

Chapter 2

A sudden, ear-splitting screech ripped through the air, sending both Ella and Demetri reeling while stopping the fight dead in its tracks. Meanwhile, all around them, gears ground, joints creaked, and gushes of steam spewed forth from every corner of the alley. The next thing they knew, massive hidden engines chugged to life and the walls of the maze-like “Selene” began lifting away on mechanical arms to reveal the familiar marble confines of the training arena behind them – along with the slack-jawed expressions of some very unamused instructors.

“Medics, get them out from under that mess! Quickly!”

Three adults in white coats ducked under the receding walls and rushed past Ella towards the crash site. Of course, everything in the arena was purposely built from light-weight materials, so those boys would be fine. Probably.

“Did you see what she just did? I demand she be expelled!” screamed an irate Demetri, as he continued to wave around his broken bottle like a knife.

“Would somebody please get that thing away from him before he hurts himself?” shouted the lead instructor. Ella snickered briefly before he turned on her next. “And as for you – Professor Wells would like to see you in her office, *right now!*”

“Me? But what’d I...?”

“I said now!”

Well, now she’d done it. Rather than continue jawing at the instructor, Ella decided to bite her tongue before it got her into any more trouble. However, that didn’t stop her from glaring at him or the three upper-year boys as she dragged her heels back to the exit of Training Room A. After all, *they* were the ones who brought illegal weapons into the practicum, so why was *she* the one being punished!?

At the far end of the room, Ella stopped in front of the heavy wooden doors to let out a deep sigh. Only then could she will herself to give them a push. They resisted at first – as if urging her to stay – but she pushed even harder until they gave way with a loud, objectionable creak. From there, bright light slowly spilled over her, followed by an explosion of chatter and laughter as they swung open to reveal a whole other world hidden behind them. Unlike the one she’d just come from, this place was full of students dressed exactly like her, crisscrossing through pristine ivory halls and chiseled archways totally unlike the gritty, grimy ‘Selene’ she’d left behind. Here there were no signs of crumbling brick or cracked pipes – just elegant marble walls, bronze statues, and spotless silk rugs. Here the mid-day sun didn’t beat down harshly from open rooftops, but instead filtered in gently through frosted glass and

thick layers of tangled ivy above, so that it bathed the students in warm, organic tones, while casting soft, twisting shadows on the ground. These shadows created the illusion of a weave that bound everyone together – from where Ella stood all the way around the roofed walkway that encircled the central courtyard.

To a layman who may not have known any better, all of this might've looked like just another fancy prep-school. But the truth was a bit more complicated than that. In truth, these kids didn't just play games of catch, or hop-scotch, or stand around gossiping about just anyone. No, these kids took turns bouncing rocks off walls and landing them precisely onto floating lily pads. They threw groups of dice into the air and called the results before the first one even hit the ground. They gossiped not about singers or actors, but oracles and scientists making the latest advances in fate-based mechanics. That was because these were no ordinary students, because this was no ordinary school. This was *Selene Loom*, a school for *fortune tellers*. And these kids weren't her friends – they were her *competition*.

Before even taking a single step, Ella crouched down and held out her hand. Barely a second later, a band of giggling girls ran by and, in their hurry, accidentally dropped a textbook right into her waiting palm. Its owner could only stare in shock as Ella nonchalantly stood up and handed it back to her,

unable to even utter “thank you” before her friends yanked her away again. *First years*, she thought, with a roll of her eyes, as she watched them rush off to their next class. She then turned and headed off in the opposite direction.

It had been a little under two years since Ella first came to the Terran capital of Selene (or perhaps ‘had been sent’ was a more apt description), and although she’d lived on campus that entire time, she still didn’t feel entirely comfortable here yet. Even while wading through a crowd of up-and-coming fortune tellers her own age, she mostly avoided eye contact. It wasn’t personal; most of them were probably good kids who’d worked very hard to get here. But all the same, Ella could think of about a dozen other places she’d rather be – particularly right now, as she stared up the long, dark stairwell leading to Professor Wells’ office. *Well, might as well get this over with*, she thought to herself, before slowly ascending to the chamber door at the very top.

“Enter,” a muffled voice shouted before she even had the chance to knock. That was hardly surprising, so Ella pushed the door open and peeked into the dimly-lit room on the other side.

“You wanted to see me, ma’am?” she asked the silhouetted woman sitting on the far end, in front of a large window overlooking the training arena.

“Sit,” her professor instructed, without even bothering to look up from the paperwork she was currently filling out.

Ella swallowed nervously and stepped inside. This was hardly her first time in this office; if anything, she was probably becoming a little *too* familiar with its narrow confines these days. The room itself was long, lean, and light on decorative frills – only a couple of half-stocked bookshelves and a tapestry of the school emblem broke up its otherwise empty walls. The rest of the exposed stone had a slight tint to it that bathed the entire room in a cold blue hue, except around the professor’s desk where sunlight beamed in from the open-domed training arena at her back. As a result, walking the length of the floor towards that big spotlight always made Ella feel like an inmate on death row.

Upon reaching the desk, she took a seat opposite the professor and waited. A relatively young faculty member here (Ella figured that she couldn’t have been a day past her mid-thirties), Professor Vapora Wells exuded all the sternness and authority of somebody twice her age. Even without the most imposing physique, what she lacked in size she more than made up for in presence. At the moment, she sat completely upright, filling out forms without the slightest change of expression – not even to acknowledge Ella’s presence. As usual, her pitch black hair was twisted up into a no-nonsense bun and she wore a blouse and pencil skirt neatly arranged in near militaristic order. It was a look likely reminiscent of her years spent in the Terran militia, which also explained the meticulous arrangement of notes, journals, and other papers on

her desk. However, the one item that always caught Ella's attention was the distinctly non-academic sword hilt that sat on a stand at the end of it. She figured it for some kind of ceremonial souvenir, given its ornate silk covered guard and curious lack of a blade.

“I would leave that alone if I were you,” the professor advised. “And please clean yourself up. Do remember that we have standards here.”

Without looking up from her papers, Professor Wells swiveled a small desk mirror toward her. One look and even she had to admit that the professor was right. Her complexion was about two shades darker than usual thanks to the layer of dirt now caked onto her cheeks. She rubbed them clean and then fixed her hair, pushing the bangs out of her face before flattening the top of her bob. She then gave herself a quick side-to-side in the mirror just to confirm that it still had its emerald sheen. After that, she re-buttoned her shirt collar, straightened her tie, and flattened out the pleats in her skirt. Only once she was done all that did Professor Wells finally look up to acknowledge her.

“Thank you. Now then, I have just one question to ask. Why?” she asked succinctly, while setting her pen down to look Ella straight in the eyes.

“Ma'am?”

“The rules of the exercise were simple: use the *Seeker Technique* to escape your pursuers, *not* engage them. It was as easy as a game of hide and seek – right up until you decided to *break* those rules and pick a fight with them in that alley! I would like to know *why*.”

“So you saw that did you?” Ella asked, while sheepishly averting her eyes.

“Do you honestly believe we would’ve put that steam cloud there if we couldn’t see everything going on inside of it?”

By now Ella had realized that she would need to change her plan of attack. “With all due respect professor, it was Demetri and his goons who picked that fight! They broke the rules *first* by using those illegal weapons – probably as payback for me beating them in last month’s practicum. I was just trying to defend myself!” she shouted, leaping to her own defense. Unfortunately, her argument must have come off as a tad over-rehearsed, because it barely got the professor to bat an eye.

“Oh, don’t you worry. Those boys will get what’s coming to them – I’ll personally see to that. But if safety was such a concern then why didn’t you bring this up days ago when you saw their names on the signup sheet? Or why didn’t you at least shout for help during the test itself?”

Ella squirmed in her seat a little. “Well, it’s not like I was *overly* concerned. I mean, it wasn’t anything I couldn’t handle...”

“Do you want to know what I think?” the professor swiftly interrupted. “I think it’s because you were *happy* to see them sign up. I think that you secretly *wanted* them in there with you, just on the off-chance that something like this might happen.”

“What!? That’s absurd. Why would I?”

“Because it would make the perfect excuse for a little *fate manipulation*.”

Without realizing it, Ella was now shifting in her chair and playing with her hands. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she mumbled.

“Oh, I think you do. I’ve spoken to your other teachers. We’ve all noticed that you’re distracted in class again – tugging on threads when you should be listening to lectures.”

“I-I have not!”

“Please, Ms. Gant. Flipping pages in people’s books or rolling pencils across desks may only be minor manipulations, but they’re still easy enough for us to spot. We didn’t get to be professors here for nothing you know.”

Realizing that there was no sense in denying it any longer, Ella relented. “Okay, hypothetically let’s say you’re right. So what?”

“So, we’ve talked about this before. Fate manipulation is still a bit too advanced for a second year student like yourself.”

“But why!? It’s not like I’m hurting anyone!”

Professor Wells raised an eyebrow. “I think there are three upper-year boys downstairs who would disagree with you on that. But even if there weren’t, the school charter clearly states...”

“No fate manipulation before third year, unless under express consent of a professor. I know, I know – but that still doesn’t explain *why*. I mean, the looms in *Luppita* begin teaching fate manipulation by mid-semester of *first year*, and they’ve produced fortune tellers like Rainn Nevée, Galena Mason – and of course *Cadmus Bloc*. That’s like a who’s who of the best fortune tellers on Moraie! Even back home in Varuna, we’d at least be practicing the basics by now. So if you think about it that way, all I’m really trying to do is keep up!”

“Except you’re trying to keep up with the wrong people. That may be the way they do things in Luppita or Varuna, but here in *Terra* we prefer that you have a firm grasp on the basics of fate reading and prediction *before*

moving onto something as complex as manipulation. Otherwise how can you ever hope to correctly influence a situation? It's like that practicum just now; if you had just *followed* the threads and escaped like we'd asked you to, then I probably could've given you top marks. But as it stands now, you'll be lucky if I'm even allowed to pass you at all."

That got Ella fired up and out of her seat. "What? But I did escape! How are my pursuers supposed to catch me when they're unconscious?"

Professor Wells sighed, then took off her glasses to pinch the bridge of her nose. "Very well. In that case, what was your next move?"

"My *next* move?"

"Suppose I had allowed you to continue. Your stunt with the fire escape only incapacitated two of the three chasers. How would you have dealt with Mr. Yakov?"

Ella stuttered as she drew a blank. "I... would have figured something out."

"When exactly? While he was plunging that broken bottle straight into your chest? Now do you see what I mean? You're just not ready for this level of fortune telling yet."

“But that’s not fair! Isn’t the whole point of having practicums to *get us* ready for that level of fortune telling? How are we supposed to do that if we aren’t even allowed to really test ourselves? Like I said, it’s not as if Luppita held back *Cadmus Bloc* just because *he* wasn’t ready! No, they kept pushing him and pushing him, so that by my age he was already a great fortune teller!”

“Who also happened to be a trained killer!”

The room fell to a hush as the professor calmed herself from that uncharacteristic outburst. “Ms. Gant, I understand that you’re frustrated, but don’t forget that while Cadmus Bloc may indeed be a great fortune teller, Luppita only trained him that way to make him a more effective *soldier*. That is the Luppitan way, after all. In fact, the same goes for *all* of those fortune tellers you mentioned; by your age, they’d already *taken lives* using what they learned! Is that really the example you want to follow?”

Ella shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe? Maybe if *Terra* did things the *Luppitan* way then the outcome of the war would’ve been a little more...”

“I wouldn’t finish that sentence if I were you.”

One look at the professor’s stern expression told her that she’d gone too far. “Sorry ma’am. I didn’t mean that,” she apologized, before zipping her lip and turning away. That drew another exacerbated sigh from her professor.

“Ms. Gant, I know what you’re going through. Believe it or not, I too sat on your side of the table once. But that’s exactly why I can now appreciate the importance of *maturity* when it comes to learning this stuff. Remember, it isn’t *just* the power to change the destiny in front of you that matters, but everything else that might happen as well. Every changed thread causes ripples in the weave around it, meaning that even the simplest manipulation has the potential to cascade out of control – sometimes dangerously so! Even you must understand why that makes it a bad thing to teach to students who aren’t ready yet. And since we aren’t about to become a tightly policed military state like Luppita, our only choice is to take our time – not just to build a solid foundation in understanding fate’s basic patterns and grammar, but to foster a sense of *responsibility* as well. That is as much for your good as it is ours. Honestly, I don’t understand why you’re in such a rush anyways. Are you *that* afraid of falling behind your peers back home? Because that will only be tempora...”

“That’s not it at all!”

Unlike the professor, Ella didn’t catch her own outburst until it was too late. By then, Professor Wells was already staring at her with a raised eyebrow, causing Ella’s face to flush red.

“Then why? You have the talent and *plenty* of time to become a great fortune teller. Why do you feel so pressured to do it all *right now*?”

“I just do, okay? I can’t afford to be sitting around twiddling my thumbs – not while I still have so many things to do and promises to keep.”

“Promises? Promises to whom? To your father? Because I don’t think that he would have sent you all the way here if he didn’t already believe in our methods.”

She asked her question in a non-confrontational tone, but under the intense spotlight created by the large window, Ella still couldn’t help but feel interrogated. Without an out, all she could do now was cross her arms, purse her lips, and look away. Lucky for her, Professor Wells didn’t push the matter any further.

“Well, I suppose it doesn’t matter. But no matter how much you wish you were in Luppita or Varuna right now, the reality is that you aren’t – you’re in Terra. So why not make the most of it? Of course, that means doing things our way – promises or not – which *also* means no more fate manipulation until you’re ready.”

“But what if I’m ready now?”

Professor Wells sighed and shook her head. “I’m afraid that’s just not your decision to make. Understood?”

At this point, all Ella really wanted was to get out of this office so she nodded along, which garnered a hesitant half-smile from her professor.

“Good. Now that that’s settled, I have some paperwork to finish. You may show yourself out.”

* * *

“EIIIIIIaaaaa!”

Ella had just descended the stairs from the professor’s office when a familiar voice called to her. It came from the central courtyard, where she turned to see her roommate – Liza Ritz – running toward her while waving her arm excitedly. The brown-haired girl’s face was so flushed that her freckles practically glowed, but that didn’t stop her from sprinting all the way up to Ella’s side before stopping to catch her breath.

“Liz? What are you doing here? Aren’t you supposed to be in a patterns and recognitions class right now?” she asked, as her gassed roommate hunched over to put her hands on her knees.

“Yeah. But I came as soon as I heard what happened!”

“Wait, you already heard? But how!?”

Liz looked up through her frizzy bangs and grinned. “Bertie, of course.”

Ella twitched, as though bitten by a gnat. “Is that so? And what’s our *esteemed* head of the student press headlining now?”

Liz put an arm around Ella’s shoulder and wrote in the air with her finger. “Ella Gant not so elegant: Second year kills three in practicum.”

One look at Liz’s cheery face was enough to tell that she was joking – somewhat – but even so, Ella wasn’t in the mood for it. She threw her roommate’s arm off and stormed away. “Oh come on, it’s just a draft! I’m sure she’ll revise it before going to print!” Liz called after her. But at that very moment, Ella saw the doors to Training Room A open up ahead of them.

“I’ve got a better idea. Why don’t I just go make one of Big Mouth Bertie’s headlines *true* for once?”

She rolled up her sleeves and began storming back towards the arena, where sure enough Demetri Yakov emerged from the doorway flanked by his two flunkies. She was ready to knock those stupid sunglasses right off his greasy blonde head, until Liz suddenly leapt onto her back and put her in an arm lock first. “Oh no, I think you’ve gotten into enough trouble for one day,” she heard her roommate shout from behind. The two then proceeded to wrestle right there, but it was already too late – the upper year boys had spotted them and were walking over.

“Well, well, if it isn’t just the little second-year that I was hoping to run into again. I see that you’ll pick a fight with just about anyone these days,” Demetri brayed, as he and his posse sauntered up to them. To anybody else, his smug tone might’ve only come off as mildly annoying, but to her it was like fingernails against a chalkboard.

“Demetri, now’s not the time,” Liz cautioned, while climbing off Ella’s back, only to stretch one arm stretched across her chest.

“Relax Ritz. I only wanted to congratulate her. Great job completely *botching* your practicum. I assume the professor had some suitably harsh words for your blatant *cheating*?”

“Me!? You were the ones who pulled weapons in there!”

The senior boy shrugged. “A regrettable misunderstanding. As I told the instructors: the boys and I were just going for *theatrics*. You know, something to get your blood pumping and *encourage* you to do your best. We had no intention of actually harming you. I mean, who would be *dumb* enough to think they could get away with an infraction in front of that many teachers?”

Demetri looked straight at her as he delivered that thinly veiled insult, before turning back to his lackeys who laughed on command. Were these ones Markus and Barret? Ella could hardly keep the names of his revolving door

posse straight. It didn't matter though, because at this point they all looked like faceless punching bags to her. In fact, the more Demetri talked, the more she began to clench her fist.

“So Liza, I see that the school still hasn't fixed your little roommate problem yet. After all, the daughter of respected business owners shouldn't have to slum it with this wild mutt. If you like, maybe the boys and I can talk to the dean for you – you know, get Ms. Gant here moved somewhere where she'd feel more comfortable. I hear there's a very nice kennel on the grounds where she and the other mutts can scrap to their heart's content.”

“Oh yeah? You mean like the one where your parents got *you*?” Ella growled, fighting every urge (as well as Liz's surprisingly sturdy grip) to keep from proving him right.

“*Hilarious*. You must think you're pretty clever, don't you?”

“Oh please Demetri, you can't give her all the credit,” Liz chimed in, coming to her aid. “Next to you, practically anyone looks like a genius.”

Now *that* seemed to irritate him. “You laugh now Ritz, but I'd watch it if I were you. At the rate she's going, it's only a matter of time before this roommate of yours gets kicked out of Selene, just like she got herself kicked

out of the schools in her own country. You don't want to get dragged down along with her."

"That's not what happened!" Ella protested.

"Oh? So what, you just flamed out then? Little miss fate manipulator couldn't make it in her own town so she had to come all the way out here instead?"

Now she didn't care if it would prove him right – Ella just wanted to sock him right in his smug jaw. However, she couldn't do it with Liz holding her back with her entire body like this. "Ella don't," the girl whispered in her ear, before gesturing with her head toward the two instructors poking their heads out from the arena doors behind Demetri. They seemed to be checking on what all the ruckus was about – a fact that Demetri picked up on rather quickly.

"Well then, if you'll excuse us; me and the boys have some important *fate manipulating* to do," he bragged, pouring more salt on the wound. Then with that, he and his posse pushed past the two girls and headed down the corridor.

"Can you believe that guy? He sure talks a big game for someone who had to take the FMC (Fate Manipulation Certification) *three times*," Liz said,

shaking her head as the boys walked away. Despite her supportive words, Ella could literally feel her breathe a sigh of relief before releasing her bear hug.

“And yet he’ll probably be transferred to a Luppitan school before any of us,” Ella then grumbled.

“Yeah well, that’s only because mommy and daddy have appearances to keep up. You and I both know he wouldn’t last a day there. What did you do to set him off anyway?”

Ella hesitated. “I may have fate manipulated a fire escape onto their heads.”

“You what!?” Liz exclaimed. “Ella you know...”

Ella sighed. “Yeah, yeah. No fate manipulation for sophomores.”

“This isn’t Luppita, Ella. You can’t keep treating it like it is.”

“Believe me, I know.”

With the boys now out of sight and the situation thoroughly diffused, the girls headed in the opposite direction towards the dormitories. For a little while after that, Ella continued to seethe – and Liz was smart enough to let her – but eventually she cooled off enough to give her friend the play-by-play of what happened with the maze, the threads, and her ill-fated attempt to just *defend*

herself from Demetri and his goons. When all was said and done though, Liz just laughed at her and pointed out how lucky she was to get away with just a slap on the wrist. According to her, that somehow proved that Professor Wells actually understood. She'd have to forgive Ella for not seeing it the same way. However, just the act of venting was therapeutic enough so that, by the time they reached the dorms on the other end of campus, Ella was willing to answer the one question she knew her roommate was dying to ask.

“Three dozen,” she said, completely unprompted.

“Three dozen? Three dozen what?” Liz replied, obviously playing dumb.

Ella made a cursory scan of the hall to ensure that nobody else was listening in. “You know what,” she whispered. After that, all she had to do was watch the expression transform on Liz's face.

“No way. Three doz-!?” Liz nearly shouted out loud, forcing Ella to slap a hand over the girl's mouth.

“Shh! Would you mind not broadcasting my thread count to the entire loom?”

Liz's widened eyes signaled she was sorry, so Ella let her hand up. “Three dozen? Ella that's amazing!” she whispered this time. “Honestly, I

don't understand why you're so secretive about your thread counts. You should be proud of them."

"I am proud Liz, but that doesn't mean I want questions about them either from the other students *or* staff."

Liz gave her a curious look, to which Ella only responded with a knowing grin. By now they'd reached the door to their room, which Ella hurriedly unlocked and pushed open. Before she was even all the way inside, she'd already pulled off her tie and thrown it on top of her dresser. After that, she then sprawled out onto her bed and lifted her legs high above her head in order to untie her shoes. Meanwhile, Liz neatly undid her tie and hung it on the rack, before walking to her side of the room and going through the mail on her desk.

"Oh by the way, this came for you," she said, tossing Ella a small envelope.

Ella caught it in her lap and then turned it over to look at the return address. It read "From the office of Damon Gant." Making a disgusted face, she tossed it unceremoniously onto a stack of identical envelopes atop her own cluttered desk, next to a framed photo of her mother and sister.

"Isn't that from your hometown? Aren't you going to read it?"

“Read what? Another letter supposedly from my dad, yet conspicuously written in his secretary’s handwriting? *Dear Ella, I hope things are well. Things back home are well. Make sure to listen to all your teachers and don’t make any trouble. Yadda yadda yadda.* Yeah, no thanks – I think I’ll pass.”

With that, she pried her shoes off with her toes and let them topple to the ground, all while Liz looked on incredulously.

“What?”

“You’re unbelievable, you know that? I can’t believe that *you* of all people are up to a three dozen thread count. You know how many threads I saw in my last practicum? Ten. And it was *barely* ten. I had a staircase to my left, a bridge to my right, and the only thread I saw led straight into the water.”

Ella chuckled. “I totally remember that. You took three showers that day just to get the algae out of your hair!”

“I’m glad you found that so funny,” Liz grumbled, as she turned back to her desk and opened one of the many textbooks there. “Honestly, I don’t know how you do it.”

Ella suddenly froze her dangling legs in midair. “Do you want to find out?”

“Find out what?”

“How I do it. What do you say we take a little trip, Liz – down to the lower city?”

Liz immediately slammed her book shut. “Oh no, not this again!” she shouted, but it was too late; Ella was already up and elbow deep in her dresser, gleefully fishing out clothes. “Ella, you know we’re not allowed in the lower city. If they ever caught you, that’s an immediate suspension or even expulsion!”

“Catch us? Liz, look at who you’re talking to here. Three dozen threads, remember? That’s better than most fourth years! They’re not going to catch us. Besides, I’ve done this a dozen times already. Aren’t you the least bit curious to see what’s down there?”

“I don’t know... we have another practicum coming up. I need to study.”

While Liz continued coming up with excuses, Ella changed out of her preppy school uniform into something more appropriate for their destination – a pair of beige shorts, a tank top, and her favorite faded red jacket. Not exactly high society attire, but they would blend in more naturally where they were going.

“There, how do I look?” she asked, holding her arms out and twirling around.

“Dapper.”

“Shut up. But seriously Liz, you *have* to come. I mean, the training arena is well and good, but all the simulations in the world can’t compare to the *real* one. That’s the only place where fate really opens up and runs free. It’s the only place where you can really get a feel for how it *moves* and *flows* in *real life*, rather than according to some teacher-scripted scenario. You want to know where I learn half this stuff? It’s out there! Besides, what better way is there to study for a practicum than with a little *practical experience*?”

“Practical exp–? Ella, exactly how many fire escapes have you been dropping on peoples’ heads!?”

She grinned. “Let’s just say that flipping pages and rolling pencils aren’t the *only* tricks I’ve been working on. But if it makes you feel any better, I promise that we won’t do any of that. No fate manipulation, no trouble – cross my heart. We’ll just hang out and observe a few of those laymen card games I keep telling you about; they’re great for working on your predictive skills. Way better than any tests in here. I promise we’ll be back before anyone even knows we left!”

Despite those stirring incentives, she still sensed great hesitation on Liz’s part.

“Ella, we can’t do that. You know how the laymen feel about us, *especially* in the lower city. Not to mention my parents would kill me if they ever found out. Yours would too if they...” Liz suddenly stopped midsentence and swallowed. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean anything by that. I wasn’t thinking...”

“Liz, really, it’s fine. Can we just not talk about it?” Ella interrupted, dismissively. “More importantly, are you coming or not?”

At least this time Liz didn’t shoot her down immediately, but the end result was the same. “I’m sorry. You know I can’t.”

Ella hung her head disappointedly. “Alright then, suit yourself. In that case I guess I’ll see you later tonight.”

Then, with a smile and a wave, she was out the door and gone.