

Vetted

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Chapter One

Allyssa pushed the gas pedal to the floor of the Volvo station wagon, cursing under her breath as the vehicle slowly responded. Driving her mother's old family 'mobile' was humiliating, uncool, and not at all what she wanted to be driving. She had eyed the sports vehicles for years, but felt a nice Jeep should be in her future. Unfortunately, her funds were limited. Being a student at Colorado State meant she had to take what she could get. This vehicle, not even her mother's station wagon, but the maid's occasional use vehicle, was all she could manage. She was saving her pennies though. She wanted something hip, something cool, and something more in line with her style.

Today, she just wanted to feel the wind whip through her dirty blonde hair and had all the windows down. It was the first time snow wasn't paramount in her mind as the cool spring had turned warm. As she sped past the speed limit, dangerously so, she became more alert and watched for any state troopers hiding in the turnouts or on-ramps; their radar guns aimed at the traffic. Fortunately, this far out on the prairie they were easier to spot, lazier actually, and they rarely came out here unless someone phoned for help from the call boxes on the side of the freeway.

After a while she slowed, took an off-ramp, went up and over the interstate, and onto the on-ramp leading back onto the interstate the other way. She cautiously merged, slowing enough that several faster cars passed her on her left until she was in the slow lane and she began to accelerate. She pushed the gas pedal to the floor again and waited interminably for the old vehicle to respond. She sighed. The speed, the rush of air, and the adrenalin weren't going to do it for her today. She was going to have to take what she got, again.

She headed back to the university and her boring dorm room. She had to prepare for her fourth quarter. She'd gotten her midterms from each of the classes. The grades weren't bad, but they weren't stellar and her parents were going to flip. She could already hear her mother, "Allyssa, we expected more of you. Your sister was getting much better grades than this and she managed to be part of a sorority. Why can't you be more like her?" Allyssa knew why she couldn't be more like her sister. She was completely the opposite of her, that's why. Another tactic her mother was sure to throw at her was, "Your father's money isn't really being well-spent, now is it?" The guilt would be heaped on long before her father came home from his day in the office, but his silent condemnation would be worse. He had tried to reason with her mother after the first set of grades came in.

"Now, they said that freshmen frequently falter, and Allyssa is obviously being a typical freshman," but he too would subside under her mother's nervous condemnation of Allyssa's numerous faults.

Allyssa had started to hate going home on weekends. She'd started a job at the cafeteria at school to earn extra pocket change, but as a newbie, she got the less choice hours and weekends, when there were few students to cater to. Those that needed the job more got first choice and she was too new to pick and choose. Her mother had been furious when she found out.

"Are you trying to embarrass us? Your father makes good money and you have an adequate allowance. You don't need to work!"

Allyssa felt compelled to work, to earn her own way. They wouldn't let her do anything she wanted without their opinion, their choices, or their consultation...whether she asked for it or not. Even her choice in career was already mapped out for her.

"Allyssa, you will want to take these business classes if you intend to work for your father when you get out of school. He's made a good living for this family and I'm sure he can get you a job in his office," her mother told her, certain that Allyssa couldn't possibly get a job on her own.

Allyssa didn't want to take business classes. She found them boring and many of her fellow students agreed, some even daring to sleep during the long lectures where some professors preferred to hear themselves speak.

Arriving back at the dorms, she saw it was getting dark and looked for a place to park. She didn't like the way some of the boys were looking at her as she climbed out of the old Volvo. Sure enough, they had to say something to her as she passed by them, looking down at her feet and trying not to be noticed.

"Hey, baby," one of them called.

"You're a tall drink of water, aren't you?" another asked.

Allyssa kept on going, hoping they would stop and leave her alone. She worried that one of them might physically try to stop her. She'd had that experience at a party where they simply wouldn't leave her alone.

“C’mon, baby, a tree like you is meant to be climbed,” had been the corny come-on. It had left Allyssa feeling distinctly uncomfortable.

Why anyone would want to be around horny guys all the time she never understood. Still, the silly girls were worse with their giggling and talking about make-up and guys all the time. She shook her head. It was no wonder STDs were so rampant in college-age kids. Half these people were stupid enough to have unprotected sex and then wonder how in the world they contracted something or gotten pregnant. It wasn’t just the guys screwing everything in sight, but the girls that were just as bad. The assumption that all girls were like that was what made Allyssa so uncomfortable.

“Whatcha saving it for, baby?” one guy she had dated had the temerity to ask.

It wasn’t that she was saving ‘it’ for anyone. He and his sweaty hands just turned her off.

Even the nice young men at the country club that her mother insisted on introducing her to had some of the same corny come-ons and raging hormones, despite being nicely dressed. Her mother couldn’t see it and she tried again and again to introduce Allyssa to her friends’ sons, grandsons, and nephews. Many had no desire to date her either, but obligingly went along with their own mother’s, grandmother’s, or aunt’s hopeful intrigue. After all, Allyssa Webster was a catch despite being as tall, if not taller than most of them.

“You have to date a lot of frogs until you find your prince,” her father had laughingly warned her as he danced with her at the country club one Friday night. He was one of the few men taller than her and she smiled up at him, wondering how many women he had dated until he found her mother.

Allyssa frequently wondered what was wrong with her that she wasn’t interested. She liked the kissing, the cuddling, and the caressing, but when they tried anything more intimate she didn’t like the invasion of space or the heated breathing that followed. It reminded her of a panting dog and made her want to laugh.

“Don’t worry about her, Helen, our Allyssa is just a late bloomer,” her father assured her mother.

“Yes, Allyssa is just our ugly duckling,” her mother agreed smilingly, talking as though Allyssa couldn’t hear her, couldn’t understand, and certainly couldn’t make her own decisions.

Tonight, she was feeling restless and the drive had cleared her head for a while, but not long enough. She soon felt the pressures, even unconscious, that her family had put on her broad shoulders. She put out her clothes for the next day, neatly folding her dirty laundry and putting it into a laundry bag to take home the next day for washing. She laid out her books for her classes on Friday and looked once more at the schedule on Monday to be sure she was prepared. She smiled to herself, her mother hadn’t noticed when she had dropped Introduction to Business Mathematics and instead took a biology class, something a little more intense than what she had learned back in high school. She hoped her mother would just assume it was something every freshman had to take.

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The next day Allyssa went to her classes, plodding along like the masses, looking up at guys her age and even those a little older roughhoused like they were still in grade school. She had been sure she would find more mature people here, after all it was a university, but she was frequently disappointed. The people she was drawn to were more mature, like her professors, who she enjoyed listening to. Their wisdom and knowledge was something she enjoyed. She even attended extra lectures when she could. Anything to avoid the avid drinking and partying that a lot of the freshmen participated in.

As she began to pack up her Volvo for the weekend, two of the girls from her dorm came over to ask her for a ride to the local mall. She knew it was just a way to cop a ride, not to include her in their plans. Still, she was nice enough to give them the ride and was pleasantly surprised when they offered to buy her something at the food court. Looking at the time, she had to decline. Her mother was expecting her for dinner and wouldn’t appreciate her being late.

“Can I get a rain check?” she asked carefully and the two of them blinked, not understanding. Sighing inwardly, she asked again, “Another time?”

“Oh yeah, sure,” they answered with a smile and turned to go.

Allyssa was sure that people their age should know what a rain check was. She was also sure they had only asked her out of a sense of obligation for the ride, and while a piece of pizza sounded like more fun than her mother’s stuffy dinner, she knew she would have had to call first. She really hated her life.

As she pulled up into Regal Crest Gardens where her parents had their home, she closed her eyes momentarily as she saw her sister’s car was already parked in her spot. She pulled up in front of the well-manicured lawn and pulled her laundry bag and suitcase from the back seat. Carefully locking the door, she made her way up to the front door only to have her father open it.

“Hey there, Sweet Pea. How was your week?” he asked with open arms to give her a hug. He took her suitcase from her and ushered her into the house.

“It was fine, Daddy. The final quarter starts on Monday,” she informed him with a smile as she looked up at him.

“Wow, your first year already finishing up. You didn’t think you’d make it, did you?” he teased, knowing she hadn’t been thrilled to go to the university. Still, Helen had insisted, and while he didn’t agree that everyone needed a college education, he could see her sister had benefited. After all, she had met and married a fine, young man.

“Yep,” she agreed, rather than disagree with him as she carried her laundry bag to the laundry room to deposit. The maid would start a load of laundry for her after she got done cleaning up in the kitchen. Already, she could smell the delicious aromas coming from there. “What’s for dinner?” she asked as she came into the kitchen, her father already there. He had deposited her suitcase at the top of the first landing for her and returned to where everyone was congregated around the family room that opened into the kitchen, creating a homey atmosphere.

“It’s Friday,” her mother said as though that explained it all.

“Can I help?”

“Let your sister do it, dear. She knows how.”

Allyssa was used to that response and didn’t take offense. Her sister knew all about how to take care of a house—cook, clean and be the good little housewife. She was four years older than Allyssa and seemed to have life well in hand. She and her husband, Derek had a house already as he was well-established in the business he had inherited from his father.

“Hi, Derek. How’s tricks?” she teased him as she greeted her brother-in-law.

“Hey there, Beanpole. Where’s your beau?” he teased back, never noticing the fleeting hurt look in her blue eyes.

“I can’t find one to measure up,” she returned, but it was more than what she was saying and no one ever caught it.

“Set the table, dear,” her mother ordered her.

Allyssa turned to the small powder room off the family room to wash her hands. Heaven forbid she got germs on her mother’s silverware or one of the men in the family set the table.

“You’re doing that wrong,” Carmen told her as she brought the mashed potatoes to the table, setting it on a heat-absorbing doily so it wouldn’t ruin her parents antique dining room set. She quickly reversed the table setting where Allyssa had put the knife on the outside of the spoon instead of the other way around.

“Who cares?” Allyssa mumbled as she finished setting the table. Her mother’s Friday evening dinners were monotonous and were only on Fridays because Derek had to work on Sundays. Allyssa would have preferred pizza with someone from school, but who would she have invited?

“Well, you should. What if it were someone important eating with us? The table should be set just so,” she indicated as she straightened out an imaginary crease in the tablecloth and then lined up the silverware, glasses, and plates that Allyssa had already put down.

Allyssa didn’t argue, Carmen would have come behind her and fixed it anyway if her mother hadn’t. Why they bothered to ask her for help she had no idea. She never did it right anyway, at least not to their specifications.

“Go up and change, Allyssa dear,” her mother came in carrying the other vegetables, making sure that a cover was on them to hold in the steam.

Allyssa smiled sweetly and did as her mother bid her, changing from her jeans and sweatshirt to a nice dress. She had been tempted to put on a pantsuit, but her mother wouldn’t have thought that proper attire and she didn’t want to irk her any more than she normally did. Her father would have backed her up and it would have delayed her mother’s dinner, ruining it as far as she was concerned. She shrugged into the dress, knowing it wouldn’t be up to her mother’s standard even though her mother had purchased it for Allyssa.

“Can’t you hold your shoulders back and act proud to be wearing that dress?” her mother asked as soon as she saw her daughter. “Stop slouching,” she advised, as she brought the main course into the dining room and passed Allyssa.

Allyssa nodded, trying to throw her shoulders back and towering over her mother in the process. She only slouched because her mother always made a big deal about her height. She advised her never to wear her hair up since it made her appear to be even taller.

As they all took their accustomed seats Allyssa wondered what they would do if she sat in a different one. They would probably have minor heart attacks at her temerity. No one would find it funny, and while it might be worth it to see their looks of astonishment or shock, she knew the uproar wouldn’t be appreciated

by her mother. She expected perfect obedience to her wishes as it was her home and her rules. The rest of them just lived by them.

The talk was first about her father's week and what had happened that might be interesting there. It was the same monotonous job he had had for years and rarely anything different occurred to make it interesting. Allyssa nodded and smiled when expected, eating carefully, one hand on her carefully spread out napkin on her lap, so her mother couldn't find fault. Her sister was watching her like a hawk, quick to find fault if she dared to put her elbow on the table or something equally socially wrong in her eyes.

Next, they discussed Derek's week. His assertions that he was doing well in his business made it sound like boasting. He had increased his father's business by at least thirty percent since he had taken it over right out of college. "They don't do it like that anymore," he had asserted time and again as he modernized things to what he felt they should be doing. Younger meant fresh ideas and more energy in the established business. Some of the old-timers in his father's business had balked at his ideas and plans. One by one they had either quit or retired, preferring not to fight with the original owner's son.

Next, they talked about her mother's week and plans for the next week, which included social engagements since her mother was not allowed to work. Her father insisted she was needed at home to make a happy house for him to come home to. He liked his comforts and he liked how she kept his home for him. He provided Juanita, the maid they had known and employed for the past twenty years, as a sign of his success. She kept the house just the way Helen wanted it.

Next came the conversation about how Carmen was doing. She too was a stay-at-home wife since Derek was doing so well. Occasionally, when they had a rush of orders, she went into work at his business, but for the most part she wasn't using that fine college education they made such a big deal about.

Fortunately for Allyssa, they managed to finish dinner, including a nice meringue dessert her mother had made, before they could start in on her and her week. Hearing about her studies week after week was boring. Nothing changed, and for Allyssa it was hard to come up with anything new and exciting they would want to hear.

"I noticed the Volvo is due for a checkup," her father informed her as they sat in the family room once again and Juanita cleaned up the kitchen and did the dishes. "I'll inform the garage that you'll bring it in next week?"

Allyssa knew she wasn't really being asked as much as informed that it was her 'duty' to keep the old car in good shape. Juanita had been given the new Volvo they purchased to do errands for the family, shop for groceries, and keep their home in order. "Yes, Daddy. I'll do that," she agreed, not wishing to argue.

Allyssa knew that at nineteen they still considered her a kid and treated her as such. Carmen, so much older in many ways, was included in the 'adult' conversation as they discussed current affairs from the newspaper or what they had seen on the television. Children were to be seen and not heard, and Allyssa was relieved when eight came around and Derek announced they better be going.

"I have a golfing date tomorrow if you wish to join us. We tee off at nine," he informed her father who agreed immediately, pleased to be included.

"We could have mimosas at the country club," Carmen told her mother excitedly, including herself in their little outing.

"It's a bit too early for that," Derek admonished and Carmen quickly agreed, subsiding into silence with his greater wisdom.

Allyssa was ready to pull her hair out as she watched her family interact. Why did no one stand up for themselves? Why were they always so polite? If her sister wanted a mimosa at nine in the morning on a Saturday, why couldn't she have one?

"We'll go shopping while they are golfing. Won't that be fun?" Helen asked her daughters, including Allyssa.

"I'd rather..." Allyssa began only to be cut off by Carmen.

"Oh, that sounds great, Mommy. Where will we go?" she enthused.

Without consulting or even really including her in the discussion they mapped out her Saturday. Allyssa knew she would have a headache by noon with their enthusiasm over shopping. She was grateful when Carmen and Derek finished up their plans with her parents and left. She escaped to her room to change out of the uncomfortable dress and pull on a comfortable nightshirt. Sighing deeply, she longed for an escape from this life. She had thought by escaping to live in the dorms, she would have something different. Her life wasn't horrible, but the monotony and sameness of it got on her nerves.

TO BE CONTINUED...