

The book cover features a close-up photograph of two women. The woman in the foreground has long, wavy brown hair and is wearing a light-colored tank top, looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The woman behind her has dark hair and is wearing a dark, sleeveless top, with her eyes closed and her hand resting on the first woman's arm. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey. The title 'CARMILLA' is written in a large, stylized, pink-outlined font across the middle. Below it, 'THE NOVEL' is written in a smaller, pink, sans-serif font. At the bottom, the text 'BASED ON THE HIT WEB SERIES' and 'ADAPTED BY KIM TURRISI' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font.

CARMILLA

THE NOVEL

BASED ON THE HIT WEB SERIES

ADAPTED BY KIM TURRISI

NEWLY ESCAPED FROM her stifling small town, Laura is all in for her freshman year at Silas University. But when her roommate, Betty, vanishes, and a sarcastic, nocturnal philosophy student named Carmilla moves into Betty's side of the room, Laura decides to play detective. Turns out Betty isn't the first girl to go missing — she's just the first girl not to come back.

As Laura looks for answers, her new roommate tries to shut her down. Does Carmilla know more than she's letting on about the disappearances? What if she isn't just selfish and insensitive, but completely inhuman? And what happens when Laura starts falling for her anyway?

Kim Turrisi's adaptation of the award-winning queer feminist vampire web series, *Carmilla*, delivers equal parts suspense, humor and bite.

CARMILLA

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ADAPTED BY KIM TURRISI



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• ONE •

The day I've been counting down to has finally arrived. I'm moving into my college dorm. Being an only child has its advantages, trust me, but the invisible shield that my overprotective father has had around me is getting old. I'll be free of the chains once I land in my dorm. Silas University, I'm all yours.

The drive has been excruciating with my father's nonstop chatter. I barely notice the fog roll in over campus as we arrive. Silas is an institution in Styria, Austria. Built in the 1800s, it has castle-like architecture that's haunting yet regal. Ornate archways decorate all of the building entrances. Magical. Weathered stone buildings housing students and classrooms surround a green quad crisscrossed with cobblestone paths. It's perfect.

The renowned journalism program and small class sizes

originally attracted me to Silas, but now I'm all about the campus lore. I mean, for starters, there's supposedly some weird glow from the Aquatic Center after dark. I've always loved inexplicable phenomena. Can't wait to check that out.

"Laura, I know there's a lot to do here but your number-one concern is school and keeping your grades up," my dad says. Here we go again. My eyes fight hard not to roll, but they fail miserably. "If you don't get the grades, we'll pull you out." He adjusts his voice to sound as tough as nails. "I want you to be able to support yourself, not need another person to survive. To do that, you need a college education with grades that help you rise to the top."

Dig deep, Laura Hollis, I coach myself, willing the butterflies out of my stomach. He's got me on edge. Like being an incoming freshman in a school where I don't know one person isn't enough. "Dad, I get it. Trust me, it's all I've heard since I got accepted," I say. I feel guilty for snapping at him, but it's not the time to pound his lesson into my head.

"Laura, this is what fathers do," he explains.

"Drive their daughters crazy?" I ask, half kidding. At least he laughs.

A slight mist starts to fall as we haul my stuff from the parking lot. The sidewalks are lined in a damp moss. I glance up and see ominous dark clouds hanging over the campus. When I open the double wooden doors of the dorm, a chill washes over me. I adjust the collar of my jacket to warm my neck and continue

down the hall, scanning the room numbers. Dim lighting gives an amber glow to the walls, and I can hear the faint sounds of other students getting their rooms set up behind closed doors.

“They could use some heat in here,” Dad remarks. I’m shivering, but I’m not sure it’s from the cold.

We walk down the hall past rooms 305 ... 306 ... The doors are decorated with a variety of pictures, posters and streamers. “Room 307, that’s me!” I announce. A sign on the door says, WELCOME, LAURA! XO, BETTY. She’s my new roomie. I like her already!

The door’s ajar, so I kick it open with my foot. It’s a pretty typical dorm room, with two beds, two desks and a teeny kitchen. But we have a big window! Bonus. I peek out and see that we overlook the quad. Nice. The goth architecture combined with the gold sheer curtains hanging from iron rods is giving off a very cool vibe.

It’s pretty much the polar opposite of my room at home. My roommate has a flair for decorating. There are countless Zen touches all over. Lavender candles, even a Buddha statue. Back home, Dad is a stickler for less is more. He doesn’t like anything chipping the paint, so my room is as sterile as a hospital and just about as inviting. I take a deep breath. I’m so ready for all of this. The adventure, the freedom, all of the new experiences. It’s really happening!

Betty isn’t here, but her side of the room is cluttered with piles of clothes against the wall and a bed that’s semi-made —

really more like a bunched-up comforter on top of a wadded-up sheet on a thin mattress. I throw my suitcases on my bed and look for the closet.

“Do you want to grab some dinner before you unpack?” Dad asks.

“I’m not really hungry. I just want to get settled, you know?” I say. If I’m being honest, I just want to be alone to absorb all of this goodness. I worked my ass off to get here, and I’m ready to start.

“All right, kiddo, I’m going to head home and leave you to it.” He’s intense but I know he means well. I give him a big hug, and Dad’s arms around me feel safe. Warm. A tiny pang of fear sneaks in. I’m really on my own. I step back hesitantly and steel myself for the actual moment he leaves.

“Studies first. Eye on the prize. The TV internship.” The coveted internship that I’ve had my sights set on for the last two years. Working in the research department behind the scenes of a morning show. Basically my dream job. *Stick to the plan*, I scream in my head. Slay my first two years at Silas and I have a shot. My dad believes it, just like I do, and that’s what I’m thinking as he walks away. I put some music on to help with the monotony of unpacking. Gwen Stefani is always good for a pick-me-up. I’d folded all my T-shirts and color coordinated them so I could just drop them into the drawers in my dresser. I find a plastic bin in a suitcase, open it and start to laugh. Dad loaded me up with all my favorites: endless cookies, Pop-Tarts, soda and chips. He thought of everything.

I rip open the Oreos and munch on a few while I put away my jeans and jackets. Sounds from outside interrupt me, but when I look out the window, all I see is darkness. Is anyone even here? It's eerily silent, inside and out.

But when I whirl around, I see a girl in a pink skirt wearing neon Chuck Taylors and a smile for days. She's got a pizza box in one hand and a six-pack of beer in the other. Where did she come from? "I didn't even hear the door," I say, a little weirded out. "Um ... hey."

"You must be Laura. I'm Betty. Gwen Stefani, I love her!" She sets her food down and rushes to hug me. Her energy is electric. "Cookies! My kind of girl. I thought we should celebrate. Hope you like pizza. And beer."

"Pizza is pretty much my favorite thing in the world. A close second to cookies," I admit. I'm indifferent to the beer. She opens two bottles, expertly, and hands one to me. We clink.

"To a killer year," Betty cheers. She flips open the pizza box in the middle of her bed where we both sit cross-legged. I'm elated when I see sausage and cheese on the pizza. No vegans here. Betty folds her slice and talks while she chews. "This week is frosh week. That means parties on top of parties. The best."

"How do you know all of this already?" How long has she even been here? I wonder.

"Family friend who's a senior is on the student council. She's been on campus for almost two weeks. I drove up with her, so I know what's going on."

Impressive. Nonstop parties, though? I shudder at the thought. My course load is pretty intense. I can't imagine a whole week of parties. I came here for the killer journalism program, not a hangover. But I don't want to get off on the wrong foot on the first day.

"Wait till you meet the Zetas. So many cute guys to choose from," Betty reports exuberantly.

Wonder if now is the right time to tell her that those Zetas do not matter to me regardless of their hot factor or any other attraction she might have? So not my type. I'm still not great at this, even though it's who I am. I just don't want any push-back or bullshit about it. Certainly not on day one. On the other hand ... what the hell? May as well put it out there. "Actually, I'm gay, so the Zetas are all yours," I say.

Betty doesn't miss a beat. "Awesome. Wait till you meet Danny. She's one of the teaching assistants. Third year. She's gorgeous and so nice. She even makes me question things. I'll be your wing girl."

"You're on," I say, smiling. I'm already glad this girl's my roomie.

I take my second piece of pizza and she opens another beer. "You ready?"

I pretend I'm considering it. "I still have half left. I'm good."

"You better get in practice," Betty jokes.

I go with the flow and half nod. No need to make waves or stand out, but beer is definitely not on my top-ten list. A final

swig of the backwash at the bottom makes me gag. I make a mental note to find a different beverage.

The open door to our room slams shut. I get up to close the window but it isn't open. Where's that breeze coming from? Is there always a draft here? I zip up my sweatshirt, then sit on my bed next to Betty.

We yap until well past midnight, filling in the blanks of roommates 101. Betty is an only child like me. She'd pick a cat, whereas I'm more of a dog person. I'm allergic to cats — at least that's what my dad told me when I asked for a kitten for Christmas when I was six. Betty swears she'd walk over cut glass for a brownie. I feel her. It's like we've been friends forever! We exchanged a couple of emails before we got here, but I had no idea she would be the perfect match for me. Crawling into bed, I almost fall asleep before my head hits the pillow. The tapping that sounds like it's coming from inside the walls creeps me out, but exhaustion takes over. It's my first night at college and I won't think about what could go wrong.

• TWO •

It's been a whirlwind week — as promised — for the freshmen. My roommate rocks, but she's just what Dad was afraid of — a total party machine. While I burn the midnight oil with my books, she hits any and every party on campus. Didn't miss a single one this week, sometimes two in one night. Confession: she's having way more fun than me. We've been sharing cooking duties and have dinner together before going our separate ways. She makes a killer mac and cheese, but I'm more of a throw-everything-in-one-bowl kinda cook.

Betty made sure to schedule late-morning classes so she can sleep in. My classes start at eight, before any thinking person is out of bed. My day is practically over when hers is just starting.

Clad in my go-to outfit, plaid pajama bottoms and a T-shirt, I start setting up my computer for my first journalism project,

a vlog about this storied school. Yep, I'm delving into the mysteries of Silas University, because the folklore surrounding this place is truly legendary. It's shrouded in mystery after mystery: there's even a question about whether there are real eyeballs in the eyeball soup. Okay, the campus myth that unlucky scholars who linger too long in the library might find themselves digitized, trapped for eternity in the online catalog, has me on red-hot alert. No one knows how it happens, only that it does. But I'll get to the bottom of these mysteries with my journalistic skill.

My epic project will land me the A my father expects. I mean, keeping a vlog isn't hard-hitting journalism on its own, but I'll use it to keep all my facts straight for the paper I'm going to write. That's the road to the best grade in class.

"All right, let's do this!" I yell at the computer screen, trying to fire myself up for the beginning of the weekend. The commotion at our door shuts me up when Betty swirls in like a hurricane. Did she really wear a sequined skirt and ripped tank top to class? I wouldn't mind tapping into some of her confidence, but maybe Silas is my chance to do just that.

"How did you do on the government test?" I ask.

She shrugs. "A sixty-two. So, not bad?"

"If I got a sixty-two on anything, my father's brain would explode, then he would order me to move home." And, okay, I wouldn't like it, either. The one time I got a C in high school geometry, I cried for a week.

“You’re better than that,” I tell Betty, but she’s already moved on. Tossing her backpack off to the side of the bed, she roots through the mini fridge and takes a beer from her shelf. She raises the bottle to me and changes her clothes between swigs of brew.

“Shouldn’t you be studying?” I ask sheepishly. Her laugh says not so much.

“It’s Friday night. There’s a raging party in the quad. Everyone will be there. You need to come,” she lectures while rifling through the closet for the perfect outfit. Articles of clothing fly through the air, landing everywhere.

“I don’t know ...”

Betty grabs my hands and twirls me around. “I do. You’re eighteen years old. There’s plenty of time to study. You’ve been at it all week. Come on, we need to get you into something besides those pajamas and get you out of this cave. You’re withering away. Plus, Danny will be there,” she adds, all singsongy.

Not gonna lie. *That* gets my attention. I mean, she’s my teaching assistant in women’s studies and all, but not my teacher. Big difference. Turns out that’s just the push I need to join the Silas student body tonight.

When I met Danny last week I was so tongue-tied that she must think I’m an idiot. At the very best, she probably realizes my game is that I have none. Thank God Betty was there to run interference. (By that I mean speak in complete sentences without swooning.) Danny’s flaming red hair cascaded down

her shoulders and her smile was as bright as the sun. Just remembering gives me goose bumps.

I take Betty's fashion advice and lose the jammies in favor of a skirt and white tank top. I run my fingers through my hair and add some pinkish lip gloss.

Betty even compliments me. "You're hot," she says.

I check myself out in the mirror. I clean up pretty well. Now to get Danny to notice. I'm so rusty — I haven't had a girlfriend since junior year, when Aisha Carson crushed me, leaving me to wallow with a broken heart for the rest of high school. Pretty crappy timing. I ended up going to prom with some rando setup. My dating skills need some work. Okay, a lot of work.

Betty and I walk arm in arm to the party. The lights lining the walkway flicker as we stroll through campus. Or are my eyes playing tricks on me? Betty doesn't seem to notice. My eyes dart back and forth when the low howl of the wind stirs up the fall leaves. I hear crunchy footsteps behind us, but when I glance over my shoulder there's no one there.

When we step into the party, multicolored strobe lights nearly blind me. My sandals stick to the floor, and I can't get away because hundreds of students surround me, gyrating while they juggle drinks.

A guy hands a bottle of vodka to Betty. "Ten-second pull, let's go!" I watch as she puts the bottle in her mouth and drinks for a full ten seconds. She doesn't even choke.

“I love this game!” she screams over the music. “Your turn. Start small. Five seconds.” She hands me the bottle.

A few kids surround me. “Drink. Drink. Drink,” they chant. Reluctantly I take the vodka. I want to hold my nose before I sip it, but I also want to be one of them and fit in. Betty starts the stopwatch on her phone. “Go!”

I suck up my fear and bring the bottle to my lips. I’m pretty sure half of it is running down my chin but I manage to continue until Betty calls time. I thrust it back into Betty’s hands and almost cough up a lung. Man, this stuff burns.

“Fun, right?” Betty says.

“Yeah.” I just hope I don’t puke.

Betty points to a group in the far corner wearing green glow sticks around their necks and carrying neon drinks. “Steer clear of them. The Alchemy Club. They do weird experiments that you don’t want to be caught in the middle of. Trust me.”

Oh, I will, I think. I’ve never been anyplace else with such a mix of creepy and crazy. Now I’m caught in a sea of wasted people, and I need to find a corner to catch my breath. I turn to ask Betty a question, but she’s vanished. Panic starts to set in, when a tap on my shoulder startles me. I turn to see Danny, and a five-alarm fire blazes in me. *Stay cool, I plead with myself. Do not babble. Please.*

“Betty’s up on the bar — she’s doing Jäger Bombs. She’s owning them.” Danny points across the room. “She’s really something.”

“Yeah,” I manage.

“It’s nice to see you out,” she says, grinning.

I shift closer to her. “It’s nice to be seen” just falls out of my stupid mouth. “I mean, Betty talked me into getting out of my pajamas. You know, to come here. I guess pajamas are frowned on at parties.” I just babble. And. Babble.

Danny doesn’t seem to notice. “You’re cute.”

I feel the red spreading across my cheeks.

“Dance?” she asks.

Grateful for the liquid courage I was cursing a few moments ago, I answer with a smile. The touch of her hand on mine as she guides me through the maze of people to the dance floor makes my crush on her grow exponentially. She’s just so everything.

And we have the whole year ahead of us.

•

My tongue seems to be wearing a wool sweater this morning. This is exactly why I don’t go to parties. I let Betty talk me into all of those vodka pulls and Jäger Bombs, and now I’m paying the price. I look over at the lump beneath her covers. Betty. She ruled the party last night. She is officially the queen of vodka pulls at Silas University, or so said all the screaming students who were cheering her on. With each chug from her perch on the bar, the noise from the crowd was deafening.

The light on my computer is flashing. Crap, I left the camera

on. I roll up out of bed and down an entire bottle of water while I scour the room for something for my pounding headache. I spot the bottle I need in a sea of cosmetics on my dresser. Fighting with the childproof top, I yank it off and pop two. I yell to Betty, "How's the Jäger-Bombinatrix this morning?"

No response. Not even a stretch. I know she's sleeping, but no one is going to need this more than she does. So I yank the covers back.

Nothing but pillows.

And then, before I turn away, a piece of folded paper flutters to the floor, stuck together with some unrecognizable fluid. I pry it open. "Dear Student, your roommate no longer attends Silas University ..."

I knew it. I knew that party was a mistake. I should have insisted we stay home, but no, I succumbed to the pressure to fit in, to be a normal college freshman who chugs beer and hammers shooters on a Friday night instead of studying. And now Betty is kicked out of school? I text her on my flip phone. Yeah, my dad thought I'd sext selfies to strangers on an iPhone, so this was my only option. He gives new meaning to the words "better safe than sorry."

My first text goes unanswered. Another also goes into oblivion.

My mind starts racing a mile a minute. I mean, I go from zero to one-eighty. Whatever her future is at Silas, where is she now? What if she's lying on the side of the road?

What kind of roommate am I? Did I lose her or did she lose me? *Calm down, Laura, I tell myself. We're at college — maybe she hooked up with someone. That has to be it.* My inner dialogue seems to be working. My heart rate is slowing down.

I scan my computer, checking her social media. Nothing since the pic of us playing flip cup with Danny and a couple of knucklehead Zetas. Betty's a poster. I mean, she posts her every move. Her breakfast. Her outfits. Everything. So why the silence?

My heart picks up its pace again.

What can I do but text? *Hey, not to be a freak but are you alive? Hookup?*

I add a laughing emoji to lighten it up and force myself to lie back down. That lasts about forty-five seconds before I pop up to check my phone. Nothing. Maybe I need some cookies.

I rip open a box of vanilla wafers. She's definitely missing. I pause. Do I want to be the overreactive friend who panics? Maybe she's fine.

What if she's not?

I comb the college directory to figure out who to call. I pound in a number in the housing office, hoping someone will answer at this ungodly hour on Saturday morning. I shake the vodka cobwebs out.

"Yes! A person!" I scream when I hear a voice on the other end of the phone. "I want to report a missing person." I don't even wait for a response. "My roommate disappeared last night

and all I found was a sticky note, and there is no way in hell or Hogwarts that she would bolt in the middle of the night and leave me with a cryptic scrap of paper.”

Plus, she was too drunk to do anything other than pass out. I keep that fact to myself. She was just drunk. Now she’s gone. Simple.

“No.” I interrupt the lame-sauce BS they’re feeding me. “No one leaves a multiple-choice note,” I insist. That’s the weirdest part of all.

I listen, bobbing my head, then I cut the guy off. “Sir, this is what was left behind. I will read it to you word for word so that you can comprehend the situation.

“Dear Student,

Your roommate no longer attends Silas University. He or she has (a) lost his or her scholarship and has decided to go home; (b) elected to attend another school due to your extreme incompatibility [please, never]; (c) experienced a psychological event that left him or her unfit for student life or (d) cited personal reasons, and really, why does anybody do anything? Exit procedures have commenced. No action on your part is needed.”

Obviously, this is a load of crap. It doesn’t make the least

bit of sense. But I listen. Listen some more. Until I can't stand another word. I take a deep breath and try to be reasonable. "Sir, I don't think you're getting the drift of this. I do not need a new roommate. My old roommate is perfect. It's just that she vanished last night. Disappeared. Something is terribly wrong. I can feel it."

He explains that some kids just flip out and not to worry, they'll get me another roommate shortly. He mentions that I'm overreacting. He's clearly not getting it.

At the end of my rope, I holler, "Obviously you're refusing to help me! I demand to talk to a supervisor!"

"You can't hang up on me!" I scream to no one. I'm ready to throw the phone across the room, except where would I even replace a flip phone? I know I can be a tad high-strung but my gut is telling me that we are at DEFCON 1.

Betty, where are you? I wait a few minutes, then my texts get a bit more frantic. You need to text me before I call the police. I need to know that you're ok. NOW.

Crickets.

So I'm on my own in my quest to find my missing roommate. This calls for all the junk food, starting with more of these vanilla wafers and maybe some chips. I find a number for campus security, but my phone rings before I get lost in the automated abyss.

"Yes, I am the one with the missing roommate. Thank you so much for calling." Finally, someone who cares. I listen to the

babbling and I have to cut her off right away. Why do these people not get it? “No, I do not need a new roommate! I need to find my old one. She’s missing!” I shout. Once again, I’m silenced by a dial tone.

My laptop is the only sign of life in this room. “Fine. If no one wants to help, I will find her myself,” I say. “I’m not backing down.” Yes, now I’m having a conversation with a computer.

I don’t know how, but I will. I close my eyes, willing my head to stop pounding.

This is basically my father’s worst nightmare about college come to life. Hangovers, debauchery, kidnapping. Maybe it’s all a bad dream. I get back into bed, hoping to start all over by going to sleep.

I toss, I turn, I get caught in the covers like a fish in a net. I try counting sheep, meditating. Nothing works, so I throw the sheet off and get up.

I make a cup of coffee and drag my fingers through my hair. How the hell am I gonna pull this off? I have to find a way. People don’t just disappear in the middle of the night. Do they?

A noise outside of my door startles me ... but not as much as when it opens. Standing smack in the middle of the doorway is a raven-haired girl wearing black leather pants and an attitude for days, looking like she’s fresh off a Harley. She unnerves me. “Who are you?”

“Carmilla, your new roommate, sweetheart,” she answers. Why does she seem so ... superior? She’s the new one here.

“Um, no,” I say hesitantly, “there’s been a mistake. This isn’t happening, I have a roommate.”

She blatantly ignores me, reaching into the fridge and helping herself to one of *my* sodas. “Don’t you catch on fast.”

I double back. “No. I mean I have a preexisting roommate, her name is B-Betty,” I stammer.

Carmilla surveys the room. “Really? Where is she?”

“She’s missing,” I snap. This girl is really getting on my nerves.

She strides around the room like she owns the place. Never taking her dark eyes off me, she waves a piece of paper in my direction. “Well, I live here now, per my letter from the dean of students. And no one dares to question her.” She’s sarcastic but serious. She’s ballsy, I’ll give her that.

Carmilla tosses her backpack on the bed, then starts ransacking Betty’s stuff. Tossing aside her jeans, picking through her pile of clean laundry. When she picks up Betty’s shirt, holding it up to herself, I flip. “Hey, that’s not yours.” Jesus Christ, what is wrong with her?

Her lips turn up and she cocks her head. “It’s on the bed that’s now mine. Possession is nine-tenths of the law, cutie.”

I don’t like the way she says that, so I snatch the shirt away from her.

Carmilla shrugs. “Until you cough up Betty, I’m your new roommate and this is my side of the room.” She draws an invisible line between our beds with her index finger. She grabs the

cookies from my desk and plops down on Betty's bed, scrolling through her phone and munching away.

"I'll find Betty so fast that there will be scorch marks on those leather pants of yours."

The grin on her face rattles me.

And that's before she blows me a kiss.

• THREE •

After another night of insomnia, I stare at my stack of textbooks. I'm certain I look like a wreck. Rat's nest for hair, ice cream stains on my T-shirt. I'm surrounded by coffee, cookies and a box of my favorite chocolate-crunch cereal, attempting to start the outline for the big paper that counts as half of my grade. I don't have one single word written, and I never procrastinate. College is hard. And different. At least this one is.

After half an hour, I have to admit I just can't concentrate. I'll work on my journalism project instead. It's turning into more of a detailed video account of the manhunt for my lost roommate. Hey, that's a strange phenomenon at Silas University, right? Every time I try to talk about anything, it turns into my quest to locate Betty.

Carmilla is nowhere to be found, which is fine by me. The

less I have to interact with her, the better. I wish she was the one who was lost.

I turn the camera on and begin my vlog entry, keeping my voice low just in case. “Betty is still missing and she has been replaced with the roommate from hell. Look at this footage.” I click a link to what the camera caught while I was in class this week. “She steals my chocolate, she wears Betty’s clothes, she’s never up before four o’clock and there’s a nonstop stream of girls in our room. Check this out — this is a girl from my anthropology class with Carmilla on my bed.”

Danny should be there with *me*.

“Carmilla is the worst.”

I dunk a Pop-Tart in my coffee. “Well, guess what,” I continue. “I told the girl of the week that Carmilla has a longtime girlfriend. She went crazy. *Bam*, revenge is mine. Now, I’m gonna use her soy milk on my cereal.” Maybe no one is following my video blog, but I sure feel better.

I reach into the fridge for her box of nondairy blech. MINE is scrawled in black Sharpie across the front, like she has to protect it. She has one thing in the fridge and lays claim to it while eating all of my food as she pleases.

I pop open the box and pour the soy milk all over my cereal. And I’m not gonna lie — I feel smug and victorious until I look down. The shrieking sound I’m sure the entire campus just heard came from the depths of my being.

This isn’t soy milk at all.

It's blood. Or something that looks suspiciously like it.

The floor monitor, Perry, rushes into my room trailed by her sidekick, LaFontaine. I mean, these two are never apart. Perry is the dorm's resident worrier, like a mom away from home. She's by the books; rules are her jam. Perry is preppy, straitlaced and so uptight, her rules have rules. LaFontaine is all punked out in an *X-Files* T-shirt and jeans, their short, spiky hair gelled to perfection. Like my high school friend Sam, they're genderqueer.

I am officially freaking out. "Do you see this? It's definitely blood. Isn't it? How could there be blood? This is the most disgusting thing ever. It's *blood!*" I yell, waving my bowl of befouled cereal at them. Carmilla has ruined a perfectly good bowl of chocolate goodness.

LaFontaine and Perry stand close together, exchanging glances. Inspecting the cereal, LaFontaine says, "Well ..." Like Carmilla should be innocent until proven guilty or something.

"Come on, you guys, it's blood. For sure. And, it's the only thing that she keeps in the refrigerator. Not a crumb of anything else. She drinks it all the time. Something isn't right."

Suddenly I see a pattern here adding up to who knows what. Carmilla never studies, she's out all night and girls throw themselves at her. She tends to appear out of nowhere. It's spooky.

And, well, the blood.

Perry assesses the situation. "I admit that I find it a bit odd."

LaFontaine nods. "Odd? That's where you're going with this?"

No one takes type O in breakfast cereal. She's off. Sounds like there's something terribly wrong with this one."

"Thank you." I almost kiss LaFontaine, I'm so happy to have someone on my side.

Perry dismisses her friend's comment with a tone in her voice that grates on my last nerve. "You are not here in an official capacity, Susan."

"Do not call me Susan," LaFontaine barks. I have to admit that the name LaFontaine fits. I've never known a Susan who could pull off the funky badass that LaFontaine does. I mean, my grandmother's name is Susan. Case closed.

"That has been your name since I've known you, you know, for the last sixteen years," Perry snaps.

"Well, now my name is LaFontaine." They are not giving an inch.

Perry turns to me. "Maybe you should let Carmilla explain. It might be some sort of a protein supplement."

"Right. For extreme hemoglobin deficiency?" quips LaFontaine.

I scoff loudly.

"Not helping." Now Perry's getting pissed.

LaFontaine rolls their eyes. "Sorry, Perry, I know you want to believe the weird here is all Dr. Seuss, but in my world the Alchemy Club tests subjects in the cafeteria and participates in all sorts of bizarre things one hundred percent of the time. Silas is all about the weird, like it or not. As this floor's unofficial

truth speaker, I'm gonna tell Laura here to wise up if she wants to survive."

Gulp. "Survive? Carmilla wants me dead?"

"Anything's possible." LaFontaine is not making me feel any safer.

Still acting like everything is roses and unicorns, Perry argues, "A lot can be solved with good communication —"

LaFontaine cuts her off and turns to me and says, "Or a lot of things can be solved with hair and blood samples." Then whips out a syringe. My startled gasp stops any further action.

"I'm a bio major," LaFontaine explains. "It's totally cool. It's what we do."

I can't take it anymore. This place is nuts. The door to my room blows open, but no one's there. It could be just a draft in the hallway, but nothing here is what it seems.

Nothing.

I'm not going to let the bloody cereal distract me from my bigger problem. Why is Carmilla here in the first place? Because Betty is still missing, and it's been days.

"If I'm going to get anywhere, I think I should go to the dean," I tell Perry and LaFontaine. "Surely, she'll get right on this. One of her students has vanished into thin air. It's not normal."

Perry and LaFontaine face each other and shake their heads knowingly. "Yeah, no. That's not such a good idea," they say in unison. This, at least, they agree on.

I'm not understanding. "What good is a dean of students who doesn't help students? Isn't that her job?"

"Well, she's not really known as the warm and fuzzy type. She likes things her way," LaFontaine explains.

Perry softens her tone. "The only thing she would do is assign you another roommate. Carmilla is better than what could be."

"I don't know about that," I argue. "She's awful. She's up all night, drinks blood and is a total slob. Did I mention she drinks blood? There's not one redeeming quality about her. She is no Betty."

"You might get a snorer or hater," LaFontaine insists. "Don't call attention to yourself with the dean. Trust me. Wait it out. I'm sure Betty will come back."

"All the other girls that disappeared did," Perry adds.

All the other girls?

"All what other girls?" I ask, my voice cracking. This is a new level of weird and slightly terrifying, if I'm being honest.

"It's not like they stayed gone. They returned to campus," Perry starts to explain.

Now my head is spinning. "Let me get this straight. More than one girl disappeared from campus and no one said anything? No one did anything?" Or thought to mention it till now?

Perry stammers and backpedals. "It wasn't really that unusual. Girls having fun. Maybe they got a little carried away. You know."

“No, I really don’t.” A tiny part of me wonders if my dad was right to be worried about me coming here.

“How do you not know this?” LaFontaine asks. “Two girls from our floor disappeared, then showed up a few days later — one in her dorm room, the other in psych lab — with zero memory of anything in between. Like, zilch.”

“Why the hell would I just happen to know this?”

LaFontaine gives me the once-over. “Everyone does.”

“It was the beginning of frosh week,” says Perry. “Week one. There were nonstop parties. You know that. Burning the candle at both ends, twenty-four seven. I’m sure they just had too much to drink.”

“Because *that* causes random disappearances?” LaFontaine says.

I stand up, pleading. “You know these girls? I need to talk to them. Now. They might be able to help us find Betty.” The answers could be right in front of us! Betty could be back tomorrow!

LaFontaine puts a hand up to stop me. “You need to chill. They’re traumatized enough already and they don’t need you stirring up those feelings. You’re clearly on a mission.”

I protest, “But, I need —”

“Dial it down. You can be a little intense.”

Then Carmilla arrives, chuckling like she’s in on some joke. “Intense is about right,” she says. Her tone is like fingernails on a blackboard.

“You must be the new roommate. Welcome to our floor,” Perry greets the roomie from hell.

LaFontaine nods kindly in her direction. Carmilla keeps walking toward the fridge. When she bends in, the girls disappear.

I glance in Carmilla’s direction. “You won’t find your soy, if that’s what you’re looking for.”

She sees the box on my desk. She knows I know. “Lighten up. It was a prank.”

“Blood in a milk carton isn’t a prank. It’s sick and twisted,” I tell her.

She bursts out in a belly laugh. “You have no sense of humor. Please. It was food coloring and corn syrup.” She totally dismisses me. “Just testing you, Hollis. You failed.”

“You’re a freak.”

“Aw, you’re angry?” Her condescending tone causes a visceral reaction. I feel my face scrunch and tense up. Even my eyes shut.

Carmilla torments me. “The bunched-up face you’ve got going on is hilarious, buttercup.”

I hiss, “How hilarious do you think it will be when I get the dean of students involved to kick you out of here?”

That stops her. “Wait a second, you’re going to bitch to the dean? I’d pay top dollar for that show. Be my guest.” The invisible wall between us is steel. The silence deafening. I welcome the interruption of two girls who show up in our room. Our door is never closed.

The energetic blonde introduces herself. "I'm Sarah Jane and this is Natalie. Perry sent us down to talk to you. She thought you might have some questions we could help with." These have to be the girls who disappeared. Both of them seem ready to talk.

Carmilla just snorts.

"Thanks for coming down," I tell the girls. "I'm Laura. Ignore my sociopath roommate. So ... you kinda disappeared at the beginning of the year?"

"Quite the killer interrogation technique you've got going on," Carmilla taunts me.

I will myself to ignore her as Sarah Jane speaks up, explaining. "One minute I was at the swim team's Under the Sea party, downing Fizzy Dagens, the next I was in my dorm room and people were yelling at me. They said I was missing for two days. I don't remember anything. It's like everything is blank."

"How is that possible?" I ask. Sarah Jane simply shrugs.

I turn to Natalie, who's a little skittish and a lot mousy. "What about you, Natalie?"

She twists toward me. "I was at a wine-and-cheese party enjoying a nice rosé, then a day and a half later I was standing in a lecture hall listening to my professor drone on and on about the American Revolution. Like thirty-six hours flew by with nothing in between."

I'm incredulous. You don't just lose days. "You can't remember anything? Nothing out of the ordinary?"

Both girls cock their heads, deep in thought. Natalie says, “Nada about the lost days, but you know, there’s a ton of Fireball in the Dagon’s.”

Carmilla can’t resist commenting, “Now that’s the scoop of the century.”

“Fuck off,” I snap before turning back to Natalie. I catch Carmilla grinning. I can’t believe I let her get to me. Crap.

Natalie thinks for a moment. “You know, there is one thing. I had the same recurring dream a few days before I disappeared. It was really visual.”

I encourage her. “Okay, that’s something ...”

“I was awake in the dark and there was a big black cat prowling under my bed.” She takes a step back. Her voice gets increasingly quavery. “Sometimes a shadowy figure in a white dress would appear. Standing over me. I don’t remember seeing a face. My throat started to close and I couldn’t breathe. It seemed so real.”

Carmilla starts whistling the theme to *The X-Files*. Natalie is ruffled now. Her eyeballs start to twitch and so does she. Just when we were getting somewhere, Carmilla had to break the spell.

“What is wrong with you?” I say.

Carmilla shrugs. “I’m out of soy milk — that makes me testy.”

Natalie starts fidgeting with her hair and freaks out. “I have to go. Now. I hope that thing doesn’t touch your face,” she says

nervously. She races out the door and down the hall, making a humming sound.

Sarah Jane moves toward the door, too. "Sorry. Nat is kinda PTSD about the dreams. I'm gonna need to go talk her down. That happens a lot since the whole vanishing thing. Humming is supposed to help. It doesn't. See you later."

The whole encounter leaves me shell-shocked. So much to absorb. The dreams are really nightmares that must mean something. But what? Betty didn't mention any dreams.

Carmilla just skulks around the room like a lion stalking prey. She really hangs on to her anger. Munching on some of my cereal right from the box, she says, "Seriously, if someone's going around kidnapping girls, I can see why they threw those two back."

"Oh my God, you are the devil. If you don't stop acting like this, I'm going to punch you in the throat."

Carmilla sticks out her lip, "Oh, cupcake. So violent."

"That was a real person who had something traumatic happen to her. As a freshman, I see it as pretty much my worst nightmare. I can relate. If I disappeared, would anyone care that I was gone? Or even notice?" I'd really like to slap her but my better judgment takes over. I'm not an aggressive person. Yet.

Carmilla keeps shoveling cereal from the box into her mouth.

"Are you so damaged that you're incapable of caring about anything or anyone?" I fire off.

She gets inches away from my face, so close that I feel her

warm breath as she spews bits of cereal at me. “Do you really think you’re doing anything to help that girl? Or Betty? Come on, Hollis, be honest here. Do you know anything that you didn’t know before she vanished?”

I don’t have a comeback for that. She is 100 percent correct.

“That’s what I thought.” She circles me like she’s about to devour me. “You’re a child. You understand nothing. Not about life, not about this place. Nothing. And certainly not about what it takes to survive in a world like Silas.” Carmilla grabs my shoulder, sending an electric shock through me. “Word of advice. The sooner you stop playing Lois Lane, the better off you’ll be. Trust me.” She throws herself on the bed, leaving me speechless. For just a moment.

I take a deep breath. “No. No, I’m not going to stop. The eighteen-year-old who’s never been outside the city limits before she got here, who thought that university was gonna be some big adventure full of books to read and parties to dance at, I never thought anything bad could happen. Turns out this new world isn’t quite what I thought it was. My university is creepy. Idiots getting hammered. Girls going missing and no one cares. They reappear and no one questions what the hell happened. Maybe that’s the way it is but I don’t have to accept it. I deserve better. Betty deserves better. Even you deserve better.”

She does the slow clap. “Bravo.”

In that moment, I know what I need to do. I turn back to my computer and get to work.

Carmilla moves up onto her elbow. From the bed, she asks, “What are you doing?”

“I’m officially changing the core of my journalism project. I’m shifting the focus of my vlog to solicit the students of Silas to help me find Betty. Someone had to have seen something. If the student body pitches in, we can do this together.” I almost believe this. I almost believe I can solve this mystery all on my own.

Carmilla purses her lips and blows out. “That’s gonna piss the dean off.”

“Then she can come talk to me.”

Delight spreads across Carmilla’s face like a sunrise. “Oh, my money is on that happening. Sooner rather than later. You’re asking for trouble.”

“I’m asking for answers,” I correct her.

“You’re crazy.”

I stroke a few keys. Voilà. “Hello, students of Silas University, my roommate vanished,” I say, firm but calm. “I need your help to find her. She isn’t the first to disappear either. No one else will help me, not even the dean of students. But I have faith in the human spirit. If you’ve seen anything out of the ordinary at a party, message me or leave a comment.”

I rewatch it. A little rough but it gets the point across. I post it, then tweet out the link. I’m in business. I’m pretty pleased with myself, feeling borderline cocky. To celebrate, I open up a new bag of chocolate cookies. I’m just about to take a bite when a shrieking alarm sounds.

“What is that?” I panic. A fire drill? A lockdown?

Carmilla is positively giddy, clapping her hands. “Here we go. You’ve done it now.”

Perry races in, full-on execution mode, shouting commands. “Let’s go! Town hall meeting! Everybody move now! Remember your training! Five-minute drill! East stairs! Proceed in an orderly fashion!” She gestures for us to go to the right, down the hall. She’s signaling like a traffic cop, arms waving. I jump up to follow the others. As I do, I turn around to see Carmilla snatch a cookie. My cookie.

Then mug for the camera as she takes a bite.



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