

# ONE DANNI

I'm about halfway through my tour of Bramppath College when I get the sneaking suspicion I've dropped myself smack in the middle of shark-infested waters. And growing up in Boulder, Colorado, I never even learned how to swim.

Bramppath College is a stupidly prestigious boarding school, full of stupidly rich kids who all own Porsches, or BMWs, or whatever. Some of my classmates will be royalty-literally-and the rest will be *nothing* like my friends back home.

I belong at a red brick school, with desks decorated in permanent marker, and paint chipping off the walls, and everyone old friends with everybody else in their class. But now I'm enrolled in a place where the students sit around roses and honeysuckle, and eat at mahogany tables, and don't look at girls like me unless it's down.

Hellene, the bubbly woman who works in the uniform shop and is our temporary tour guide, is nice enough, I guess. But that's no reason to let down my guard around rich people just yet. She doesn't exactly seem like she drove a Porsche to work. Still, she's either high-key obsessed with the school, or she's being paid a decent amount to pretend to be, because she's been rattling off facts about the buildings like she's on speed. Mom's super into it, though. The two of

them are walking way ahead of me, talking like they met fifteen years ago instead of fifteen minutes.

I trail behind them, staring around as we walk. The grounds are enormous. My entire suburb at home could fit on top of this school, I swear. We duck under a neat hedge arch, hop down some stone steps, and then cross through a flower garden. To our left is yet another towering building that Hellene says was built centuries ago, and I crane my neck to take it all in until I pull a muscle.

Even my body knows I don't belong here. Too bad my mind didn't figure that out until it was way too late.

Until today, the whole moving countries thing was sort of exciting. Mom met this guy, Dennis Baker, online like two years ago, and as it turned out, he wasn't a catfish. He's actually a pretty great guy. My biological dad dipped when Mom got pregnant, and she stayed single pretty much my whole childhood, so I never had any kind of father figure to compare Dennis to. Still, I'm pretty sure he's one of the better ones. When he and Mom got serious, he even offered to move to Boulder at first, because he thought I should finish high school in my own country. But then Mom went to visit him in Henland and got all googly-eyed over it, and fast-forward a year and a half, here we are.

When all this went down-back when I was young and nai:ve-the first thing I thought was, *Holy shit, I get to live in Henland?* It might be a small country, but it's freaking stunning, and it's within driving distance of places like Paris and Brussels. Seriously, I could drive south from Boulder for longer than either of those trips and still be in Colorado. The second thought was, *Wilit, isn't Bramppath there?* Bramppath College (*college*, it turns out, can confusingly also mean *high school* in some countries) is famous for being one of the best schools in the world for pumping out musical geniuses. Maybe, I thought, I could be one of them.

I don't think Mom and Dennis were exactly psyched about the idea of me going to boarding school, but they let me apply for a scholarship anyway. In hindsight, I'm pretty sure they thought I'd never get it in a million years.

Then I got short-listed. And accepted.

Which brings me to today. Touring Bramppath in person for the first time, as out of my depth as a rubber duck in the ocean.

"The ballroom is to the right of the tennis courts," Hellene says to Mom, who makes her "impressed" noise. "The main piano is there," Hellene adds, pointing, and I perk up. "You can book practice slots online, but I believe you're the only serious player at the school at the moment. It's all about the strings this year. You should find it mostly free."

Mom pumps a fist in the air at me. I pump mine back, and hope she can't tell that I'm panicking.

The thing is, I didn't have the best start to high school. Things have been better recently, but that's thanks to my best friend, Rachel. Rachel, who lives in Boulder, and won't be here to have my back if the Bramppath kids decide they hate me. And they might. It wouldn't be the first time that's happened to me.

At the end of the tour, Hellene takes us into a small room near the main office. "Just wait out here for a moment," she says, going through a door that leads into an ominous black stairway. "I'll grab your uniform."

Mom and I exchange a glance. Shrugging, I sit down on one of the dozen or so wooden chairs lining the wall. There's one other person here, a girl about my age with perfect lips and a sharp chin who looks like she might be East Asian. She gives me a distracted smile and pushes her bangs out of her eyes, showing off straight, high-set brows.

I don't know how to tell if her clothes are expensive without referring to labels, and I can't see any of those, but something about them looks expensive, anyway. She's dressed in head-to-toe neutrals, her bag is all floppy like real leather, and her shoes are spotless.

I bet she has a Porsche.

Hellene comes up the stairs clutching a box. She grunts under the weight of it, and I jump up to give her a hand, but Mom gets there first. When they haul the box onto the desk, Hellene steps back, catches her breath, and notices the other girl. "Oh, Molly. Senior cape, right? I'm sorry, we're running a little bit late."

Molly shrugs. "I'm not in a rush."

Satisfied, Hellene starts unloading the box. "The compulsory uniform is covered by the scholarship," she says, handing me a mountain of clear, individually wrapped packages, all in varying shades of dark green and white. "I've got your shirts, skirts, vests, and socks.... Here's the school tie, the school jumper, your formal dining gown-this one's heavy-and the senior cape."

"What, no emblazoned underwear?" Mom jokes, and I concentrate on melting into the floor. If probably-owns-a-Porsche Molly didn't peg me as an outsider before, she sure knows now.

The bundle, which is roughly as tall as I am, starts forming a leaning tower of packages in my arms almost as soon as Hellene hands it over, so I transfer it to a nearby chair. For a beat, I think it's going to hold its balance, but then it topples over, littering the room with plastic-sealed clothing.

Amazing.