

I needed to get off the phone with her. This whole conversation was terrible. It was like being bitten to death by fire ants—somehow, hundreds of little tiny stings that were so much worse than just getting punched once, or something. “Okay,” I said shortly. “So—”

“And as for you,” she continued, as though I hadn’t spoken. “You’re going to make your Constellation feed public, same with Status Q and Friendverse. I’m going to keep tabs and make sure that you haven’t gone back on our agreement. If you do—or if you tell any of your friends or Nate that I am the reason this is happening, I’ll know and I go public with everything. Understood?”

“How?” I blurted. I could hear the edge of hysteria in my voice. She was just a high-school almost-senior, like me. She wasn’t the CIA, or the IRS. How was she doing this? “How are you going to *know*, Isabel?”

“Because I will,” she replied calmly. “You tell a group that large something that big, and someone’s going to say something. In their statuses, in their quotes, in messages they send to other people or write on their friends’ walls. Your life is public, in case you hadn’t noticed, Madison, and it exists on the internet. If you say something, I will know. And then the very next thing I’ll do is release this information. Understood?”

“Yes,” I muttered. I wouldn’t have admitted it for almost anything, but she had a point. Getting *everyone* to not say anything about this—or pretend we weren’t friends when we still were, which was what I’d been hoping to pull off—had no chance of lasting. It would be as impossible as convincing everyone to leave Constellation, Friendverse, and Status Q. I might as well ask them to cut off a major appendage.

“Good,” Isabel said. She sounded content now, and relaxed, and I could hear that she was smiling again. “I really didn’t want to have to do this,” she added, almost conversationally. “But you brought this on yourself, Madison. You don’t mess with me. And now you know it. Have a *great* rest of your summer, Mad.”

She hung up, and I was left staring at the phone in my hand. I was gripping it so hard that my hand was shaking. I unclenched my fingers and put it down in front of me on the table. My thoughts weren’t racing anymore—they were just centered on what I had to do today. I had to hurt everyone that I loved.

I looked at the half-written e-mail on the screen in front of me. Then I deleted it entirely. I took a breath, and logged on to Constellation. It was time to get this over with.