Let me see it," he held out his hand.

I arched my eyebrows at him in confusion.

"Just let me see your phone. I promise I'm not going to do anything to it."

"Okay," I handed him the phone through the windows.

He took it and quickly typed something into the keypad, and handed it back.

“My number. If you ever want to talk or anything, call me,” he winked and drove off.

I quickly scrolled through my contacts and found his name right there.

*Connor Guy. What a name. What a guy.*

While staring at the number it dawned on me that he did not have my number.

ME: Connor, since I have your number

You should have mine. See you tomorrow.

I hit send and tossed the phone onto the passenger seat. As I put the car into gear, about to pull out of the lot, my ringtone started going off. My first thought jumped to Connor, but why would he be calling me?

I scrambled for the phone and checked the caller I.D. Anna.

*Geez.*

“Hi Anna.”

“How did it go?” the excited voice on the other end asked.

“It was fine,” I said.

“Just fine?” she asked.

“Yeah, just fine.”

“Fine enough to get the position?”

“What are you? My mom? Yeah, I got it.”

I pulled the phone away as her high pitched squeal came through.

“So are there any cute boys?”

“Come on, Anna, I’m not doing this to find a guy. It’s educational.”

“Oh, so there is.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No,” I repeated.

“Yes.”

“Maybe.”

“I knew it! Is he hot?”

“I guess. I don’t know,” I muttered. “I’ll call you back. I’m driving right now.”

Before she could say anything else, I ended the call. The thought of Connor distracted me enough on my drive home, I didn’t need Anna beating my ear off.

Everybody always wondered how we became and stayed best friends. Our personalities were so vastly different, but we seemed to mesh well. Her fiery personality and bluntness amazed me. She always had a witty come back, and never took shit from anybody. Me on the other hand, well timid fit a lot better. I hated confrontation and being in the spotlight. Maybe that was why we got along so well. I didn’t steal her attention.

I heard my phone beep and knew Anna was upset. I smiled; she always seemed to get mad at me over such small things.

*Abigail, you asshole.*

*You have blue tooth through*

*That car of yours. Call me.*

I couldn’t help but roll my eyes at the screen.

*Dearest Anna,*

*Later.*

My house was dark and desolate. Mom had forgotten to turn on the porch light for me again.

"Mom?"

"Office," came a muffled response.

I looked down the small hallway and saw soft light sneaking out from under the office door.

"I'm home mom," I said opening the door.

"I see," she said with her nose buried in a newspaper.

"No book tonight?" I asked.

"After I read this. Apparently the police found some junkie dead in the middle of downtown this morning. It's the fifth attack in two weeks."

"Really?" I didn't remember seeing any police hovered around anything when I went to my interview.

"Yeah, they said it's the third attack in two weeks."

"Wow. That's really scary," I turned and headed toward the kitchen, "I'm eating and going to bed."

"What's really funny," mom continued as I was leaving, "everyone who had been attacked was wearing some sort of red hooded jacket or sweater."

I stopped while walking out the door, and remembered the junkie on the bus this morning.

*I wonder if it was her.*

## Chapter Five

My dreams were filled with visions of Connor. They weren't normal dreams though. Every time I would get close to him, he would be covered in blood and an enormous wolf stood over him. I would turn to run, only to be caught up in a red cloak. As the wolf caught up to me and sunk its fangs into my throat, I woke up in a cold sweat. I glanced at my alarm clock, only three am. I lay back, too terrified to fall back asleep. The dream didn't even feel like a dream. More like a memory. I slid out of bed and headed for my shower, at least I would have time to stop for coffee before my first day.

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I stood outside One PPG Place staring up at the massive glass structure. It reminded me of a giant, reflective castle. A very modern castle. The building seemed to fit Belinda's personality. The perfect location for a titan like her. My first day of interning for a fashion executive wasn't exactly what I expected. I had always imagined I would be staring at models and swatches of clothing all day. That didn't happen. We mainly went through a lot of magazines and paperwork. While it was fun working next to Belinda, the wretched Blanche did everything she could to make me miserable. By noon, I couldn't help but stare at the clock, anxious for five.

"Did you stock the kitchen?" a low, ear-grating hiss asked from behind me.

"What?" I asked in return.

"The kitchen, is it stocked?"

"Isn't that your job?" I snapped.

"You're the new girl, you do it."

I looked at her, I mean really looked at her. Her nose turned up, her lips pursed into a permanent sneer, and her eye brows stitched together in an angry V. I couldn't help but wonder if she was born with that sour puss look on her face, or if she had to learn it.

She curled and teased her bottle blonde hair to no end. She kind of reminded me of an angry poodle.

"Look, Blanche, I'm not the office bitch. I'm not the receptionist, and I'm not a stock girl. I am *Belinda's* intern. I have a desk full of paperwork that needs done. If you don't want to do *your* job, then quit," I said through clenched teeth.

Nobody had ever gotten me so upset before. In fact, I had never really put my foot down with anyone before that point. She snorted at me and walked away. For the first time today she didn't have some witty, smart-ass remark.

"The only way to deal with that one is to just ignore her. She's miserable," a velvety smooth voice came from behind me.

"Connor!" I gasped.

"Sorry, didn't mean to scare ya," he flashed a big grin at me.

"You didn't. You, um, startled me. That's all," I stammered.

"Oh, okay. Hey, do you have plans for lunch?" he asked.

"Not really. I'll be sitting somewhere, alone. Why?"

"Would you like company?" he asked, his amazingly blue eyes sparkling.

"Yes, of course," I smiled shyly.

"Great. You like Primanti's?" he asked.

“Yeah of course, who doesn’t?”

“Alright, that’s where we’ll get lunch.”

“We? We who?” I asked.

“Us.”

“You and me?” I asked nervously.

“Yeah,” he said laughing, “never have a guy ask you out for lunch?”

“Of course I have,” I laughed back nervously. Sure guys have asked me out, but none even came close to being as handsome as Connor. None of them even had jobs, let alone worked for a major fashion company.

I smiled nervously as he turned away and went into his office.

I couldn’t believe it. I was having lunch with Connor, and *he* asked *me*!

My heart raced as I slowly walked back to my desk. The inner school girl in me giggled and squealed. I’m not entirely sure why I acted so silly. I bit the inside of my cheeks to suppress the smile that ached to spread across my face. I kept peeking out the window facing the hallway trying to steal glances of my lunch partner. I knew anything more than a crush and flirting would be a bad idea. I already had one work romance sour and turn bad, I didn’t need another. This internship was more important than a relationship. The thought of jeopardizing the internship for some guy was absurd. But oh what a guy! I caught myself checking the time every five minutes; I was too excited and it wasn’t just for a pastrami with fries, slaw and malt vinegar. I needed the break from staring at magazines, dictating notes, and organizing Belinda’s paper work. Not to mention that meant a glorious hour away from Blanche’s gum chewing. I wished the office was bigger.

I somehow managed to last until lunch time without going insane. Connor and I slipped out the door without anyone noticing and into an almost empty restaurant. I slid into a booth and picked up the small menu. The agony of awkward silence fell over us. I looked up at him and saw that he chewed on his bottom lip lightly. Every now and then he glanced up at me, but quickly turned his eyes back to the menu. Our waitress finally came around to get our orders, so no more distracting menu to keep us from talking.

“So, how’s your first day going?” he asked with just the slightest hint of nervousness in his voice.

“It’s good. I can’t complain. At least I’m not in class.”

“Yeah, I can understand how that is. How old are you?”

“I’m eighteen.”

“Oh, that’s cool. I’m twenty-one. I was the intern last year, but not with Miss Hexe, with the old web developer.”

“Oh.”

Awkward silence again.

“Abigail?”

“Hmm?”

“Your last name is Grimm. Right?”

“Uh, yeah. Why?” I asked.

“So, your father’s last name is Grimm?” he asked.

“My father isn’t in my life. He took off before I was even born,” I snapped.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t realize...” his voice trailed off.

“It’s fine. You didn’t know.”

He quickly changed the subject, “How did you end up in fashion?”

“My best friend and I were always drawing and making things for our dolls growing up, so I went into PR and she followed.”

“How did you go from designing clothes for dolls to PR? And why did your friend follow you?”

I laughed lightly; it was a big jump, “Anna did the designing and sewing, while I did all the promotions. She followed because, that’s what she does. She didn’t want to go to school alone, so she went to Pitt with me.”

“So you guys are a team?”

“Yeah, the plan is to open a shop or start a clothing line when we graduate,” I dumped malt vinegar on my sandwich and took a big bite. “What about you?”

“I finished school a few months ago. The old web developer quit without notice, and Belinda asked if I wanted to stay on full-time.”

“Why would he quit like that?”

“We have no idea. He stopped showing up, never answered his phone or his door. I was set to move to New York, but decided to keep the job here.”

We turned our attentions to our respective lunches and finished with idle chit chat. Our walk back to the office was painfully silent.

My mood still seemed to stay pretty sour for the rest of the day. Talking about my absentee father usually did that to me. I couldn’t wait to go home. But as good turned bad days go, they always got worse. I felt like the unluckiest person in the world, stuck in the most awkward place. Blanche and I ended up on the elevator together, again.

We said nothing; just rode the thirty-nine floors down. Out of the corner of my eye, I couldn’t help but watch her. She seemed to have a permanent scowl. Honestly, if she smiled or stopped teasing her hair, she could be really pretty. Hell, if she tried to be a little nicer I might have tried being friends with her, or at the least a friendly acquaintance. She must have caught me watching her because her head suddenly snapped toward me. Her eyes bugged out, and she looked like a rabid animal.

“Why are you staring at me?”

“I’m not,” I whispered.

“You’re weird,” she snapped.

“What is your problem?”

“I don’t have a problem,” her spittle landed on my face.

“Yes, you do. You’ve had this serious chip on your shoulder since my interview.”

“I don’t have a chip,” she sneered.

“Whatever you say,” I mumbled.

“Oh and stay away from Connor. He’s mine.”

My heart sunk a bit, but it made sense he had a girlfriend. His good looks could not be denied, had a great job, and had the most pleasant attitude. No man that good looking is ever single. Ever. What baffled me though, how could *she* be his girlfriend? Why would he have asked me to lunch if she was his girlfriend?

The more she talked, it made me just blink slowly and shake my head.

“Don’t shake your head at me. You girls always throw yourselves at him. It’s pathetic really,” she continued.

“I haven’t thrown myself at him and I don’t plan on it.”