

"You sure nobody is coming here?"

"Don't worry, only I have access to this place"

Bernadette was not the type to break rules like this, but she felt she needed to be more adventurous in life sometimes. Which was why she enlisted Jayline's help with her current endeavor.

She had asked her girlfriend Madison to join her at the library at night for a special project without giving a lot of details. The real purpose was a surprise date set up by her and Jayline, who could not have been happier to help.

Bernadette considered herself the shy type, with her friends being the more outgoing and bolder of their group. Honestly, it had been nothing short of a miracle that she and Madison began dating... mostly because it was Madison who took the initiative first and asked her out, otherwise, she would have remained in limbo for a long time...

Madison just made her feel... *alive*. She pushed her to explore new things and enjoy life in such a joyous way. Any time they shared together was always the happiest for her. Those were the things she desperately wanted to let Madison know, the ones she'd been too shy to spit out.

Too shy to tell Madison she loved her.

But no more, Bernadette was determined to take the initiative this time. She'd surprise Madison with a date on the place they met, the very library where Jayline worked *and* had the keys to open up in the middle of the night, making sure they'd have the place all to themselves. The owner was away so he'd never find what they were doing.

Setting up a few fake candles (she wasn't going to bring *actual* candles to a library!) over a mantelpiece on one of the tables, she pulled out their favorite drinks and food from a bag. "Does this look right to you? I mean it's not the height of romance..." Certainly not when the food was microwaved chicken and diet sodas...

Madison blew a dark bang from her face, "Honestly, you're gonna get cold feet now of all times?!"

"I-I'm not!" Bernadette weekly said, idly twirling a finger around a lock of orange hair while adjusting her glasses. "Just... want this to go right, maybe I should just do something else..."

"You are always second-guessing yourself," Her friend said a touch tired. "Look, it'll be fine. You two will have a great night, and you'll come out of it more in love than ever, I guarantee it" She smiled comfortingly at her, placing a hand on her shoulder. "Now, I'll go look for Maddie and lock up the place for you. Then I'll give you both space while I wait in the security room"

"You..." Bernadette paused. "You're not going to be spying on us, are you?"

"Pfff, you think I'm a voyeur or something?"

That wasn't a no...

"Confidence, girl!" She tapped her shoulder a few times before walking about. "How you gonna confess to Maddie if you lack the spine for it?"

Bernadette watched her disappear among the lines of bookshelves, her words echoing in her mind. "Yeah... guess so" She muttered to herself.

Sighing, Bernadette stepped away from the table to gather herself. She adjusted the hem of her black shirt with white stripes and smoothed out her long white skirt. Checking herself on her phone she looked for any hair out of place in her wavy orange locks. She was pretty, Madison said so, she had to believe that. But... was she brave enough? Was she strong enough to tell her how she felt?

Jayline was right, here she went again overthinking things, trying to talk her way out of actually *doing* what she wanted.

God, why was this so hard?

She idly paced around, trying to calm her racing thoughts. Her eyes shifted through the various books on the shelves, stopping on a rather worn and old-looking one. Her curiosity got the better of her and pulled it out, noting with some surprise the red gem on its cover. That... had to be a fake right? Or at least a pretty cheap one.

It had no title, no words of any kind to suggest what this book was about. So she opened it, finding no title or index, only a single sentence written in cursive with old ink.

*What do you desire?*

God, she desired so many things. She wanted to be more adventurous, more confident, she wanted to be more like those women she often read in fantasy books who were filled with courage and determination. Bold to the extreme and with unconquerable spirit, guiding themselves by their passions...

She wanted to be brave to tell Madison she loved her.

But if she had to sum it all up in one sentence...

"I wish to be strong..."

The book snapped shut, startling Bernadette.

What... she hadn't...

The gem glowed.

And a light, something akin to a lightning bolt mixed with a laser projecting, shot out from it to her forehead.