

SHIMMER

(Continued...)

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CHAPTER 5

Hadenford, New Jersey

“‘Better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven.’ What do you suppose Milton meant by that? Let’s hear from our new student, Logan Walker?”

“Um...”

“Stand, please, Mr. Walker.”

With a sigh, Logan pushed back his chair and stood. Everyone in the class was looking at him, half of them smirking, waiting for the new kid to make an ass of himself. “I... uh...”

“We’re studying *Paradise Lost*, Logan.” She stared at him over her reading glasses, which were one brisk nod away from tumbling off her pinched nose. “If that helps.”

Scattered laughter. Logan felt his face turning red, which explained the brief nausea he’d experienced over his frozen waffle breakfast. In hindsight, he should have ditched school.

“‘Better to reign in hell...’” Mrs. Claridge prompted. “What was Milton telling us?”

Logan nodded. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a sympathetic face. Two rows over. Attractive girl, striking face, sheaf of black hair, jade green eyes. Something about her... he was breathless, a little weak in the knees, and not simply because of his pending embarrassment. He looked her way and their eyes met. She gave a slight nod, meant only for him and somehow that broke through his incipient panic. He faced Mrs.

Claridge again and said the first thing that came to his mind. “Milton obviously never spent any time in hell.”

More laughter, this time with him, not at him. Big difference. Logan felt the tension ease across his chest. Mrs. Claridge, however, was frowning at him. “And I suppose you *have* spent some time in hell, Mr. Walker?”

“No...” Logan said. *But I know some people who have.*

“Perhaps you’d like to spend some time in the principal’s office instead?”

“I—don’t think that’s necessary, Mrs. Claridge.”

“Then sit down,” she aid. “Let’s hope your next opportunity to dazzle us results in a display of erudition rather than ignorance.”

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Logan slammed his locker shut on his battered English Lit textbook.

“Ouch! Poor locker.”

Startled, Logan looked to his right and there she was, not three feet away from him, wearing a black top with a floral design in silver thread, over green cargo pants, her elbow and hip leaning against the row of lockers. “Hey,” Logan said, finding himself a bit mesmerized by her jade green eyes.

“Tough being the new guy?”

“Tougher on the lockers, I guess.”

She chuckled, a light airy sound. “In case you were wondering, Mrs. Claridge does indeed have a stick up her ass.” Logan grinned. “If you believe the rumors, it’s actually a broomstick. And that’s where she parks it when she isn’t flying over town in her pointy black hat, cackling at the moon.”

Logan laughed. “I’ll remember that next time she’s deep frying my ego in her cauldron.”

“There you go,” she said with a smile and a wink. She straightened, clutching textbooks and spiral-bound notebooks to her chest. “Well, I’d better run before I’m late to government. Mr. Dinsmore is no party himself.”

“Wait,” Logan said. “I didn’t catch your name.”

“Didn’t throw it.” She spun on one heel and strolled away from him down the crowded hall with an exaggerated sway to her hips.

Logan ran after her, noticed her smile as he caught up to her, and decided to press his luck. “C’mon,” he said. “You already know my name.”

“Only because you were singled out for ridicule by the big C,” she said, giving him a playful rib poke with her elbow. “I prefer flying under the radar.”

“Then you shouldn’t scribble your name on your notebook... Fallon.”

She glanced down at the doodled notebook in question and frowned. “Ah, but that could be my girlfriend’s name?”

“Is it?” Logan asked with a frown of his own. “I mean, are you a...?”

“No, I’m not,” she said. “Not that there’s anything wrong with that—right? And yes, it is. My name, that is. My secret’s out, but I have plenty more.”

“Names?” Logan asked. “Or secrets?”

“Yes,” she said and stopped outside a classroom. She gave a nod toward the number above the door. “This is my stop.”

“Oh,” Logan said. “So... Fallon, I’ll see you around?”

She smiled, brushing a stand of black hair away from her face and tucking it behind her right ear before responding. “I’m sure you will,” she said. “Unless you walk around with your eyes closed.”

“Not usually.”

“Don’t you have somewhere to be...?”

“Oh, yeah, right,” Logan said, flipping through a pile of papers he’d stuffed into his five-subject notebook. “Physics or calculus or something. I’m sure I’ll hate it.”

“After Claridge, you should be able to handle anything,” Fallon said. “Bye, now.”

“Sure,” Logan said, backing away until he bumped into somebody and made a quick apology. “Well, see you... uh, I’ll be looking for... Yeah, I’d better go.”

She laughed. “Yes.”

Logan waited until she turned away and entered the classroom before digging out his forgotten schedule. Whatever class he had next, he wasn’t looking forward to it. He had a feeling his attention would remain focused on Fallon for quite some time. Something about her intrigued him. Sure, she was attractive and she put him at ease, even while rattling his cage and tying his tongue in knots, but... there was more to it than that. Definitely more.

CHAPTER 6

Fallon took her usual seat in the back right corner of Dinsmore's class. No assigned seats but most students ended up in the same spots regardless. The class bell had rung and Dinsmore, who Fallon suspected was a closet anarchist, was late as usual. Tuning out the low buzz of conversation in the crowded classroom, Fallon tapped her ballpoint pen against the cover of her government notebook. Thinking back on Logan's discomfiture, she had to smile with a bit of satisfaction. Nice to know she could keep a guy off balance when she set her mind to it. Yet there had been something more to their encounter, something tugging at her subconscious.

"Well...?" Sadie Bennett said from her usual unassigned seat at Fallon's left. Sadie was a cheerful and mischievous redhead with a pixie haircut, pale blue eyes verging on gray and a perky, up-tilted nose that was a sweet sixteen birthday present from her father, post-divorce naturally. "Who was he?"

"What? Who?"

"Cute guy in the hall," Sadie prompted. "Deer-in-the-headlights vibe."

"Oh..."

"Right," Sadie said. "But is he an 'oh, no' or an 'oh, my'?"

"Oh—maybe," Fallon said, shrugging noncommittally. "New blood. Transfer student."

"Want my advice?" Sadie asked but didn't wait for a reply. "Play out the line, let him tire himself out, then reel him in."

Fallon sighed. While there was no arguing with Sadie's overactive libido, Fallon couldn't resist the challenge. "Who says I'm fishing?"

"Oh, you're fishing, girl," Sadie said. "I recognize the dreamy look in your eyes."

Something clicked. “Thanks, Sadie.”

“For what?”

“Never mind,” Fallon muttered. She shuffled through her notebooks until she found the one with the doodle-ridden cover, her dream journal. Flipping through the pages of dated descriptions and sketches, she almost passed a page featuring a smudged pencil portrait. Though her finest artwork might never grace a museum exhibit, she could capture a likeness now and then when she set herself to the task. Her memory of the dream had faded, but a single image had remained. Her breath caught in her throat. There was no mistaking the face looking up at her from the page. “Logan.”

“Whoa,” Sadie said, after taking a peek over Fallon’s forearm. “Freaky.”

Fallon jumped at the sound of Dinsmore dropping his battered briefcase on his desk. “Good afternoon, citizens!” he declared in his booming voice, eliciting a dozen mumbled replies.

Fallon closed her dream journal and opened her government notebook again, flipping to the next blank page. As Dinsmore began to scrawl notes on the blackboard in his trademark chicken scratch, Fallon glanced down at the ballpoint pen clutched in her white-knuckled grip and couldn’t stop her hand from trembling.

“What was that notebook?” Sadie asked, her voice a taut whisper.

“Dream journal.”

“You said he was new, so how could you...?”

Fallon shook her head. “I don’t know.”

A half-truth, at best. She’d had similar experiences dating back to junior high. But nothing so... blatant. Though she still worried that she would end up like her mother, the dream journal had been an attempt to codify her dream experiences, to gain a measure of control over coincidences that frightened her, to cling to her rational side and preserve her sanity. Now she felt her hold slipping, her mental balance teetering at the edge of an abyss.

She whispered to herself, “Who are you, Logan Walker?”

Excellent question, but did she really want to know the answer?