Play the Field

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Play the Field

by ITold Myself Id Never Write Fanfiction

Summary

College sports AU woohoo. The rugby team invites the swim team to a very fun sports mixer, what could happen? I also did not mean for this to be so long and also like...so not about sports LOL. Yeah.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

One, two, three, breathe.

One, two, three, breathe.

One, two, flipturn.

Kick, kick,

Breathe.

Harrowhark thought about a lot of things while she swam: assignments, sports, the crushing weight of responsibility, church…occasionally the bones she planned to collect from the side of the highway. Midterms were coming up, so naturally she was already reviewing material in her head– at the very least detailing out incredibly intricate study plans. Her studying the night prior had ended just two hours ago, the unjust chains of Palamedes' "reasonable sleep hours" dragging her away, so she was already behind.

One, two, three, breathe.

The morning light filtered through the water, casting a warm tone over the electric blue spider-web reflections that danced on the bottom of the pool. They always reminded Harrow of the human nervous system and she cracked a smile as she watched them pulsate.

One, two, three, breathe.

Harrow liked the rhythm of her longer freestyle sets, uninterrupted time alone where she could just think and swim. She was completely in control. Nothing new, nothing unexpected, nothing–

SPLOOSH!

A tidal wave washed over Harrow as she came up for air, the churning water shoving her back into the water. Harrow choked as she surfaced, suddenly aware of a commotion in the lane next to her.

“--if the rugby team would please get out of the pool, we’re trying to hold practice!” Coach Mercy, ironically named, stomped up the pool deck towards Harrow– or, the lane next to Harrow.

Harrow, still struggling for air as she tread water, swiveled to find none other than five fully-clothed members of the women’s rugby team splashing around in lane two. One of them, the sensible one by Harrow’s assumptions, stood by the door to the locker room, mortified if nothing else. Her short bob looked familiar, but she was too far away to recognize.

One of the *less* sensible rugby players by Harrow’s account, a ginger butch who was very much enjoying splashing their teammates, spoke up.

“Wait, wait, wait! We just wanted to–”

A wave smacked them square in the face.

“I believe our coach asked you to leave, meathead.” Ianthe Tridentarius had pulled her goggles up onto her swim cap for the extra dramatic effect. The dramatic effect was a wet raccoon-esque look, but she looked smug nonetheless.

The ginger butch appeared to waffle between confused and amused. Conmused if you will.

“Did you just…splash me?”

“You’re in a pool. Water is wet,” Ianthe stated.

“No shit.”

The ginger scooped a wave of water at the pallid blonde, smacking her right in the raccoon eyes. Harrow struggled to subdue the smirk tugging at her lips at the sight of Ianthe's enraged expression.

"We just wanted to invite you guys to a little sports mixer we're throwing at the rugby house this weekend. We couldn't leave out—" the ginger coughed. " —definitely the most *memorable* college sports team."

At a glare from Coach Mercy, the ginger added:

"Aaand I know for a fact that nobody has a game or meet this weekend, so we better see you there."

The ginger grinned innocently at the coach, but Mercy's sour face did not change.

"You guys are like fish, we drink like fish…it'll be great."

The rugby players paused their water-wrestling for a brief moment to laugh.

Ripples of quiet conversation and chuckling echoed through the lanes behind them, but Harrow already knew she wouldn't be attending. She had never attended a single college party and wasn't about to start now. She was here for a degree, not to waste time on people she'd likely never see again.

Harrow rolled her eyes at the commotion and was about to start her laps again when golden eyes locked onto hers. A shiver rolled down her spine.

"Will I see *you* this weekend?"

A brief panic shot through her heart.

“No,” Harrow said flatly.

“Whaaaat?” The ginger attempted a suave doggy paddle up to Harrow’s lane line. “We’re gonna have a keg. It’s gonna rock.”

Harrow grimaced. The thought of loud music and sticky floors was enough to make her itchy, even now.

“The more you talk, the less convinced I am.”

The ginger grinned infuriatingly wide and Harrow’s heart felt like it was being electrocuted.

“And there’s nothing I can do to convince you?”

Harrow tried to pull their gaze away, but the pools of gold held her steadfast. She had never felt like this before. Was it a heart murmur? A lung problem? A stroke? None of the symptoms quite matched up with her own, but something was clearly wrong. Her face flushed.

Ianthe, noticing the moment, was quick to duck into Harrow’s lane.

“Hey *Chucky* , leave her alone.”

“ *Chucky* ?” laughed the ginger. “Yeah okay, Smeagol.”

Something in Ianthe snapped.

“You’re just lucky that you’re over there, *Carrot Top* , because I can and will do unspeakable things–”

“Nav!”

Mercymorn seemed to be more pissed about being ignored than practice being interrupted. The anger rolling off of her quieted the room, silencing even the ginger flirt. The only one unaffected was, of course, Ianthe, fueled by acute rage and general disregard for everyone that wasn’t her.

“Out of the pool. Now,” Mercy motioned to her phone. “Enjoy running laps at practice.”

“Nav” winced.

The rest of the rugby team had already started to make their way out of the pool, laughing and shoving each other through wet gym clothes and hair. The rugby player by the door, a girl Harrow now recognized as her roommate’s apparent platonic life partner, shook her head as they approached.

Meanwhile, Ianthe continued:

“--and don’t even get me started on that shirt because I *know* that you’ve never worn something nice in your life and–”

“Nav” grinned again, skewering Harrow with eye contact. “Come get your dog, swimmer girl.”

Harrow’s condition was only worsening. A mystery illness for sure. Maybe they would let her name it. Nonagesimitus? Harrowhark syndrome? Neither sounded deadly enough.

“HER DOG?! I am no such thing you…you…brain damage waiting to happen!” Ianthe shrieked.

Gideon laughed as they swam away. “That’s what your mom said to me last night! Eyyo!”

“That doesn’t make sense, you cretin!” Ianthe called after them.

“Doesn’t have to.” Gideon flipped off Ianthe with a satisfied grin.

“God, Tridentarius. Do you ever shut up?” Coach Mercy stomped back up the pool deck. “Okay, okay. Now that the alcoholics are gone, back to practice!”

Harrow watched, still unable to speak, as Gideon made it to the wall and hoisted themselves smoothly out of the pool, water running in rivulets down warm, brown skin, back muscles rippling under their wet shirt–

Harrow knew that she had been praying to God as long as she could remember, but she didn’t exactly plan on meeting him so soon.

For the first time in 20 years, she thought she needed to lie down.

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The locker room reeked of chlorine– one of the only two parts of swim that irked Harrow. The acrid smell paled only to the feeling of pruny fingers and, if she had to pick a third, Ianthe.

Dressed in her usual drab pants and sweater combo, Harrow rubbed a towel through spiky, wet hair. It was getting a little too long for her taste. She grabbed at a piece, inky black, and pulled it up to inspect the length.

“So we’re going to that party, right?”

A voice spoke directly into Harrow’s ear, spooking her enough to drop the wet towel onto her gym bag.

Fists clenched, Harrow took a calming breath before turning to find, of course, Ianthe.

“You’re so easy to startle, Harry.”

“Don’t call me that.” Harrow picked up the towel and gave her hair one more rub before shoving it in her bag.

“I know you don’t have any exams for the next two weeks and your social life is frankly depressing, so I can’t imagine you’re busy this weekend.”

Harrow sighed. “Did you only come over here to insult me, Tridentarius?”

“We should go to that party. Together.” Ianthe flashed a toothy grin, the same one that always made Harrow feel like prey being sized up by a lion. Maybe in this case, a hyena. Ianthe’s hair didn’t have enough volume.

“We don’t hang out.”

Ianthe smirked and leaned against the locker behind Harrow, her face inches from Harrow’s own.

“And what if I want to?”

Harrow pushed Ianthe away, stepping sideways away from her.

“You seem to hate the rugby team anyway. Why would you make yourself miserable on purpose?” Harrow stopped. “Actually, don’t answer that. I don’t care.”

Harrow began packing up her gym bag, making sure everything was packed in separate plastic bags to avoid anything getting remotely damp.

“I can’t let Gideon Nav think that they scared me off from their lame rugby party. Cor and I will make sure to show everyone how to have a good time–”

Harrow stopped packing. “Who?”

“Cor. My sister? You’ve met her like five times.”

“I know your sister, idiot. Who is Gideon?”

Ianthe’s face fell for a split second– the mask slipping only briefly before a cruel smirk twisted over her lips.

“The ginger from earlier. The one who was flirting with you.”

Harrow could hear her heart beating in her ears. She desperately wished she was anywhere else so she could say the butch’s name with her own mouth.

Gideon.

The cross hanging around Harrow’s neck suddenly felt out of place, unusually heavy and uncomfortable. She reached a hand up to clutch at it.

“People don’t flirt with me.”

Ianthe’s mask slipped again, a brief flash of hurt before the smirk returned. She opened her mouth to speak, but Harrow fixed her with a very intentional look.

“And as I’ve mentioned *several* times, it doesn’t matter, because I’m not gay.”

Harrow returned to packing her bag, zipping it closed with finality. She could still hear her heart thrumming in her ears, feel the flush in her ears. She pushed past Ianthe, heading for the door.

“I’m going to class. Don’t follow me.”

“Pick you up at eight on Saturday?”

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Harrow tapped her foot as she waited in line, the old wood making a deep sound under her boot. She held her textbook aloft, scribbling notes in the margins as she tried her best to ignore both the chatter and the repetitive indie rock echoing through the coffee shop. Harrow allowed herself few frivolities, but coffee was one of them. Sure, the campus coffee shop was closer and more efficient as far as time was concerned, but their coffee tasted like mud. The indie kids that plagued this shop were a bit much for Harrow, but the coffee and available seating far outweighed her having to figure out what the hell kombucha was. Now, if she could just find a place to study for a few hours in peace, she would be content. A voice cut into her thoughts.

“You can go ahead of me– I haven’t made up my mind yet.”

Harrow looked up to see strong, brown arms, a muscle tee, and of course, a shock of ginger hair. Gideon Nav.

“Wait! I know you. Swimmer girl!” Gideon beamed down at Harrow.

Harrow sighed. “Yes, I am she.”

“You’re a lot shorter than I thought you were going to be, I can’t lie.” Gideon grinned. “I like your pants though.”

“What do those two statements have to do with each other?” Harrow made another note in her textbook, trying to play off how fast her heart was beating.

It was obvious that Harrow had caught Gideon off guard. They changed the subject. “So are you coming to our party on Saturday?”

“Do you remember my answer from yesterday?”

“Yes?”

“It hasn’t changed.”

“It’s going to be really fun–”

“I don’t care.”

Gideon sighed and Harrow *almost* felt bad. “Well, at least help me choose a coffee. I never know what to get. What’re you getting?”

It was obvious Gideon wasn't going anywhere. Harrow closed her textbook and stuck it under her arm with a sigh. "I get an iced black coffee with one sugar."

"No creamer?"

"Why would I get creamer?"

Gideon wrinkled their nose. "That's kind of an unhinged coffee order."

"It's a perfectly normal order. It does its job."

"Yeah, but does it taste good?"

The line moved forward and Gideon and Harrow inched closer to the register.

"It doesn't have to taste good, I just need to stay awake."

A lie.

Gideon cocked an eyebrow. "So why the sugar, then?"

Harrow scowled. "You're a frustrating individual," she said at last.

"You're an odd one."

Harrow rolled her eyes, still trying to silence the thumping in her heart. *What the hell was this feeling?*

"So hey," Gideon said. "Why doesn't the swim team ever come to any of the other CU sports parties? I mean I know you have your little "fun averse" thing going on, but I haven't seen any of you I don't think."

They moved with the line. A new song started in the coffee shop, but it was nearly identical to the last. Harrow rolled her eyes.

Gideon raised an eyebrow. "Was that an annoying question or..?"

Great job, Harrow.

"No, sorry. It was just–" Harrow pointed at a speaker. "--the music..." She felt her ears burn.

Gideon chuckled. "Not an indie rock fan?"

"Not this indie rock…and to answer your question, I believe our party attendance would be contingent on *invitations* , so."

"Ah. And yet I still run into the worst Tridentarius."

Harrow choked back a laugh as the line moved forward again.

"Ah, I almost got you." Gideon grinned and looked Harrow square in the eyes, skewering her in gold. "I'm going to make you laugh someday."

Harrow rolled her eyes, but couldn't quite wipe off the smile playing on her lips.

“Have you eaten yet by the way?” Gideon asked, walking backwards as the line moved up.

“No? What does that have to do with anything?”

Gideon grinned as they swiveled on a heel to face the girl at the register. “Hey! How’s your morning?”

The girl, heavily eye-linered and sweatered, stuttered out a “good”.

“That’s good to hear.” They smiled. “Can I get a caramel frappe with whipped cream, an iced coffee, no cream, one sugar, and a bagel and a croissant?”

The barista nodded and rang Gideon up before Harrow could process what was going on. What was their game here? Harrow was absolutely baffled, rendered speechless. Gideon smirked as they made eye contact with the swimmer. They grabbed their order from the counter and passed Harrow her coffee and croissant.

“See you round, swimmer girl.”

What the fuck .

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One, two, three, breathe.

One, two, three, breathe.

Harrow surfaced and grabbed the concrete wall at the end of the pool. It bit gently at her soft hand.

“Nice, Nonagesimus,” Coach Mercy called. “Watch your flip turn though, it’s eating time.”

Harrow nodded and hoisted herself out of the pool.

“Tridentarius, breathe less. Based on how much you flap those gums, I know you have some breath control.”

Ianthe scowled and pulled her goggles onto her cap, pulling herself out of the pool as well.

“Ok. Again.”

The sound of feet smacking concrete echoed through the room, each swimmer crawling out of the pool and back up to the block. Harrow bent over and positioned her feet, gripping the block gently as she focused on the water below her.

Breathe in, breathe out.

Harrow pictured how her arms would move as she leapt off the block, her lithe muscles flexing in preparation. She focused on the exact spot that she’d land. Harrow waited for the whistle, every hair and muscle at absolute attention.

Suddenly, to her left, a flash of ginger hair.

Attention lost in an instant. She whipped her head over to see none other than Gideon Nav poking their head through the door. They made eye contact— Gideon winked.

A shock ran through Harrow's heart and she lost her balance, tumbling head over heels into the pool with a splash, limbs akimbo. She clawed to the surface, gasping for air, cheeks already burning.

"Nonagesimus, what the fuck was that?"

Harrow didn't have to look at her teammates to know that they were all staring at her, holding back laughter. She wished she could sink to the bottom of the pool. Angrily, she searched for the butch, but they were already gone.

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She had been alerted to their existence only a day or so ago, but Harrow decided she was going to kill Gideon Nav. Causing her to make such a fool of herself was absolutely unacceptable, intentional or not. Why the fuck were they even at the pool in the first place?

Harrow marched across campus with a purpose, pants swishing angrily. Her boots thudded across concrete and then grass as she finally made it to the rec sports field. The cross around her neck felt heavy, clunking thickly into her chest with every step. She ignored it.

Harrow surveyed the field…or fields. Oh no.

She kicked herself. Not looking over the field map and practice schedule was so unlike her. She needed to take a breath. Why was she so worked up? Why would she just assume that Gideon would be here? Maybe she should text Palamedes—

"Nav! Deep left!"

A field of people covered in mud and bruises. A shock of red hair. Bingo. Maybe Harrow *was* a genius. She silenced the thought.

“Cam! Pod left!”

Harrow marched through the muddy grass, cringing as she realized how much cleaning her boots would require. The closer she got to the field, the louder the grunting and shouting became. A flush spread from the pit of her stomach all the way to her ears. *Must be the effects of whatever disease had overtaken her. Surely.*

Harrow snuck around to the back fence, watching from behind a bush. She was going to confront Gideon…she just needed to observe the scene first. She spotted them, brown skin slick with sweat and muscles rippling under a black muscle tee— self cut as Harrow observed. They passed the ball out to a teammate right as a smaller player tried to tackle them, bouncing right off into the grass. Gideon grinned and offered her a hand up before running after their teammates.

She watched as possession changed and Gideon fell back, another grin spreading across their face as they lined themself up with a girl in a different color penny. Gideon ran in a flat line with their teammates, eyes watching both the action and the girl in front of them. As soon as she got the ball, Gideon absolutely trucked the girl, arms yanking her knees towards them as they drove forward. Gideon rolled off of her and stood.

Harrow involuntarily found her hand cupped over her mouth, an angry flush burning in her cheeks. Gideon looked busy. Maybe…maybe she could confront them another time. The cross felt like a noose as Harrow slunk away.

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“Repeat the plan one more time? I’m not sure I follow.”

Palamedes Sextus sat across from Harrow at their cluttered kitchen table. Between them sat Camilla Hect, who was focused intently on helping Palamedes solve the newspaper crossword.

“When, and I mean *when,* not *if,* Ianthe Tridentarius shows up at our apartment tonight, I need you to tell her I’m not home. Do not under any circumstances allow her to come into our house. I don’t know how she got our address, but under no circumstances am I here, okay?”

“Right. And am I allowed to know why? Ooh– six letters–”

“Atomic.”

Palamedes penciled the word in with a smile.

“Thank you, Cam. You’re a genius.”

“Of course, Warden.”

Harrow played with her spoon, watching thin soup spill over the edge and splash back into her bowl.

“She’s dragging you to the party, isn’t she? The one the rugby team is throwing?” Cam fixed Harrow with a knowing stare.

“A party?” Palamedes adjusted his glasses. “Are we going to that?”

“I did plan on dragging you along.”

“Ah. Alright then. Eight letter word for–”

“Heritage.”

“You complete me, thank you.”

Camilla nodded and fixed Harrow with her gaze. “If you’re going to be drinking, I recommend finishing your soup.”

“Yes, Harrow, God. Please finish your soup,” echoed Palamedes as he penciled in another word.

Harrow made a noise of discomfort.

“Ah, yes. Lord’s name in vain. Sorry about that, Harrow.”

“It’s fine. And the whole point of this plan is to ensure that I will not go to this party, so I will not be drinking. I do not drink.”

“Finish your soup anyway. Coffee isn’t food.” Palamedes penciled in another word. “Ooh perfect! That was a hard one.”

Harrow grimaced and stared at her nearly-full bowl of soup. She slurped a small amount off her spoon.

“Camilla, how long have you played rugby? I didn’t know you were on the team until the other day in the pool.”

Cam flashed her eyes towards the crossword before refocusing on Harrow.

“I joined sophomore year. Palamedes actually got me to sign up.”

Harrow played with her soup some more.

“So you know a lot of people on the team, then.”

Both Cam and Pal stopped and looked up from the crossword. They shared a glance.

“I would hazard to say I know all of them,” Camilla replied slowly.

Harrow played with her soup intensely, the orange liquid splashing up the sides of the bowl as it crashed back down to earth. “Alright.”

Cam looked at Palamedes again.

“Are you wondering about anyone in particular, or?”

Harrow fidgeted with her cross necklace.

“Not really. But..um…the whole team will be there, correct?”

“Correct.”

Harrow mixed her soup around. “Interesting.”

Palamedes sighed. “Harrow, eat the damn soup already. You’re making me anxious.”

“It’s got too much flavor!”

“It’s grocery store-brand soup, Harrow. It’s only got one spice.”

“You’re a pain in my ass.” Harrow took another bite of soup.

She gazed at the near complete sunset through the kitchen window, the final trails of golden hour washing over their cluttered countertops and cabinets. It would be dark soon.

“Okay new plan.” Harrow looked at Camilla and Palamedes. “You just say that I’m getting ready and pregaming or whatever with you and maybe she leaves me alone.”

Cam and Pal shared a look.

“And how believable do you think that will be?”

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Harrowhark stood stiffly in the corner of Ianthe’s room while she and Coronabeth whirled around like twin hurricanes, music from a stray speaker blaring.

“--well it doesn’t have to be anything special, but you’re not going out in *that* .” Ianthe snatched a ruffled skirt from Corona and held it aloft.

“Ianthe, you’re not putting me in a skirt. Absolutely not.”

“Ugh, you’re so difficult.” Ianthe faced the closet again.

“I would prefer to go in what I’m already wearing considering I didn’t want to go out at all.” Harrow looked down at her usual pants/sweater combo.

“Awh Harrow.” Corona bounced over to them. “Going out is about looking cute and getting drunk. If you want to keep the pants, try…this instead.” She held out a cropped, black tank top.

Harrow winced. That was a lot of skin that would be showing.

“What happened to going out being about fun?”

“Fun is the goal, not the standard.”

“Fantastic.”

“When do *you* have fun? Hurry up and change. You look very…church,” Ianthe sneered.

Harrow felt their ears burn and bit their tongue. They snatched the tank from Corona, heading for the bathroom in the hallway.

“Why are you changing in there?” Ianthe fixed Harrow with a pointed stare. “We’re all girls here.”

Harrow stared back, clenching her teeth.

“Maybe she has to pee. You don’t know everything.” Corona held a bottle of liquor above her head. “And the Uber will be here in 15 minutes, so it’s time for shots!”

Harrow sighed with slight relief. If Corona stuck around, she might have a chance of surviving the night. Unfortunately, Harrow knew that would not be the case.

“Oh! I’m sorry— Harrow, you don’t drink, do you?”

“Not—“

“She is tonight,” Ianthe cut her off.

Harrow glared at her teammate.

“Oh come on, don’t be such a buzzkill.” Ianthe rolled her eyes. “Besides, I know you’ll hate a party like this sober.”

As much as she loathed to admit it, Ianthe had a point. The thought of loud music, sticky floors, and botched social interactions was starting to make Harrow sweat. *What could a shot or two hurt?*

Corona frowned. “Ignore her. You don’t have to drink if you don’t want to.”

“No, I’ll be fine,” said Harrow.

Ianthe smirked.

“Okay, well only drink what you’re comfortable with, okay?” Corona pulled out an extra shot glass for Harrow.

“Pour the shots, Cor. We’re burning daylight.” Ianthe rolled her eyes.

“You’re so bossy.”

Corona poured the shots quickly, albeit incredibly messily, and Harrow wiped the excess vodka dripping down her wrist on her sweater. She cringed.

“Okay one…two…three…!” Corona beamed as she called out the countdown.

The three cheers-ed their shot glasses. Harrow’s, of course, some tourist shot glass with tits and a bikini on the front. She held it with two fingers by the sides, avoiding any and all tiddy. Harrow drank the shot as quickly as she could, a shiver already running down her spine. Her mouth and throat burned, the taste clinging onto every surface it could. Most noticeably however, was the warm feeling in her chest that burned throughout her whole body. Maybe she should have finished the soup.

“Harrow?” Corona looked concerned. “Do you need a chaser or anything?”

Harrow wiped whatever pained expression was likely on her face clean off.

“No, I’m fine.”

“Then get ready for round two!”

The Uber arrived quickly, allowing just enough time for Harrow to change and choke down three more shots. When Harrow stumbled after the other two into the driveway, she was immediately assaulted by the night air on her bare shoulders and stomach– an incredibly new sensation. She shivered.

“Harry, come *on* .” Ianthe called from beside the Uber. Harrow scowled but picked up the pace anyway.

The three of them crammed in the back, Harrow in the middle “since she was the smallest”. Corona thanked the driver as Harrow looked blankly out the windshield. She could feel the alcohol buzz in her ears, behind her eyes. Before she could make one last protest, an “actually I think I’m needed at home” or a “since Palamedes isn’t home, the cats need to be watched-“, the car shuddered to life and they were off.

“Corona, dear,” Ianthe flicked her eyes between Harrow and her sister with a sneer. “Didn’t you use to *fuck* one of the rugby players?”

The Uber driver coughed.

Coronabeth giggled like a melody, covering her mouth to stop herself. “Oh my gosh I did.”

Harrow returned Ianthe’s eye contact, suspicious.

“Harrow. Oh my gosh.” Corona flopped a large hand on Harrow’s bare shoulder. “The soccer team— oh I’m on the soccer team. Did you know that? I think I told you that. I play striker. Isn’t it so funny that we all play sports—“

“Corona.” Ianthe reminded.

“Right. So the soccer team and the rugby team hang out sometimes, you know? Cuz gay people, right? So we were at one of their parties and this *ginger butch* was being so flirty and they’re like really hot—“

Ianthe held Harrow’s gaze, a sneer curling at her lips.

“—and so we hooked up that night and I guess then like just kept hooking up? We never dated or anything cuz I don’t think either of us were looking for that but it was fun and the sex was good, yknow?”

Harrow's eyes hardened as she maintained eye contact with her teammate.

Ianthe cocked her head in mock confusion. "What was their name again?"

Corona giggled again. "Gideon Nav. Isn't that such a silly name?"

Corona thumped Harrow on the shoulder as she laughed. Harrow flinched. The soccer player smiled at Harrow, waiting for a response.

"It really is." Harrow forced a polite smile.

Corona smiled again, sated. "I haven't seen them in a while though. We're on good terms, but I think we have our eyes on different people, yknow?"

Ianthe smirked, victorious. Harrow bit her tongue, holding her gaze. Corona pulled a flask from her cleavage and took a swig.

"Want some?" she slurred, her face a little too close to Harrow's own.

Harrow could feel too much. The car was too hot, Ianthe and Corona's legs and shoulders were too close, the damned tank-top straps were too tight and too…wrong. Harrow glanced at Ianthe before refocusing on Corona.

"Yes."

Harrow took a swig of the flask. Perhaps too big of a swig. She choked down a sputter and forced the burning alcohol down her throat.

“What was that?” Harrow choked nonchalantly.

“Everclear,” Corona smiled.

“Cool.” Harrow felt the alcohol warming her chest. *What the fuck was everclear?*

Harrow felt the stimului start to melt away, the warm rush easing her somewhat.

“Awh Cor.” Ianthe condescended. “You know Harry doesn’t drink much more than communion wine. Why’d you let her drink that?”

“I’m fine,” Harrow snapped at Ianthe. She turned back to Corona, alcohol buzzing in her ears. “So who else have you fucked?”

A stunned silence settled over the car before Corona absolutely lost it, cackling with glee. Ianthe, red to her ears, scowled and looked out the window.

“I knew you weren’t a prude, Harrowhark Nonagesimus!” Coronabeth cuffed Harrow on the shoulder with a grin.

A spiteful pride filled Harrow at Ianthe’s reaction. She smiled back at Corona.

“So as far as CU sports goes, I had a few run-ins with this girl Camilla from the rugby team. She plays 9 I think? Whatever that means—“

Harrow choked.

“What?!” She yelled uncharacteristically, half laughing.

“What do you mean, what?”

“She’s my roommate’s like…platonic soulmate or whatever. I didn’t even know she played rugby till this week,” Harrow slurred.

“You’re joking!”

“No, I swear!”

Corona laughed again, a sweet and rich sound. Harrow smiled. She felt human.

“Who else?” Harrow prompted.

“Okay, okay. Some people from the rowing team— nothing special— one girl from the basketball team, and—“ Corona blushed. “I’ve like barely spoken to her, but there’s this girl on the track team that’s so…I don’t even know. I think I’d give anything to kiss her.”

Harrow felt her ears burn.

A flash of red hair . Burning, golden eyes. What would it be like—

“…yeah,” Harrow breathed before she could catch herself.

Corona’s eyes widened like saucers. She yanked Harrow towards her with a mad grin.

“Who?! A girl in the sports program?!”

Harrow's entire body flushed with an angry heat. The blood in her ears pounded like drums.

"Uh—"

"Harry's straight." Ianthe said coldly, fixing Harrow once again with a pointed look.

"Oh," Corona released Harrow's shoulders. "I'm sorry, I forgot."

"It's okay."

Harrow grabbed the cross around her neck. It bit into her palm.

Their Uber pulled to a stop a few minutes later in front of a house that, foundation-shaking music aside, looked like it would fall in with a strong breeze. In the front yard, two girls wrestled gleefully before a crowd of drunk athletes, rolling each other over abandoned beer cans and solo cups. Harrow watched as one released the other from a headlock, and the other, once freed, kissed her sparring partner into the grass. The crowd cheered.

"Is this the place?" asked the Uber driver.

"Yep!" Corona chirped, already pushing the door open. "Thanks so much!"

Harrow filed out behind her, the night air brushing softly over her exposed shoulders and neck.

"You girls have…fun…" they said, already pulling slowly away. As soon as Ianthe slammed the door, the car was barreling down the road.

“Ew. It looks like a frat.”

A hand grabbed Harrow’s shoulder from behind. It wasn’t Corona’s.

“Come on, let’s go inside,” Ianthe grinned.

Harrow stared at the hand. She didn’t really have a reason to tell her to get off, right? Corona had grabbed her shoulder earlier and it was fine. Right?

“Harrow?”

Harrow looked up. Ianthe and Corona were waiting.

“Sorry.” She could feel the alcohol buzzing in her ears.

Harrow took a single step before her boots caught on a crack in the sidewalk. She tumbled forward, stopping short as Ianthe caught her.

Ianthe grinned. Their faces were too close together. “Careful, Harry.”

Harrow realized in that instant that there was no way she could be gay. Everything about Ianthe’s touch and proximity made her vibrate with discomfort. Nothing about this was gentle, or loving, or any of the things Harrow had been told to expect. Maybe Gideon—

Harrow pulled away. “Yeah.”

The three walked inside.

If outside was rowdy, inside was insane. A game of cup pong had been set up near the door, and two buff women were absolutely demolishing two men from the tennis team. Harrow could barely hear them screaming at each other over the music, but it was obvious they were being drunk under the table. Behind the living room, in what was likely intended to be a dining room, another table game had been set up and some poor freshman with brown, curly hair was desperately trying to bounce a ping pong ball into a stack of solo cups while a group watched on. Something Harrow couldn't see happened and the stack was smacked off the table.

"Bitch cup, JM!"

The freshman groaned and grabbed a heavy cup from the center, chugging to the chants of "down in one, down in one".

The kitchen had three beat to shit sports coolers of mixed drinks sitting on the counter and plenty of party goers dancing and wrestling in and out of the space. Harrow assumed the famed keg was likely on the caving-in porch.

Harrow hated to admit it, but Ianthe was right. She would not have been able to stand this sober.

"You made it!"

Harrow turned around to see Cam and Pal, the latter hanging onto Cam like a crutch.

"Harrow, I should have had more to eat than soup. Tonight should have been pasta night. That was my bad," Palamedes slurred.

Harrow patted his shoulder. "You're fineee. I didn even know I was going to be drinking. I should have finished my soup."

Palamedes' eyes went wide. "You didn finish your soup?!"

Cam narrowed her eyes. "Harrow. Are you drunk?"

"Maybe. Anything's possbible."

Cam frowned and finally looked behind Harrow.

"Ah. Hello, Coronabeth," she nodded without a change of expression. "Sister of Coronabeth."

"Hi, Cam," Corona giggled. Ianthe raised an eyebrow.

"You three be safe, okay?" Cam readjusted Palamedes like the strap of a bag. "I'm going to go get the Warden to some food before he runs into his ex."

"Which one?" Harrow asked.

"The one with the stupid hair," Palamedes slurred.

"Fuck him."

"Yeah! *Fuck* him!" Palamedes swung his fist in the air.

"Okay, and we're going." Cam drug Palamedes into the crowded kitchen.

“ *That’s* the other rugby player?” Ianthe scowled at Cam’s disappearing figure. “You could do better.”

Harrow felt an angry knot in her chest.

“I think she’s hot. And you have no idea. When she—“ Corona stopped short, staring into the crowd. “That’s her. That’s Judith. She’s here.”

Harrow looked to see a severe-looking girl overseeing the dance floor.

“Should I say hi?”

“Ugh, Cor. Your type eludes me.” Ianthe groaned.

“I’m going to go say hi. Wish me luck.” Corona bounded away through the crowd with a smile.

Harrow winced as she watched her last chance at a normal night flirt with the living embodiment of ROTC.

“Well, guess that leaves us.” Ianthe looked down at Harrow. “Want to grab a drink?”

Harrow knew logically that she probably shouldn’t drink any more, but she also knew that the situation wasn’t getting any better any time soon, so she might as well ease the suffering. She felt stupid as she followed Ianthe through the crowd like a puppy.

Once in the kitchen, Ianthe filled a solo cup from a cooler labeled “swamp water” and handed it to Harrow. At the very least, the name and its appearance matched up. Harrow wrinkled her nose.

“Cheers!” Ianthe knocked her cup into Harrow’s own, splashing some of the brown/green liquid on Harrow’s front.

Ianthe made a face. “Oh shit. My bad.”

Harrow grit her teeth and took a big swig of her cup. Luckily, swamp water just tasted like shitty mixed drink. “It’s fine.” She brushed as much of the liquid off her front as she could.

She took another swig of the drink. Then another. Then another. Ianthe smirked to herself as she watched Harrow make quick work of her solo cup. The alcohol felt warm in her chest and loud in her ears.

She was about to fill her cup again when a voice behind her spoke.

“You made it.”

Harrow swiveled around, expecting to find a drunker Cam and Pal, but instead was met with an open Hawaiian shirt and a Nike sports bra.

“You look…really good, swimmer girl.” Gideon Nav held a beer in one hand and a slice of pizza in the other as they smiled down at Harrow. “What convinced you to show up?”

Every little detail rendered Harrow more unable to speak. The way their stupid shaved mullet fell in their eyes just slightly, the visible muscles in their arms and stomach working just enough to let you know they were there, the way their gym shorts fell on their hips so the band of their boxers showed— Harrow was struck dumb.

Gideon grinned, as if knowing their effect. “Can I get you a drink?”

Ianthe scowled, gripping Harrow’s shoulder. “She’s had enough tonight.”

“Oh,” Gideon took a step back. “I didn’t know y’all were together, my bad.”

Harrow managed to shake off whatever was clouding her brain: lust? Alcohol? Both? She shook Ianthe’s hand off her shoulder.

“We’re not.”

“Oh,” Gideon tried to suppress a smile. The blonde scowled.

“She’s straight.” Ianthe spat.

“Oh.”

Gideon looked to Harrow for confirmation, but all Harrow could do was sip desperately from her nearly empty cup. The cross around her neck felt heavy, making its presence incredibly known.

“G-man!” A call rang through the crowd.

Gideon looked for the source of the noise before glancing back at a smug Ianthe and miserable Harrow.

“Well, thanks for coming. Let’s do shots later, yeah?” They started to walk away.

Harrow panicked. “I’m not…um..”

Gideon stopped and turned around, trapping Harrow in their eyes.

“What?”

The cross weighed on Harrow’s chest like a dumbbell— a sensation alcohol couldn’t fix. She lowered her head.

“Nothing.”

And then Gideon was gone.

“Come on,” Ianthe grabbed Harrow’s shoulder. “Let’s go dance.”

Harrow followed Ianthe dumbly into the living room. The music’s bass reverberated in her rib cage, thump thumping to a rhythm that did not match her own heart. For the first time, Harrow realized that the alcohol no longer felt good. She fought off the first wave of uncomfortable dizziness as Ianthe grabbed her by the hand, pulling her close. The blonde rocked the two of them together to the beat of the music– well…only slightly off. Harrow was too preoccupied by the dizziness to really care.

Ianthe pulled Harrow closer and closer as the music went on, hands moving from her wrist, to waist, to the back of her neck. Ianthe pinched a tuft of Harrow’s overgrown hair, pulling it uncomfortably. She leaned forward to whisper wetly into Harrow’s ear.

“I like your hair.”

Harrow winced, pulling away as much as she could.

“I don’t.”

“Awh come on,” Ianthe traced the outline of Harrow’s ear. “I think it’s cute.”

Harrow shuddered, pulling back further from Ianthe. “Tridentarius. What are you doing?”

“What?”

“You know what.” Harrow broke all contact from her teammate, sloppily smacking her hand away.

Ianthe smirked. “Just give in, Harrow. I saw the way you looked at Gideon earlier.”

Harrow’s heart felt like it might beat out of her chest. She felt sick. “What do you mean?”

A flash of Hawaiian shirt and ginger hair appeared to Harrow’s right. Her eyes flicked away from her teammate, following the figure through the crowd.

“You’re not straight, Nonagesimus. Just admit it.” Condescension played on Ianthe’s lips.

Harrow’s ears burned red hot. “I am.”

The Hawaiian shirt had made its way closer. Her cross was ice cold.

Ianthe leaned in, frustratingly close. “Then prove it.”

“Fine.”

With uncharacteristically little forethought, Harrow marched over to Gideon Nav and spun them around.

“Oh, hey th–”

Harrow nearly launched herself at the rugby player, leaping up on her tiptoes to grip their cheeks, and kissing them square on the mouth.

Recovering from their surprise somewhat quickly, Gideon kissed Harrow back, wrapping strong hands around her waist. Warmth bloomed in Harrow’s stomach as she deepened the kiss, wrapping her arms around Gideon’s neck. The bare skin on her lower back tingled underneath the butch’s gentle fingers. Ianthe gaped like a fish out of water, struggling uglily for breath.

Harrow’s first thought was: “oh no”-- for a variety of reasons. When she finally pulled away from Gideon, she felt like she was being ripped from a good dream, torn away from a warm cup of tea on a rainy day.

“Hey.” Gideon smiled down at Harrow softly, a dust of blush on their warm cheeks.

A wave of nausea washed over Harrow and she stumbled backwards. She needed to vomit. Now.

“I’m– I’m sorry.” Harrow mumbled before pushing through the crowd.

Salty, bitter liquid flooded Harrow’s mouth, pooling under her tongue. A wave of dizziness washed over her and she struggled to find her footing on the slick, wooden floor. Flashing, colored lights only aided the disorientation and Harrow gripped onto a wall. The heat, the noise, the bass, her stomach, the wet fucking tanktop, the lights, her *hair* –

Harrow managed to stumble onto the back porch and heave her shoulders over the railing before her stomach completely emptied itself onto the grass below. She heaved, abdominals clenching as her body tried to rid itself of what was no longer there.

“Damn, I guess you really are straight.”

Gideon.

Harrow couldn’t even respond, too preoccupied by agony. She retched again, a pale yellow fluid falling silently through the night air. Her fingers scrabbled at the railing, splinters and jagged wood tearing through skin.

“Oh, shit. Are you okay?” Harrow could hear Gideon’s feet thumping closer on the porch.

It was too much. Everything was too much. Her throat burned, she could feel the bile eating away at her teeth. The hair on her nape felt like a collar, slowly suffocating her. Suffocating…

Harrow grabbed the hair on her neck, fingers leaving bloody trails over tan skin. She pulled.

“Woah! Hey!”

Harrow felt a strong hand on her wrist. She retched again.

“What’re you doing?” Gideon relaxed their grip and took a step back, watching as retching became sobbing.

“Gone…it needs to be gone…it’s everywhere–” Harrow tried to tug again.

“Hold– hold on, hold on.” Gideon took Harrow’s hair from her hands, holding it gently away from her neck.

Harrow pressed the pads of her fingers into the decaying wood, squeezing her eyes shut as she felt her stomach clench again.

“I’m going to cut it off– is that okay? Can I touch you?” Gideon produced a multi-tool from their basketball shorts, frantically trying to open the scissors.

“Please– just get it off.” Tears rolled down Harrow’s cheeks.

“I am, I am. It’s okay.”

In a few choppy motions, Gideon lobbed off the offending hair, brushing the remnants gently from Harrow’s neck.

“What can I do? What do you need?” Gideon pocketed the multi-tool again.

“I don’t…I don’t…” Harrow was suddenly very aware of the wet fucking tanktop sticking to her chest. She grabbed the hem and yanked upward.

“Woah, uh-!” Gideon touched Harrow’s hand gently to stop her. “I’m going to take you to my room upstairs, okay? It’s quieter up there. You can change. Is that alright?”

Harrow clenched and unclenched her fists and nodded.

“Can I carry you?”

Harrow nodded again, relinquishing her vice grip on the porch railing. Gideon scooped her up effortlessly and stepped back inside. Within a few strides, they arrived at a nondescript door by the kitchen, ducking inside and quickly yanking it closed again. Party noises somewhat muffled, Gideon hurried up the wooden stairs before them, eyes flicking between Harrow’s grey face and the approaching landing.

They arrived at a hallway and Gideon turned left, padding quickly to the end of the hall and throwing the door open. They set Harrow down on a bed and shut the door, kicking their shoes off on a small mat.

Gideon's room was cleaner than Harrow had expected. A variety of posters and photos adorned the old and cracking walls, but everything seemed to have a place, a shelf, a basket.

They hurried over to a dresser that had seen better days, rifling through the drawers.

"Here," Gideon held out a pile of folded clothes. "If you feel ready, you can shower and change into these. They might be a little big, but…"

Harrow gingerly reached out for them, but stopped short, noticing the blood still dripping down her fingers.

"Ah, right. Uh, I'll just hold onto them. Hold on," Gideon grabbed a pair of tweezers from their desk. "Can I touch you?"

Harrow nodded numbly.

With nervous hands, Gideon held Harrow's own, plucking out the visible splinters from her fingertips. "There, that should make the shower a little more tolerable."

Dizziness still had a firm hand around Harrow's head, but she choked out:

"Thank you."

Gideon smiled softly. "Ready for that shower?"

The butch led Harrow back down the hallway to a tiny bathroom with a tub shower. They turned the fan and water on and immediately sat on the laminate floor facing the door.

“I’m going to stay with you if that’s okay– just to make sure you’re alright– but don’t worry I’m not looking at anything, I promise.

Harrow figured Gideon probably couldn’t see, but she nodded anyway, shyly peeling off her sticky clothes. She flung the wet tank top into the corner.

“Thank you.” She repeated. Gideon nodded.

Harrow stepped under the warm stream of water and immediately sat down, her head in her hands.

“So, uh…drink often?” Asked Gideon.

“Never.”

“Oh…shit. Welcome.”

Harrow grunted, curling more into an upright fetal position.

“Do you feel like eating? I have a hotplate and some food up here. Spicy ramen, other ramen, chow mein, mac n cheese…” Gideon drummed their fingers on the floor.

“I um…can’t handle a lot of flavor…I’m sorry.”

“No worries. Let’s see…butter noodles sound alright?”

“Mhm.”

“Butter noodles it is.”

Harrow laid back against the tub, letting the water wash the sticky texture off her stomach. A wave of nausea smacked her again and the salty liquid trickled back into her mouth. Harrow sat up and retched, yellow substance running off her feet and down the drain.

“You’re doing great, Harrow. You’re gonna be okay.” Gideon rubbed circles into the floor with a finger.

Harrow retched again.

In a miraculous feat, Harrow managed to dress herself— only after having vomited in the shower four more times. Afterward, Gideon let her brush her teeth with their toothbrush since they “were planning on getting a new one anyway”, and save for the pit of bile burning the back of her throat, Harrow finally felt somewhat better.

She sat on Gideon’s bed, slowly nursing a Powerade. Her abdominals ached, a nice reminder that they existed at least. Their clothes were way too big for Harrow, but not necessarily in a bad way. If she were less drunk, their smell might have been overwhelming, but all it did now was make her want to take a nap.

Gideon fussed over the hot plate on their desk, monitoring the boiling water.

“Bow tie or penne?” Gideon asked, holding both open boxes aloft.

“Whatever you prefer,” Harrow mumbled, taking another drink of Powerade. She laid back, cheek against soft sheets and felt her eyes flutter closed. Her brain felt like cotton. Drifting off would be so easy. Maybe just a few minutes…

“No. Nope. No sleepy time.” Gideon softly slapped Harrow’s cheeks. “Up and at em. Let’s go.”

Harrow groaned and went limp as Gideon tried to force her upright.

“You are such a pain in my ass, Nonagesimus.” Gideon scooped Harrow up, much to her protest, and deposited her in their desk chair.

“No sleep until you eat this pasta and drink a full cup of water *and* that Powerade.” Gideon accented this by thrusting the blue Powerade back into Harrow’s hands.

They poured in the box of bow ties and stirred. Harrow took a bitter sip of her Powerade.

“Nav?”

“Hm?”

“I never told you my name.”

Gideon froze. They paused a minute before tossing salt into the pasta water. They stirred it around.

“I never told you mine.”

Non-nausea related heat crept over Harrow’s ears.

“Touché.”

They sat in silence as Gideon cooked, the party below them still rumbling on. A yell echoed up through the floorboards.

“Do you want a haircut?” Gideon asked finally.

“What?”

“Your hair seemed like it was bothering you. I can give you a haircut with like…real scissors if you want.”

Harrow drunkenly scoffed. “As if I’d let a drunk stranger near my head with scissors.”

“You have before.” Gideon arched an eyebrow.

“That was different,” Harrow mumbled. “Forgive me if I don’t think the rugby team’s…” she searched for a word. “…whatever…would cut my hair well.”

“What? I like *cut* hair.”

“ *You?”*

“Yeah, me, *sourpuss* . I cut my teammates’ hair.”

“Why?”

Gideon snorted and turned down the heat on the hot plate. “If there’s one thing you’ll come to learn, *combat boots* , it’s that gay people tend to love a haircut.”

“I’m—“ Harrow stopped herself, averting her eyes. The instinctive response played on her lips but she choked it down.

“Cut my hair.”

Gideon smirked, joy dancing in their eyes. “I’m sorry, I can only hear nice requests.”

Harrow huffed. Her head was pounding. “Please, cut my hair.”

“Finish your Powerade and we’ll talk.” Gideon turned the hot plate off and moved the pot to their desk.

Harrow scowled and locked eyes with them, guzzling the Powerade as fast as possible. Gideon choked down a laugh as Harrow violently chugged, the plastic bottle crinkling in her grip. She slammed the empty bottle on Gideon’s desk, a rivulet of blue Powerade rolling slowly down her chin.

“Gideon Nav, please cut my—“

Gideon wiped the Powerade from her chin with a thumb and the words caught in Harrow’s throat. Heat bloomed deep in her stomach.

“You can’t just…do that!” Harrow swatted Gideon’s hand away.

“Do what?”

They locked eyes for an infuriating second.

Harrow looked away. “If I puke on your floor, it’s your fault.”

“I’ll get my shears.” Gideon smiled and rifled through her desk drawer.

Gideon escorted Harrow back to the bathroom, music booming louder as they left Gideon’s room. Harrow felt a wave of gratitude as she thought about the party downstairs.

“Thank you.” She mumbled, eyes locked on the floor.

The rugby player sat her on the edge of the bathtub and closed the door. They cracked a smile and shrugged.

“I take haircut payment in kisses.” Gideon froze. “A joke! That was a joke. I’m sorry.”

Gideon rushed to kneel behind Harrow in the bathtub, their face maddeningly close to the back of Harrow’s head. Harrow fought a war in her head before, ears burning, she turned and pressed a soft kiss onto Gideon’s cheek. She whipped back around to the door. Harrow could hear Gideon swallow behind her. They cleared their throat. Wordlessly, they began to snip at the hair at Harrow’s nape, cleaning up their work from earlier. They moved on to the hair by Harrow’s ears.

Something about Gideon’s closeness felt like TV static. Even where they were not touching her, Harrow’s skin tingled. She sat with bated breath, anticipating the next touch, the next snip. Gideon’s breath ghosted against the back of Harrow’s neck as they worked, sending a shiver down her spine. Gideon gently brushed the hair from Harrow’s ears. One brush, then two. Then, a slow trace down the back of her ear that quickly stopped.

“Face me.” Gideon’s voice was thick with silence. Harrow turned.

A dust of blush lay across their cheeks and ears, eyes focusing anywhere that were not Harrow’s own. They rose up on their knees and began cutting the hair that fell into Harrow’s eyes, leaving Harrow with only a view of their black sports bra. She averted her eyes, feeling even more heat rush to her face. Gideon moved closer, fussing with some hair on the top of Harrow’s head, and Harrow held her breath, turning away from the source of embarrassment.

“Stop moving.” Gideon grabbed Harrow’s head and pulled it straight. Harrow was feeling anything but.

Gideon moved back and brushed the loose hair from Harrow’s forehead, running a gentle thumb over her features once again.

“That should do it. Look in the mirror and tell me what you think.”

“That was fast.”

“Well, as you said, I’m drunk.” Gideon smiled.

Harrow immediately clambered to look in the mirror, the alcohol left in her system still leaving her unsteady. Her hair had been sheared short on the sides, with a little bit of fluff still visible on top. No hair touching skin, barely any weight to it. Harrow turned to see all sides of her head.

“I think it’s hot.”

Gideon watched Harrow from the tub, something hungry in their eyes, and Harrow was lost for words. They motioned to her and grabbed a towel from the wall. Harrow sat back down on the tub ledge, coming face to face with the rugby player. The towel was placed over her head and moved back and forth, knocking sprinkles of loose hair into the tub. Gideon rubbed

Harrow's head with the towel for a minute or so before they stopped, peeling it up and out of Harrow's face.

The blush on Gideon's cheeks was darker now, their eyes taking all of Harrow in. The swimmer felt the heat in her stomach again. Knocking thought to the side, she leaned in.

"Can I kiss you?"

Gideon only let themselves stare at Harrow's lips for a second. Their eyebrows scrunched.

"Harrow–"

Anxiety smacked Harrow before she even knew what hit her. Of course Gideon didn't want to kiss her, she was some random church girl that got too drunk and threw up in their bathtub.

"I apologize. Obviously, you don't want to. I can just go–" Harrow moved to stand, trying to flee the scene before she had to live with the consequences.

A hand grabbed her wrist, pulling her gently back. Harrow stilled.

"Of course I want to."

Their eyes met.

The blush on Gideon's cheeks darkened further. They stared at the wall of the bathtub. "You're drunk, Harrow. And you like…just came out. It feels like I'd be…like taking advantage of you or something."

Harrow's heart calmed…slightly.

"You're drunker than I am at this point, you idiot." Harrow grabbed Gideon's head, turning it up to look at her. "And who cares? I came out…" she averted her eyes. "...because of you."

Gideon stared at Harrow, eyes dark and cheeks darker. Harrow's face burned. "Please. Kiss me or someth–"

Gideon grabbed Harrow's legs and pulled her into their lap, pressing her against the wall of the bathtub with a hungry kiss. Harrow's heart threatened to beat right out of her chest as she felt sparks lighting up all over her body, the heat in her stomach absolutely unignorable. She exhaled and wrapped her hands around their head, grabbing tufts of ginger hair as she kissed them back. Gideon made a noise and grabbed Harrow's hips, pulling her closer. Downstairs, the party boomed on.

As it turned out, Gideon was serious about the food, water, Powerade demand. The two laid in Gideon's bed, the warm pot of butter noodles between them. They held a large cup of water in one hand, the other one resting on Harrow's shoulder.

"Why the hell did she kiss him? That's a 500 dollar fine."

Gideon's laptop sat further back on the bed, their favorite trashy dating show playing.

"To make Chad jealous." Gideon waggled their eyebrows.

"The objective is to *avoid* intimate contact. They're losing so much money. And for *Chad* ? She could do better."

"Agreed, but eat your noodles."

Harrow sighed and ate another forkful of pasta. They had lost most of their warmth by now.

“Good job.” Gideon kissed Harrow on the head. “Water?”

Harrow accepted the cup of water and drank like a madman, cheeks somehow still flushing at nearly everything Gideon did. This was going to be a problem. She handed the cup back with burning ears and Gideon took a swig. Their thumb ran gentle lines along Harrow’s collar bone, the soothing gesture interrupted only by the thin chain around Harrow’s neck rolling against her skin.

“What’s your necklace?” Gideon nonchalantly tugged at the chain, revealing, of course, the cross. “Oh.”

They looked at each other again.

“This explains a lot.”

Harrow wanted to bury herself in the covers and never come out. She instead stared at one of the flowers on Gideon’s shirt.

“Stereotypical, I know.” Harrow mumbled.

“No! Well, I mean yes, but I was raised in the church too. I get it.” Gideon smiled. “It’s a rough relationship when you’re…not…what they want.”

The swimmer nodded. “I mean…I think I always knew. But saying it out loud would…mean I really *was* everything I was raised not to be. I wasn’t always as super religious I don’t think, but after my parents died when I was little…” She trailed off.

“Hey! I never met *my* parents! I was raised by nuns!” Gideon grinned.

Harrow perked up. “Really?”

“Yeah!”

The two grinned and fistbumped for a second. And then:

“Oh. Sorry for your loss.”

There was a moment of silence before Gideon chuckled, then Harrow. They looked at each other again and broke out into peals of full blown laughter. Harrow had never felt so light in her life.

“You’ve got such a cute laugh.” Gideon’s smiling eyes looked into hers.

“Shut up.”

“You do, I don’t lie.” Gideon raised their left hand. “I Gideon Nav, promise that I would never lie to Harrowhark Nonagesimus.”

Harrow rolled her eyes and gave Gideon a playful shove. “You’re such a ham.”

They clutched their nonexistent pearls with a gasp. “You wound me. I am wounded.”

“Oh my God–”

Suddenly the door creaked open. “Hey, Gid, have you seen—” Camilla Hect’s dark eyes surveyed the scene: Harrow, in Gideon’s clothes, cuddling and laughing with the rugby player. “Ah. Have a good night.” The door swung closed. Only Harrow’s final shred of dignity saved her from running after Camilla to explain.

They could hear Cam’s voice from in the hallway. “She’s in there.”

“In *Gideon’s* room?” That was Corona. There was a pause. “Congrats you two!”

Harrow wanted to jump out the window. She buried her face in her hands.

“Church is less embarrassing.”

“Picture what you were forced to wear to Christmas mass in 2008 and get back to me.”

“Fair point.”

Harrow settled back against Gideon’s arm, relaxing into the warmth. She sighed. The dating show droned on.

“Are you feeling better?” Gideon asked.

“Are you serious?”

“Yes?”

“Yeah.” chuckled Harrow. “I’m feeling much better. Actually–” She leaned forward and pulled the cross over her head, setting the necklace on the windowsill behind them.

“Woah, woah– I didn’t mean to make you feel like you had to–”

“No, no. You didn’t. This is something I think I need to navigate by myself…” Harrow took a deep breath. “...and right now, I just want to focus on other things.”

Gidon smiled at her as she lay back against them.

“What other things?”

“What?”

“You said you were focusing on other things, so like what specifically?”

Harrow shoved Gideon. “I’m going to go home.”

“Noooooooo. Stay.” Gideon wrapped muscular arms around Harrow’s waist as she tried to flee, pulling her back on top of them. “I’ll drive you home in the morning. Just stay.”

And Harrow did.

End Notes

Howdy fuckers. This was written partly in a college bar and partly while drinking. These things do not overlap. You've heard of write drunk, edit sober– now it's time for write drunk, edit drunk. I wrote this so my gf would let me read their OFMD fanfic. I didn't plan on as much of the church shit to be here LOLLL I just play sports and thought this would be fun. It got...maybe a little realer than I meant for it to. The girls in the apartment above me are screaming Adele.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!