



Poetic Justice

by Alessa

I glanced at the time on my watch and doubled my speed once I saw how late I really was. With books in my arms, I half walked and half jogged towards my destination, hoping I could get there before my absence was noted.

Unfortunately, I had no such luck.

My mother's voice came through the earpiece on my phone as soon as I flipped it open.

"Liana, where are you?" she asked.

"I'm coming!" I snapped, quickening my steps.

"You were supposed to be at the store twenty-five minutes ago. Your brother is probably already home from school, standing outside and wondering why no one is at the house to let him in."

"I know; I'm sorry. I'm coming! I'm down the block." I turned off my cell phone and shoved it into my pocket as I rushed down the sidewalk.

While I walked, I anxiously ran a hand through my chin-length hair. I still wasn't used to it being so short. I had kept it long all my life, up until several weeks ago, when I decided that I wanted a change. Before I left my old town, I let my best friend cut it for me, so it was just past my jaw line.

Big mistake on my part. Not because she had done a bad job or anything, but because some girls could pull off the short-hair look and some could not. I, regrettably, fell into the "could not" category.

Finally, short of breath, I opened the shop door to see my mother standing behind the counter with her arms crossed.

"Liana," she started, using a tone of voice that suggested she was anything but happy.

"I know, I know." I avoided her gaze as I tossed my stuff on the counter.

"If you *knew*, you'd be here on time. This is the second time this week. Now, when your brother gets home from school, I *have* to—"

"Be there to let him in. I know; you've told me. Just give him a key or something."

"That's not the point. He's only in second grade; he can't be home alone."

"Oh, c'mon, Mom. You left me home all the time when I was in second—"

"You have a responsibility to be here, Annie," my mother interrupted. "Please make sure you fulfil it. On time, from now on."

"Fine," I grumbled. I grabbed my apron and absentmindedly tied it around my waist. "How long do I have to work here, anyway?"

"Sweetheart, don't start with this. I can't discuss it right now," Mom said as she hurriedly collected her belongings and put them in her pocketbook.

"Seriously, Mom," I protested. "We've been in this town for almost a month, and I have absolutely no life outside this ice cream shop." She pretended not to hear me as she sorted through her bag. I sighed. "No one ever even comes in here, anyway."

Mom glanced up from her task and shot me a look. "That's because when you hide behind the counter, *reading*, people assume we're closed." Her shoes clicked on the white tile floor as she walked over to me. "We'll talk about it once we get some new employees in here." Mom gave me a kiss on the cheek. "Thanks for helping us out. I'll see you for dinner. Call if you need me," she added.

I propped myself up with my elbows resting on the counter and watched unamused as she headed for the door.

Mom pushed on the glass door with her shoulder, making the bell on top ring out. Just before she walked out, though, she turned back around to face me.

"Oh, and Annie?"

I looked up at her, raising my eyebrows in question.

"Make sure you actually work, alright? Rather than burying your nose in a book while you're supposed to be manning the counter."

I nodded and forced a smile. Then, after waving to her, I waited for her to leave. When the door shut, and she disappeared from view, I leaned over the counter and craned my neck to make sure she was really gone.

Finally, I let out a sigh, grabbed the newly-borrowed library book, placed headphones with music from my phone over my head, and sank behind the counter.

I pulled the apron back over my head again and tossed it to the side. With music blasting through my headphones, I sat with my back against the cabinets and tapped my foot idly as my eyes scanned over words. I'm not sure how long I sat there, but before I knew it, my phone was minutes from dying, and I had knocked out half the pages of the novel in my hand.

I froze and looked up from the text when I thought I heard a voice. The sound was muffled through the music, but it sounded like someone asking, "Anyone here?" over and over again.

I took one of my earphones away from my ear and listened again, but assumed I had been imagining the voice when I found that the shop was quiet. I was about to go back to my book when I saw something move out of the corner of my eye. Craning my neck backwards, I looked up at the counter behind me and was met with another face, inches away from mine.

I screamed bloody murder, dropped the book, and scrambled to my feet.

The girl, who had been staring at me as if I were an alien emerging from a spaceship, leaned over the counter and stood up straight before taking a few steps back. Despite the fact that I was breathing heavily and obviously terrified, she grinned, as if she couldn't suppress her amusement.

"Didn't mean to scare you," she finally spoke, breaking the silence.

When I just stared silently at her, she tried again. "Do you work here, or do you just break into ice cream shops and use them as your personal libraries?"

"No," I murmured, finding both my voice and my apron. I tied the pink string around my waist for the second time today. "No, I work here," I said meekly. "Really, I do."

"Yeah, I know. It was a joke."

"Oh," I said curtly. Then, a moment too late, I let out a weak laugh.

The only sound in the entire shop was the soft hum of indistinct music coming from my earphones. The girl cleared her throat, and I stole a glance at her out of the corner of my eye.

She had hair tied in a neat ponytail that almost reached her butt, and eyes that were the same exact shade of brown. She wore floral denim shorts and a casual green T-shirt that had a picture of Snoopy. On her feet, she wore red canvas sneakers that appeared to have been sported enough times because they were tattered and ripped.

The girl suddenly caught me looking at her, so I tore my gaze away and stared down at the countertop instead. "Is there anything I can get for you?" I asked, hoping to diffuse some of the awkwardness.

"Yeah, there is," she replied.

I nodded. "The specially-made soft serve flavours for today are pistachio and chocolate-raspberry, and —"

"Actually," she said, "I was wondering if you could get me something more along the lines of a job application. You guys are hiring, right?"

"Oh," I murmured, dropping my hand from the cash register. "You—you want a job here?"

She shrugged. "I was thinking about it, yeah. My parents have been bugging me to get a job since summer started, and I'm going to need some spending money for my dorm when I start college in the fall, so..."

"You sure you want a job *here*, though?" I stole another glance at her appearance. Then I quickly added, "I don't mean any disrespect by it. It's just... you don't really seem like the type of person who would want to work in an ice cream shop."

"Wait..." she stammered, confused. "Why not? I like ice cream just as much as the next person." Her mouth split into another grin. "Besides," she said, motioning to my apron, "I look damn stunning in pink."

I laughed. "No one looks good in an apron," I replied. "Besides, this place is always dead. No one knows about it since it just opened, and, frankly, it's boring as hell working here."

She nonchalantly shrugged a shoulder. "Sounds like the perfect job for me. I'm not too good with handling mobs of people, anyhow."

I opened my mouth again to reply, but shut it upon realising what I was doing. I suddenly started to wonder why I was trying to talk this girl out of the job. After all, if she started working here, I wouldn't have to come in every day. I could go out with my friends, have some form of life, and hopefully have as much fun as possible by the time school started.

"Alright," I said, opening the drawer of paperwork by the front counter. I flipped through the stacks of papers and records, but I couldn't find anything. "I don't think we have any applications right now, but if you want to write some information down on a piece of paper, I'll give it to my Dad.... I mean, the manager." I corrected myself quickly, but it didn't prevent me from blushing.

The girl nodded and smiled, then took the pen from my hand and proceeded to scribble down her name, age, phone number, and address.

"Is this good?" she asked.

I took the piece of paper from her and quickly scanned over it. "Yeah. That's fine." Then, having looked at her name on the loose-leaf, I added, "Christine."

"Sounds good." Christine glanced down at my ice cream cone-shaped name tag. "Liana?" she queried.

"Most people just call me Annie."

"I like Liana more," she smiled.

"The manager's not here right now, but I'll give it to him when I see him, and then I'll let you know."

The girl nodded, sticking her hands casually into her pockets. "Hey... Do you think you'd be able to put in a good word for me with your Dad? I mean, the manager."

"Um, sure. But... I can't promise anything."

She raised an eyebrow. "Why?" she asked. Then a look of realisation made its way onto her face. "Oh... You two don't get along?"

I shrugged. "Nah, it's not that. We get along. He's just not that good of a manager," I explained. "He opened this place about a week after we moved here. Then he got another job, and he hasn't been here since. Basically dumped the entire responsibility on me and my Mom."

"Interesting," Christine tapped her chin in contemplation. "That must suck for you. How old are you, anyway?"

"Thirteen-and-a-half. Why?"

"Well, aren't you a bit too young to be working in an ice cream shop?"

Was she mocking me? I shot her a glare. "What are you trying to say? That I'm a kid?"

"No, no—" Christine's hands shot up defensively. "But don't you have to be at least sixteen before you can start working?"

"Oh, I know, right?" My brain slowly caught up with her reasoning. "But no one ever listens to me when I tell them that. Mom just says, I'm helping the family, which is just another way of saying I'm their slave for the rest of my life."

"Ah. That sucks," Christine said with a little laugh while nodding and pensively staring at the floor. Then she brought her gaze back to me and offered a comforting half-smile. "Well, hopefully I can help out then."

I couldn't help but mirror her expression. "Yeah, hopefully," I repeated.



"I don't know, Annie," my mother said as she turned on the faucet.

"Why not?" I whined. "You said it yourself. You said we needed to hire new employees."

She glanced over her shoulder and shot me a look. "When did I say that?"

"Today!" I exclaimed, stacking the pile of dishes next to the sink. "You said, 'we'll talk about it when we get some new employees in here.'"

"Yes, Annie. *When*. That doesn't necessarily mean now. I don't know if your father wants any employees right now. We just opened the store." Using her forearm since her hands were submerged in soapy water, she brushed a strand of light brown hair out of her eyes.

"So what?" I picked up a dish rag and began drying the clean plates on the counter.

"So when you hire employees, it means more paperwork and more formalities and more money," she explained. "We don't even know anything about this girl. She could be a thief, for all we know."

"Oh, yeah? And what is she gonna steal, Mom? Our non-existent cash register money or a few tubs of vanilla cookie dough?"

"Don't be cheeky, Annie."

I sighed. "Could you at least just talk to Dad about it? Please?"

"I'll talk to him about it, but I doubt he wants the extra responsibility right now," she said, handing me a freshly-washed plate to dry and put away. "And if he does agree, let me tell you right now: You'll be taking on some of that responsibility."



I doubled my speed as I caught sight of the time on my watch. The small hands over the numbers suggested that I was thirty-two minutes behind. My feet quickened on the sidewalk.

As I shoved the door open, breathing heavily, I was met with the greeting, "Your Mom's right. You *are* always late."

Christine stood behind the counter with her chin in her hand and her foot tapping idly. Today, she was wearing an orange headband, a white shirt underneath her apron, and her signature floral denim shorts. I was almost certain she had at least fifteen identical pairs of them.

"You have no right to reprimand me," I replied, tossing my things on the counter and grabbing my own apron.

"Oh? And why's that?" she asked, grinning.

I raised an eyebrow at her as I tied the thread around my waist. "Have you already forgotten how many strings I pulled for you?"

"Alright, alright. I know. Sorry," she said immediately, oblivious to the fact that I was teasing her.

Regardless of the fact that I had reminded her countless times, I decided to remind her again. "I sang your praises to both my parents, despite the fact that I barely knew you. I practically begged my Dad to hire you. I agreed to his deal that *I* have to be the one to train you, and on top of that, you have the audacity to point out my slight tardiness?"

Finally, she caught on to my sarcasm, and the size of her smile doubled, showing the dimples on both sides of her mouth. "Where were you, anyway?" she asked, but then added, "Wait, no, don't tell me. The library."

"Shut up."

"Nerd. You're such a nerd."

"Asshole," I retaliated.

"Dork-face."

"Housewife in a pink apron."

"Girl with a boy's haircut."

I gasped and stared at her as I feigned emotional injury. "You've gone too far," I told her. I placed my hand over my heart and turned my back to her.

Christine had only been working at the ice cream shop for a week, but she and I had already grown comfortable around one another. The teasing and joking never took a break, and she and I were always on each other's cases for one thing or another. I found that, with Christine around, I got less work done

than I would have if I was alone. The thought started to dawn on me that I would never finish her training, get out of here, and go have a life. Strangely, though, I didn't mind so much.

"Liana," she began. "C'mon, I didn't mean it." Christine took a few steps towards me and tugged lightly at my hair. "I like it short, you know that. It looks good on you."

I turned around to shoot her a look, but I froze upon finding myself face-to-face with her. Her bewitching grin was still on her face as she looked down at me. "You can't stay mad at me, you know."

"Oh, believe me. I can," I stated. "One time, I was mad at my little brother for six months straight."

She sighed and let her shoulders drop. "What do I have to do? Get on my knee and recite poetry or something?"

"Hah! The day that you recite poetry will be the day that pigs fly, hell freezes over, and cows come home."

No sooner were the words out of my mouth that Christine had dropped on one of her knees and started rambling, "Annie, Annie, she's oh so pretty; her hair is short; her eyes remind me of... uh, Salt Lake City?"

I raised an eyebrow and stared at her with a disdainful expression on my face. "Pfft! That's the worst excuse for poetry I've ever heard."

"What!?" she exclaimed. "It's a real poem!"

"Have you ever even been to Salt Lake City? I assure you, it has nothing to do with my eyes. That isn't a real poem."

"Not yet, maybe, but watch me. I'll get it copywrited. Solely for you, my love." Christine stood up and tried to wrap her arms around me, but I dodged her embrace and shoved her away.

"You're such a suck-up," I accused, turning away so she didn't see the scarlet colour painting my cheeks.



I sat on the countertop in the kitchen, a novel in my hand. Every few moments, I'd look up to check if Christine was still mopping the floor as I'd told her to.

"Are you planning on helping me at all?" she asked, pausing for a moment to wipe her forehead with the back of her arm.

"Nope," I said, my eyes glued to the page. "I am the trainer; you are the trainee. Therefore, you do the irritating, mindless jobs that I refuse to do."

"Do I have to remind you that I'm older than you? I'm starting college in the fall, so if anyone should be training someone, it should be me training you."

I scoffed at her incredulously. "You wouldn't even know how to teach a puppy to fetch a stick."

Christine rolled her eyes, dipped the mop back into the bucket, and continued with her work.

"The sooner you finish, the sooner I get to teach you how to use the soft-serve machine!" I stated excitedly. Christine didn't look as thrilled.

The bell in front of the store suddenly rang out, indicating that someone had walked in.

I sighed and impatiently let my head drop against the back wall. "Any chance you want to get that?" I asked.

Christine looked up from the soapy puddles on the tiles and feigned innocence. "Me?" she asked. "The naïve trainee who does the irritating, mindless jobs that you refuse to do? No, handling customers is much too important and intricate. I think you'd better take care of it."

I scoffed, immediately regretting my former choice of words. "Fine," I spat, tossing my book to the side and hopping off the counter.

When I walked out into the brightness of the front room, I saw a girl standing at the counter. She was dressed in a pink tank top, white denim shorts, and flip-flops. Her reddish, wavy hair reached to the small of her back. She was examining her cotton-candy pink nails, and she didn't look up until I asked, "Hi, what can I help you with?"

"Oh," she murmured. "Hi."

I raised an eyebrow. "Hi." My voice was curt and inquiring. "Is there something I can help you with?" I repeated.

The girl was looking over my shoulder at the kitchen door, tilting her head in question. "Actually, I was looking for someone."

"Who?" I asked. Getting information out of this girl was like pulling teeth from a mule.

"A girl named Christine. I think she just started working here a little while ago."

My mouth formed a silent "O" shape, and I nodded. "Yeah, she did. She's in the back room right now, though, mopping up."

The girl's gaze flickered over to me. She stared at me with a blank expression, as if she were waiting for me to do something.

"Sooo..." I stretched the word out as if I were talking to a kindergartener, "Is there anything *I* can help you with?"

"Sure. You can tell Christine that Jenifer is waiting to talk to her." She looked back down and continued examining her nails. I stood there for a moment with my eyebrows furrowed. Then I finally turned on my heel and went back into the kitchen.

"Looks like you're going to have to deal with the importance and intricacy of customers. She demands you."

Christine put the mop back in the bucket and glanced at me. "Who? What?" she asked.

I pointed over my shoulder and then resumed my spot on the countertop. "Someone's looking for you," I said. I picked up my book and pretended to be engrossed in the text once again. "Hurry it up. I still have to teach you how to use the soft-serve," I added.

I waited until Christine walked out before I tore my eyes from the page and strained my ears to hear what was happening.

"Jenifer!" I heard Christine say.

"Hi Chris!" she exclaimed happily. "See, I told you I'd come to see you."

Christine laughed. "Well, I had my doubts," she said.

Then she laughed, too. "So this is where you got a job, huh?" Jenifer said as she peered around. "It just opened, right?"

"Yeah. About a month ago."

"Seems like a cool place to work," I heard her say. She paused and then added, "Although, that little brat has a bit of an attitude."

I clenched my teeth together.

The swinging door finally fell still and closed up the entrance, making it impossible for me to hear the conversation going on outside. However, I craned my neck and inched forward in order to see through the small window in the kitchen door.

Jenifer was facing me, but all I saw of Christine was the back of her head. Jenifer laughed and swatted Christine playfully on the arm. Then Christine, for a split second, put her hand on Jenifer's shoulder.

My face suddenly flushed red. Christine was usually a kiss-ass when it came to customers, but she was never this much of a flirt. Ever. Except maybe when she was trying to get on my nerves. And, anyway... weird situations like that did not make me all that thrilled.

When Christine went to sling her arm around Jenifer's shoulders, she stepped out of my line of sight for a second. I leaned forward even more to see what was going on, but I forgot that I was perched on top of the countertop. As I went plummeting towards the floor, I made a grab for anything that would keep me up.

My hand wrapped around the dish towel that was placed underneath bowls, mixers, utensils, and other things. It, unfortunately, did not keep me up, but it did pull all of those things down. It made a huge ruckus as it clattered to the floor.

"Liana?" Christine burst quickly through the door. "Are you alright?" she asked, stepping over the mess to help me up.

"I'm fine," I replied, grabbing her hand as she pulled me to my feet.

"What happened?"

I opened my mouth to speak, but the words caught in my throat. "I slipped," I finally murmured. "You should consider putting a wet-floor sign down next time."

Christine let out a weak laugh and apologised, but she was interrupted.

"Everything okay in there?" Jenifer's voice sounded from the front room.

Christine went to the door and held it open with her shoulder. "Yeah, everything's good," she responded.

"Anything I can help with?" Jenifer said, offering a smile that I categorised as fully pretentious.

Christine shook her head. "Nah, we're alright." She turned back around to look at the state of the room. "Hey, Jenifer... Listen, thanks so much for stopping by. It was great to see you, but I should get back to work."

Jenifer nodded reluctantly. "Okay," she agreed. "We should definitely do something soon, though. I haven't seen you all summer!"

"Absolutely. I'll call you," Christine said. I rolled my eyes behind her back and started picking up some of the stuff on the floor.

The bell on the door sounded again, but I continued to avoid Christine's gaze as I stacked the bowls that had fallen.

"You okay?" she questioned again.

"Peachy."

She opened her mouth to retort, but dropped it and started helping me clean up. The kitchen was quiet except for the clattering of metal.

"So, *she* seemed happy to see you," I said flatly, finally breaking the silence.

"Hm?" she asked.

"Your friend Lucifer."

"Jenifer," Christine corrected.

"Whatever."

"Yeah, I haven't seen her since school let out," she told me. Then she stated pensively, "We used to go out, you know."

"No kidding," I murmured drily.

"Are you surprised?"

I shot her a look. "I'm thirteen-and-a-half. I think I can handle the fact that you like girls."

"Okay, if you say so. But I'm done with Jeni. She's been just a friend of mine for about a year now."

"Does *she* know that?" I asked spitefully.

Christine's expression was quizzical, her eyes studying me with a curious twinkle. "What're you getting at, Liana?" she asked.

"Nothing." The word came out sounding like venom, and Christine stood up straight and crossed her arms.

"Is someone jealous?" she asked, a smirk pulling at her mouth.

"Excuse me?" I asked, forcing a laugh.

"You are. You're totally jelly. Aren't you?"

"Oh, please," I murmured, putting the last of the stuff on the countertop where it belonged. "Jealous of that girl? Let me tell you something, Christine. I have the ability to giggle and appear like a moron. I just choose not to. Besides," I scoffed, "What makes you think I'm into girls?"

Christine cocked an eyebrow and leaned nonchalantly against the side of the refrigerator. "Let's just say I think you're a little too preoccupied with her ability to gain my attention."

I gritted my teeth. "You know what's wrong with you?" I asked, trying desperately not to sound flustered. "Your ego is too big for your own good; that's what's wrong with you."

"Well, apparently that doesn't bother you too much, because I've managed to capture your heart even *with* my gigantic ego." Her tone of voice suggested that she was only teasing me, but even so, it riled me up.

"Shut up, Christine!" I sneered. "How dare you even suggest something like that? I'm not into girls. In fact, I'm crazy about boys. I think Justin Bieber is totally hot."

"Is it because he looks like a cute girl?"

I don't know why I didn't strangle her right there with my shoelace. I must have some awesome self-restraining powers. "Keep hoping for a miracle, Christine."

"Okay, fine. You're not into girls; I get it."

"And stop looking at me like that," I hissed now, annoyed without even knowing why.

"Or what?" she asked. When I didn't answer, she turned on the faucet behind her and ran her fingers underneath the stream. Then she flicked droplets of water at me. "Or what?" Christine repeated, her teasing grin reappearing.

I glared at her for a moment, my mouth half open. "Or this," I retaliated, grabbing a handful of brightly coloured sprinkles out of the container. I tossed them in her direction, and the majority of them collected in her brown hair.

"What the hell, Liana?" she spat. Christine then grabbed the whipped cream, leaned towards me, tugged at the neckline of my shirt, and pressed the nozzle. She smiled wickedly as the entire contents of the can were sprayed down my shirt.

I made a sound that was a cross between a choke and a gasp at the cold substance that was now, thanks to this infuriating girl, seeping into my training bra.

"You—you jerk!" I yelled. Within a split second, her floral denim shorts were dripping in chocolate sauce.

Ah, well. At least she had fourteen more pairs at home.

The soft-serve machine caught both of our attentions at the same time, and the two of us stumbled towards it, each trying to shove the other out of the way. The second the levers were pulled, all hell broke loose.

The freshly mopped floors were swirled with melting chocolate and vanilla ice cream. I could feel the chocolate syrup sticking underneath my feet, and beside the fact that my shirt was dripping with whipped cream, I now had chopped walnuts in my hair.

Christine and I wrestled over anything and everything that could be used as ammo, and we left a disaster on every inch of the tile floor that we trod on. Soon, every inch of the kitchen was covered in some form of sugary syrup.

Christine dipped her hand into a jar of raspberry sauce, and as she tried to smear it on my face, I lost my footing and kicked her legs out from under her.

I felt strawberry ice cream seep into my hair when my head met the tiles. Christine fell right on top of me. Being bigger than me, she tried desperately hard to keep her arms from slipping in order to avoid squashing me.

Even when she got her bearings, though, she didn't move. She stared down at me, her face barely recognisable through all the ice cream and sprinkles on it. We grinned at each other through our heavy breathing.

"Hey, Liana?" she asked.

"Yes?"

Christine took this opportunity to smear what was left of the raspberry sauce from one side of my face to the other.

"Thanks."

"You're welcome," she replied. Then she slowly leaned downward, and the smile on my mouth slowly faded out. I immediately froze up like a deer caught in the headlights, and my heart, located next to the entire contents of a whipped cream can, began beating impossibly fast.

But then, as her face inched ever closer to mine, we heard the doorbell. She and I both jolted and jumped to our feet, which resulted in a hell of a lot of skidding and falling. The kitchen door swung open, and my father stood at the threshold, peering in disbelief around the destroyed room.

Of course, after weeks of ignoring his ice cream shop, he chose *today* to stop by and check up on it. I felt about ready to throw up.

For a moment, Dad's expression faltered, and he didn't seem to know what to say. Then his face turned redder than mine (taking into account the raspberry sauce), his fists clenched, and he appeared ready to detonate.

"You!" He pointed at Christine and yelled the words at the top of his lungs. "Get out!"

Christine opened her mouth to say something in our defence, but the command, "Now!" boomed out of my Dad's mouth before she could even try.

"Liana Maddison, you will have this cleaned up before I get back, or, mark my words, I will talk your mother into never allowing you to eat another ice cream in your life," he roared.

Dad waited for Christine to scramble and me to equip myself with a mop before he left the store in a rage, the door shutting forcefully behind him.



I closed my eyes and let my head drop back against the tile wall, slumping onto the counter. The mop, located beside my legs, was leaning against the edge of the stainless-steel surface, and the broom rested on the floor. There were still a few rags around the kitchen, but, for the most part, I had rinsed them of all the whipped cream and chocolate syrup, and now they were drying on top of the radiator.

I had managed to get the majority of dessert toppings out of my hair by running my head underneath the tap for a while, and I'd even found an old t-shirt in the storage room from when we were painting the place. Even with my minor attempts to clean myself up, though, I still looked like a drunk hobo.

It had to be around eight o'clock in the evening. On any other day, Mom would have closed up shop, and we would have been home two hours earlier. But I'd been cleaning the kitchen since 4:30 that afternoon, and I was on the verge of passing out.

The bell in the front room sounded, and I shut my eyes tighter, wishing I'd imagined the sound. I was not mentally prepared for the wrath of my Dad, especially now that he'd had several hours to reflect on how I'd managed to turn his kitchen into a battle zone.

However, instead of hearing the phrase, "I talked to your mother and, good news, you're only grounded until the day you turn twenty-one," I heard a timid voice ask, "Liana?"

I opened one eye to see Christine. She had pushed on the swinging door ever so carefully and was peering around the kitchen.

A smile pulled at the side of my mouth. "Don't worry," I said, allowing myself to relax once again. "He's not here."

"Thank God," she murmured, taking a step into the kitchen. I noted that the lucky jerk had been able to take a shower, wash the toppings from her hair, and change into clean clothes. Oh, how I longed to do the same. "I was half expecting to be held at gunpoint when I walked in," she added.

I laughed. "Aw, c'mon, he wasn't *that* mad."

Save for the sceptical raised eyebrow, Christine's expression was blank.

"Alright. Well, whatever," I muttered quickly. "We turned his kitchen into a Jackson Pollock painting, ice cream style. He had a right to be ticked."

Christine shrugged and hopped up next to me on the counter. "Well, I suppose," she agreed, letting her head drop back against the wall as well. A grin formed on her face as she stared absentmindedly at the ceiling. "It was pretty fun, though. Right, monkey girl?" She poked me in the ribs with a finger. "Right?"

I laughed. "Yeah, it really was," I said. "Not half as much fun as the cleaning turned out to be, however."

Christine turned her head to offer me a sympathetic glance. "I'm really sorry, Liana," she said, all traces of amusement disappearing from her voice.

"For what?" I asked.

She shrugged. "Well, for one, I took off, so you had to clean the entire kitchen by yourself."

"If you'd stayed, Dad would've lost it. Even more so than he already did. I don't blame you."

"Yeah, I guess," she said, pensively tucking a loose strand of hair behind her ear. "Then I'm sorry for starting it in the first place."

"Technically," I replied, "your first choice of ammo was water. I'm the one who upgraded to sprinkles."

Christine rolled her eyes and sighed. "Alright. Then I'm sorry for..." Her voice trailed off as she tried to think of something. She held up her pointer finger as the thought came to her. "Making you jealous," she stated proudly.

"You did not make me jealous," I insisted, emphasising each word brusquely.

"Oh, but I did," Christine made a repetitive 'tsk' noise and shook her head slowly from side to side. "I made you jealous, Liana, and now I feel as if I must sincerely apologise."

"No, really," I murmured. "It's fine. I don't need an apology."

"You do," Christine disagreed. "A good one, too. But what can I do that will make up for all the trouble I've caused you tonight?"

"Just steer clear of this place for about a week or so while I talk Dad into letting you keep your job, and we'll call it even."

Christine pursed her mouth to the side as she thought about it. "I was thinking more along the lines of reciting a poem for you."

"Oh no!" I groaned. "Please, anything but that."

"Sorry, can't hear you," Christine slid off the counter and, once again, dropped on one of her knees.

"Would you get out of here?" I said, starting to inch away from her. "We tried this already, remember? You're not exactly Dr. Seuss when it comes to rhyme schemes. And besides..." I pouted. "You're embarrassing me."

"This one's good, I promise," Christine insisted. "And it doesn't even rhyme." Then she cleared her throat and took my hand in both of hers. I let my head slump forward as I sighed irately.

"*My heart, it is brighter than all of the many stars in the sky,*" she began. I made another unappreciative sound at her first line, but Christine shot me a look that said, "I am not done," and then continued.

"*For it sparkles with Annie,*" she said. "*It glows with the light of the love of my Annie.*"

I tilted my head to the side as I stared at her with incredulous, narrowed eyes.

"*With the thought of the light, of the eyes of my Annie,*" Christine finished and looked up at me, her expression sincere.

When I didn't say anything, she stood up and murmured, "Today is the day that pigs fly, hell freezes over, and cows come home, Liana Maddison, for I just recited poetry for you." She forced her voice to sound smug, but there was a hint of uncertainty and self-doubt to it.

I stumbled over my words for a minute or so before I finally choked out the response, "There's no way in hell you made that up."

Christine laughed. "No, I didn't make that up," she admitted.

"Who did?" I asked.

"It's called '*For Annie*'," she told me. "It's by Edgar Allan Poe."

"Oh," I scrunched up my face in distaste to hide the fact that, in reality, my heart was melting. "Well, *that's* not romantic. That guy was a nutcase. He wrote about killing people and hiding their hearts underneath his floorboards and shit."

"Jesus Christ. I tried, didn't I?" Christine stated. Even though she sounded angry, the renowned grin was surfacing on her lips. "Now shut your little face, accept a compliment, and quit pretending like you don't know I love you."

With that, Christine took a step towards me, took my face in both of her hands, and placed a confident but gentle kiss on my lips.

As I sat on the edge of the counter, my legs swinging giddily underneath me, I put my arms around her neck and, pulling her closer to me, kissed her back.

Well, who would have thought? It actually felt nice kissing a girl, and if I ever thought otherwise, then certainly my heart had a different idea because it wouldn't stop jumping from joy inside my chest.

And then, suddenly, I stopped caring that I didn't have a life outside this ice cream shop. In fact, I tried to forget that the new school year was just around the corner and that I was missing out on the fun with my friends. I stopped worrying about handing in my pink apron and getting the hell out of here as soon as I could. In fact, I started planning on being on time more often.

I figured I wouldn't need to hide behind the counter and read novels anymore to keep from being bored, and I decided that from now on, I'd much rather hear Christine's voice than the sound of music through my headphones.

I noted how happy I was that she'd come into the store, scared the ever-loving crap out of me, and asked for a job. I noted how happy I was that I'd talked my parents into hiring her. I also noted that it was a good thing I'd been so stubborn and persistent when talking my parents into hiring her, because when I got home tonight, I'd have to do it all over again.

Oh, the strings I pulled for that girl. But I didn't mind. I would have done anything to feel her lips meet mine just one more time.

The End