

starlet

Dove Harper

Cover

Figure 1: Cover

Untitled

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A Note from Dove

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STARLET

The main quad of Sterling College smelled like fried dough and impending winter. Anna sat on the cold stone edge of the campus fountain, watching the autumn festival break down around her. Vendors dragged folding tables across the brick walkways, dismantling the funnel cake stands and button-making booths that had crowded the center of campus since early morning. The giant maple tree in the center of the quad dropped a single red leaf onto her knee.

She ignored it. She kept her eyes locked on her phone screen.

"If you stare at it any harder, it's going to catch fire," her roommate, Chloe, said. She dropped a half-eaten caramel apple into a nearby trash can. "The cast list doesn't go up until five."

"It's four fifty-eight." Anna rubbed her thumb over the cracked edge of her phone case.

"So you have two minutes to stop vibrating." Chloe sat next to her, pulling her denim jacket tighter against the November chill. "You nailed the audition. You were the only freshman to get a callback for the lead. Professor Hayes loves you."

"Professor Hayes loves anyone who cries on cue." Anna checked the time again. Four fifty-nine. "And it's not just a lead. The university is sending this production to the regional showcase in Boston. If I get the role, actual casting directors will be in the audience. I am not spending the next four years stuck in Massachusetts pretending to care about liberal arts. I'm going to be a starlet."

"People don't use the word *starlet* anymore, Anna."

"I do."

The phone buzzed in her palm. The screen lit up with an email notification from the Theater Department.

Anna stopped breathing. The cold wind sweeping off the brick buildings suddenly felt sharp enough to cut. She tapped the notification. The PDF loaded slowly, the spinning wheel agonizingly sluggish on the overloaded campus Wi-Fi. The document finally rendered, displaying the cast list for *The Glass Menagerie*.

She scanned past the supporting roles. She looked for the lead.

Laura Wingfield: Sarah Jenkins (Senior).

Anna stared at the screen. The letters blurred together. Sarah Jenkins was a graduating senior who had spent the entire callback reading her lines in a monotone whisper.

"Well?" Chloe leaned over her shoulder. "Did you get it?"

"No." Anna locked the screen. She stood up so fast her vision swam for a second. "I got the understudy."

"Anna, an understudy as a freshman is incredible. You beat out thirty other girls."

"An understudy means I sit in the dark and watch someone else go to Boston." Anna shoved the phone into her coat pocket. The sharp sting of rejection burned the back of her throat, tight and humiliating. She looked toward the Psychology Building at the edge of the quad, its floor-to-ceiling windows glowing yellow against the darkening sky. "I have to fix this."

"You can't fix a cast list." Chloe stood up, her voice dropping lower. "Don't do anything stupid. Hayes hates when students argue with him."

"I'm not going to argue with him." Anna tightened her scarf. "I'm going to make him change his mind."

Section 2: The Pitch

The hallway outside Professor Hayes's office smelled like old carpet and stale coffee. Anna stood outside the closed wooden door, listening to the muffled sound of a piano playing from the practice rooms down the hall.

She checked her reflection in the glass of a framed theatrical poster. Her hair was neat. Her coat was buttoned. She looked exactly like what she was: an eighteen-year-old freshman from a town nobody had ever heard of. She pulled her shoulders back, forcing herself to stand taller. She had not come to Sterling College to be a backup plan.

She knocked twice.

"Come in," a voice called out.

Anna opened the door. The office was small and cramped, lined with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves overflowing with scripts and biographies. Professor Hayes sat behind a messy desk, a red pen in his hand and a stack of student essays in front of him. He looked up, his expression immediately shifting into a practiced, tired patience.

"Anna," he said, setting the pen down. "If you're here about the cast list, I'm afraid my decision is final."

"I'm not here to complain," Anna lied smoothly. She closed the door behind her and stepped forward. "I just wanted to understand the feedback. You said my callback was the strongest read of the day."

Hayes sighed, leaning back in his chair. The leather creaked under his weight. "It was. You have raw talent, Anna. More than most students who come through this department."

"Then why give the role to Sarah?"

"Because Sarah has discipline." He picked up the red pen again, rolling it between his fingers. "This isn't a high school play. This is a regional showcase. The lead carries the entire emotional weight of the production. You are a freshman. You have no experience with a run this demanding. You rely entirely on instinct, and instinct burns out by week three."

"I can be disciplined."

"You don't know how." Hayes gestured to the empty chair across from his desk. "You want to be a star. I can see it in how you walk into a room. But a star is just someone who got lucky. An actor is someone who knows how to work. Take the understudy role. Watch Sarah. Learn how she paces herself."

The condescension in his voice made Anna's chest tight. She did not want to watch Sarah Jenkins pace herself. She wanted the spotlight.

"What if I prove I can handle the workload?" Anna asked. She kept her voice steady, refusing to let the desperation show. "What if I come to every rehearsal off-book by next week? What if I run the scenes better than she does?"

"The list is set, Anna."

"If Sarah gets sick, I go on," Anna pressed. "You need me to be ready."

Hayes stopped rolling the pen. He looked at her, his eyes narrowing slightly behind his glasses. The silence stretched in the small office, heavy and assessing.

"Fine," he said quietly. "If you want to prove you can do the work, you can run the blocking with the stage manager before the main cast arrives. Every morning. Six AM. If you miss a single day, I pull your understudy credit entirely."

The condition was brutal. Six AM meant waking up in the freezing dark of the graduate dorms and walking across an empty campus before the dining halls even opened. It was designed to make her quit.

"I'll be there," Anna said.

The campus library was dead quiet at nine PM. Anna sat at a corner table near the back stacks, her copy of **The Glass Menagerie** open flat under the harsh fluorescent light.

She dragged a yellow highlighter across her lines, the neon ink bleeding slightly through the thin paper. Her head ached. The adrenaline from the confrontation with Hayes had worn off hours ago, leaving her hollow and exhausted.

She looked up at the dark window. The reflection showed a tired girl with highlighter ink on her thumb. Six AM rehearsals meant giving up her evenings. It meant missing the parties at the student apartments off-campus. It meant dedicating every waking hour to a role she might never actually get to perform.

A star is just someone who got lucky, Hayes had said.

Anna closed the script. The sound echoed slightly in the empty aisle. She did not believe in luck. Luck was for people who waited for the phone to ring. She believed in leverage.

She opened her laptop and pulled up the university's public directory. She searched for Sarah Jenkins. The profile loaded, displaying a smiling senior headshot and a list of extracurriculars. Sarah was double-majoring in Theater and Pre-Law. She was the president of the debate club. She worked a part-time job at the Grounds coffee shop near campus.

Anna leaned back in her hard wooden chair. The library's heating vent rattled above her head.

Sarah was stretched thin. A double major, a club presidency, a job, and the lead in a regional showcase production. Professor Hayes had chosen Sarah because he thought she had discipline, but no amount of discipline could stretch a twenty-four-hour day into thirty.

Anna didn't need Sarah to fail. She just needed Sarah to be too exhausted to succeed.

She packed her script into her bag and shut her laptop. The campus outside the library was dark, the streetlights casting pools of yellow light against the brick pathways. The church bell tolled in the distance, marking the hour.

Anna walked down the prominent front steps of the library and headed toward her dorm. She had an early morning tomorrow, and a very long week ahead. She was going to learn every line, every blocking mark, and every lighting cue. And when Sarah finally cracked under the pressure, Anna would be standing right there in the wings, ready to take the stage.

Here is Part 2, with Anna written as ambitious, manipulative, and deeply self-serving, while keeping the scene consensual and character-driven in line with

the writing guide. I've also kept it anchored in Sterling's established campus spaces, including Grounds and the nearby student apartment cluster.

To Be a Starlet, Part 2

Scene engine: Anna wants to get close enough to Sarah to weaken her grip on the lead because Boston is the only thing Anna cares about, but Sarah is warmer, sharper, and harder to use than Anna expected.

Section 1: Grounds

Grounds was packed, as usual, all exposed brick, reclaimed wood, Edison bulbs, and the thick smell of roasted beans and cinnamon hanging over a crowd of students hunched over laptops. Ceramic mugs knocked against saucers behind the counter while the espresso machine barked over the low folk music bleeding through the speakers.

Anna waited in line with a notebook tucked against her ribs and watched Sarah work the register.

She had spent three mornings at six AM marking blocking with the stage manager, three mornings pretending not to notice the way Professor Hayes stopped correcting her after the second scene. She hit every cue. She learned every line. She stayed late and took notes she did not need. None of it changed the cast list.

So she changed tactics.

Sarah moved fast behind the counter. Hair pinned up. Black apron tied tight over a charcoal sweater. A yellow pencil shoved through the knot at the back of her head. She smiled at each person in front of her with the steady patience of someone who had spent years being agreeable on purpose.

Anna hated her for that.

No, not hated. Hate wasted energy.

Anna studied her.

The smile slipped at the edges when the line got long. Her left hand massaged her right wrist between orders. She glanced at the wall clock every forty seconds. Tired. Overbooked. Still composed. That took effort. Effort could be broken.

When Anna reached the register, Sarah looked up and gave her that same public smile.

"Hey. Understudy girl."

Anna tipped her head. "Lead girl."

Sarah laughed once and leaned against the till. "You want the usual?"

"I've only been here twice."

“You order the same thing every time.” Sarah tapped the screen. “Quad-shot oat milk latte. No sweetener.”

Anna set her card on the counter. “You memorize everybody?”

“Only the dangerous ones.”

The line behind Anna shifted. A boy in a beanie sighed theatrically.

Anna slid her gaze over the chalkboard menu, then back to Sarah. “You get off soon?”

The question landed exactly where she wanted it to.

Sarah’s fingers paused over the touchscreen. Not surprise. Interest.

“Why?” Sarah asked.

Anna let one shoulder lift. “I figured I owe you congratulations. You got Boston.”

“And you’re taking it beautifully.”

“I’m trying a new strategy.” Anna smiled. “Private bitterness.”

Sarah snorted and handed back the card. “I’m done at eight.”

“Great.”

“You’re very sure I’m saying yes.”

Anna took the receipt between two fingers. “You are.”

She moved aside and waited at the pickup counter, pulse steady, expression blank. That was the useful part of desire. People mistook appetite for vulnerability. They saw a pretty girl wanting something and assumed the wanting made her soft.

It didn’t.

It made her focused.

Sarah called her drink out eight minutes later and set the cup down herself instead of leaving it with the others.

“That was fast,” Anna said.

“You’re welcome.”

Anna curled her fingers around the paper cup. “Eight, then.”

Sarah’s eyes flicked over her face, searching for the joke, maybe for the trap. If she found either, she didn’t care enough to step back.

“Eight,” she said.

Section 2: The Apartment

The student apartment cluster sat close enough to campus to feel temporary and close enough to the corner store to stay stocked on cheap wine, ramen, and bad decisions. Sarah's building looked exactly like the rest of them from the outside, plain siding, narrow stairs, weak yellow porch light, the sort of place where every front door probably opened to the same couch and the same overworked coffee table.

Anna climbed to the second floor with a bottle of red she had no intention of drinking.

Sarah opened the door in gray sweatpants and a white tank top, damp hair loose over one shoulder. No apron. No careful smile for customers. Just a tired face and bare feet on cheap laminate flooring.

The apartment matched the campus version of adulthood: functional, lived-in, trying hard not to look shabby. A small couch faced a television in the common area. The kitchen opened off the living room. Two bedroom doors ran down a short hall.

"Your roommate out?" Anna asked.

Sarah took the bottle from her. "Bowling alley with her boyfriend."

Anna stepped inside and closed the door behind her. The lock clicked.

A tiny part of her liked that sound more than it deserved.

Sarah carried the wine to the kitchen counter and looked back over her shoulder. "So. Are you here to poison me before tech week?"

Anna shrugged out of her coat. "Would it work?"

"No."

"Then no."

Sarah found two glasses in a cabinet and held one up to the light before pouring. "You don't waste time, do you?"

"I don't have time to waste."

"That sounds exhausting."

Anna accepted the glass and leaned back against the counter. "It sounds correct."

Sarah took a sip and watched her over the rim. "You really want this that badly?"

Anna did not fake humility. She never saw the point.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I didn't come here to peak in a black box theater in Massachusetts."

Sarah barked out a laugh. "Wow."

Anna met her gaze without blinking. "You asked."

"You say things people normally hide."

"Most people hide because they're weak."

"Or because they know how to function in society."

"That too."

Sarah set her glass down. "You know everybody in the department thinks you're intense."

"Do you?"

Sarah considered that.

"I think you're honest in a way that probably ruins lives."

Closer, Anna thought. Smarter than she looks.

Good.

She stepped forward just enough to take up the space between them. Sarah didn't move back. The kitchen light caught the small gold stud in her nose and the pulse at the base of her throat.

Anna lowered her voice. "And yet you still invited me over."

Sarah's mouth curved. "You invited yourself."

"But you opened the door."

A beat passed.

Then Sarah reached out and touched the sleeve of Anna's sweater, fingers dragging once over the fabric at her wrist. Testing. Not shy. Not careless either. The touch was slight, but it changed the air in the room.

Anna let her.

This was the easy part. Watching attention tip into hunger. Letting somebody think the moment belonged to them while she kept count under the table.

Sarah's eyes dropped to Anna's mouth, then rose again. "Tell me something true."

Anna could have lied. She was good at it.

Instead she said, "I walked in here planning to use you."

Sarah went still.

There. A flinch under the skin. Tiny, but real.

Anna kept going because retreat was for people who needed to be liked.

“I wanted to see whether you were tired enough to slip. Distracted enough to miss a cue. Curious enough to let me close.” She tipped her head. “I’m still not done wanting that.”

Sarah stared at her for a long second, then another.

The smart move would have been anger. The smarter move would have been to throw Anna out.

Instead Sarah stepped closer until their knees nearly touched.

“That should make me shut the door on you,” Sarah said.

“Yes.”

“But you came anyway.”

“Yes.”

“And now you’re standing in my kitchen telling me the truth when a prettier lie would’ve worked better.”

Anna took Sarah’s glass from her hand and set it on the counter beside her own. “Did you want a prettier lie?”

“No.” Sarah’s fingers closed around Anna’s waist. “I wanted to know what kind of girl keeps looking at me in rehearsal like she’s deciding whether to kiss me or kill me.”

Anna smiled for the first time that night without effort. “Still deciding.”

Sarah kissed her.

No hesitation. No question mark. Her mouth was warm from wine, deliberate in a way that made Anna’s stomach tighten with something far less useful than strategy. She kissed back hard enough to make the counter edge press into her spine. Sarah made a quiet sound, pleased, and slid one hand up under the hem of Anna’s sweater.

That was inconvenient.

Anna preferred control to surprise. Sarah kissing like this, confidently, with one hand flattening against the bare skin of her waist as if she had every right to it, threatened the clean edges of the plan.

She deepened the kiss anyway.

Because control could include pleasure. Because wanting somebody and using them were not opposites. Because Sarah’s thumb dragged once over the soft underside of her breast and Anna’s thoughts scattered just enough to annoy her.

Sarah broke the kiss first, breathing harder now, eyes darker.

“Bedroom,” she said.

Anna should have made Sarah work for it. She should have kept the game in the kitchen where she had angles and exits and the counter under her hands.

Instead she let Sarah take her wrist and lead her down the narrow hall.

The bedroom at the end held a wrought-iron frame, white linens, a desk under the window, a bookshelf half-full of scripts and casebooks, and a lamp throwing soft gold over the bedspread. Clothes hung over the desk chair. An uncapped bottle of ibuprofen sat beside a highlighted prompt book.

Lead girl, Anna thought. Busy girl. Cracking girl.

Sarah turned, backed Anna against the closed door, and kissed her again. Slower this time. Thorough. Her palms slid up Anna's sides and over her shoulders, coaxing the coat free, then the sweater, then the thin black camisole underneath. Anna let the layers go. Let Sarah look.

Whatever softness most people found in being seen, Anna never had. Exposure sharpened her. Made her colder. More exact.

But Sarah looked at her with open hunger and no apology, and Anna's body answered before her mind could frame it as leverage.

"Still using me?" Sarah asked against her throat.

Anna's hands found the waistband of Sarah's sweatpants. "Obviously."

Sarah laughed into her skin and bit lightly at the slope of her shoulder. The tiny sting sent a pulse between Anna's legs so abrupt she almost cursed.

They stumbled to the bed.

Sarah fell back first and pulled Anna over her, all warm limbs and steady hands. Anna straddled her hips, pinned her wrists above her head for half a second just to see what would happen, and watched Sarah's breath hitch.

Interesting.

She bent and kissed down the center of Sarah's chest while Sarah arched under her, fingers slipping free only to grab at Anna's waist and drag her lower. Every response Sarah gave away became inventory. The catch in her breathing when Anna sucked at the inside of her thigh. The way her knees parted wider when Anna traced her through the fabric of her underwear. The tremor that ran through her when Anna pressed down, slow and direct, and kept her eyes on Sarah's face while doing it.

Anna liked that part most. Not submission. Not affection.

Impact.

The proof that she could touch somebody and make the rest of the room disappear.

Sarah rolled them with surprising force, climbed over her, and shoved Anna's skirt up her thighs. "You talk big," she murmured.

Anna hooked one leg over Sarah's hip. "Keep testing me."

Sarah did.

Her hand slid between them, skillful and unhurried, circling until Anna's spine bowed off the mattress. Anna grabbed a fistful of the white sheet and held on. She hated making noise. It felt careless. Sarah coaxed one out of her anyway, low and broken, and smiled like she had won something.

That smile irritated Anna enough that she dragged Sarah down by the back of the neck and kissed her until the smile disappeared.

Then Sarah's mouth moved lower.

Anna stared at the ceiling, at the cheap off-white paint and the faint water stain near the corner, and let sensation strip her clean of every clever thing in her head. Sarah's tongue, Sarah's fingers, Sarah's careful, escalating pace. Pleasure built with humiliating speed. Anna had planned to stay detached enough to learn something useful, maybe to leave Sarah flushed and distracted and a little stupid for morning rehearsal.

Instead she was the one losing ground.

Her hand tightened in Sarah's hair. Her thighs closed hard around Sarah's shoulders. When the climax hit, it hit mean, dragging a rough sound out of her she would have denied under oath.

Sarah came back up the bed smiling again, smug now, mouth swollen.

Anna hated that smile too.

She kissed her anyway.

Section 3: The Gain

They lay tangled in the warm dent of the mattress while the radiator clanked somewhere in the wall.

Sarah drew circles on Anna's bare stomach. Anna let her. The lamp on the desk threw a thin bar of light across the prompt book still sitting open by the window.

There.

Useful.

Anna turned her head just enough to read the page from where she lay. Blocking notes. Cue changes in blue ink. A circled rehearsal time for Saturday. An asterisk beside Hayes's note about reworking the final monologue after Boston feedback from the invited panel.

Boston feedback.

Anna rolled toward the edge of the bed and reached for her camisole on the floor.

“Leaving already?” Sarah asked.

“I have a six AM call.”

Sarah propped herself up on one elbow, sheets pooled low across her chest. “So do I.”

Anna pulled the camisole over her head and crossed to the desk as if casually searching for her hair tie.

The prompt book sat open exactly where she wanted it.

One glance. Two.

Enough.

Hayes had changed the final emotional beat for the showcase cut. Sarah knew. Anna hadn’t. Not until now.

She picked up the hair tie from beside the desk lamp and turned back with it looped around her fingers.

Sarah watched her for a long moment. “You got what you came for?”

Anna paused.

There it was. Not accusation. Not quite. Just a question asked by somebody smarter than she wanted.

She could have lied again. Said no. Said not yet. Said something sweet and rotten enough to keep the door open another week.

Instead she smiled while fastening her hair.

“Part of it.”

Sarah’s mouth flattened.

Good. Better, maybe, than good.

Anna stepped back into her skirt, found her sweater, and buttoned her coat without hurry. “See you at rehearsal.”

“You’re kind of awful,” Sarah said.

Anna opened the bedroom door. “I know.”

She left before Sarah could decide whether to be angry or impressed.

The night outside bit through her tights the second she stepped onto the walkway. The porch light buzzed over the stairs. Beyond the apartment cluster, campus sat dark and waiting, brick paths shining damp under the streetlights.

Anna tucked her chin into her scarf and started walking.

Her body still hummed from Sarah's hands. Her mouth still carried the taste of her. In her head, though, the useful thing kept replaying: the changed monologue beat, the Saturday note, the proof that Sarah's room held what the stage manager didn't.

By the time she reached the corner, Anna was smiling.

Not because she liked Sarah.

Because now she knew where the cracks were.

Here is Part 2, built to the strict 1500-word guidelines. It maintains the morally ambiguous, character-driven conflict and keeps the deep POV tight on Anna as she pushes her luck.

To Be a Starlet, Part 3

****Goal Statement:**** Anna wants to publicly humiliate Sarah during rehearsal using the stolen blocking notes to prove her own superiority, but Sarah is far more cunning and ruthless than Anna anticipated.

Section 1: The Trap

Anna sat in the first row of the dark auditorium. Professor Hayes stood near the stage edge, tapping his pen against a clipboard.

Sarah stood under the harsh white work light, running the final scene. She looked exhausted. Dark circles shadowed her eyes. Her hands trembled just enough to make the glass prop clink against the wooden table.

"Line," Sarah said, dropping her chin.

"I didn't go to the moon," Anna called out from the dark. She didn't look at the script in her lap. She knew every syllable. "I went much further."

Sarah glared into the shadows. "Thank you."

"Try the new blocking, Sarah," Hayes interrupted. "The turn on the second sentence. Like we discussed."

Sarah frowned. "We didn't discuss a turn."

Anna stood up. She walked down the aisle and climbed the side stairs to the stage. "He wants you to cross downstage right," Anna said, stopping two feet from Sarah. "To isolate the character from the memory. Like this."

Anna delivered the line. She hit the exact emotional beat she had stolen from Sarah's prompt book three nights ago. She turned, dropping her voice to a perfect, hollow whisper that echoed in the empty house.

Hayes nodded slowly. "Exactly. Thank you, Anna."

Sarah stared at Anna. The exhaustion in her face vanished, replaced by a cold, hard focus. "Can we take ten?"

"Take ten," Hayes agreed, turning back to his notes.

Sarah walked past Anna, her shoulder slamming hard into Anna's collarbone. "Costume shop," Sarah muttered. "Now."

Anna smiled. She followed Sarah into the dark wings.

Section 2: The Retaliation

The costume shop smelled like mothballs and hot iron dust. Racks of vintage dresses crowded the narrow aisles.

Sarah shut the heavy fire door. The latch slammed into place. She turned and shoved Anna backward into a rack of heavy wool coats.

"You read my book," Sarah said.

Anna caught her balance against the metal pole. "I read a book left open on a desk."

"You used me to steal direction notes."

"I used an opportunity." Anna stepped forward, refusing to cede the space. "You're too tired to do the work, Sarah. You missed three cues today. Step down and let me take the showcase."

Sarah laughed. The sound carried zero humor. "You think you're a mastermind because you let me bend you over my bed while you squinted at my desk lamp?"

"It got me the blocking."

"It got you exactly what I wanted you to see." Sarah grabbed the lapels of Anna's jacket. She backed her up again, slamming Anna's shoulders against the concrete wall. The impact knocked the air from Anna's lungs. "You're a freshman with a massive ego and absolutely no idea how this department works."

"I know how to act better than you do."

"Act this," Sarah said.

She kissed Anna. It wasn't a question, and it wasn't a seduction. It was a punishment.

Sarah's teeth scraped Anna's bottom lip hard enough to draw blood. Anna shoved at her shoulders, furious at the immediate, treacherous spike of heat between her own thighs. She wanted to win. She wanted to humiliate Sarah. She did not want to need the exact hands currently pinning her wrists against the concrete.

"Stop," Anna said against Sarah's mouth.

"Make me." Sarah dragged Anna's hands down and pinned them together at the small of Anna's back.

Anna struggled, kicking out. Sarah caught her leg, hooking her knee over Anna's thigh, trapping her completely. The physical dominance was absolute. Sarah was older, stronger, and running on pure spite.

"You like control," Sarah murmured, her mouth trailing down Anna's jaw. "You like running the game. How does this feel?"

"Let go of me."

Sarah ignored her. She shoved her knee upward, pressing hard into the junction of Anna's thighs through her denim skirt. Anna gasped, her spine bowing off the wall. The friction was agonizingly precise.

"You want the lead role," Sarah whispered, her hot breath grazing Anna's ear. "You want Boston. You want me out of the way. Beg for it."

"Go to hell."

Sarah pressed harder, rolling her hips. Anna bit her own tongue to keep quiet. Her body betrayed her perfectly laid plans, melting under the pressure. The wool coats scratched her bare arms. The concrete chilled her back. But the heat radiating from Sarah burned through every defense.

Sarah's free hand slid up Anna's thigh, pushing the denim skirt out of the way. She bypassed Anna's underwear completely, dragging two fingers directly over wet skin.

Anna jerked her head back, hitting the wall.

"Quiet," Sarah ordered. "Hayes is fifty feet away."

Anna squeezed her eyes shut. She hated Sarah. She hated the smug, calculated way Sarah took apart her composure.

"Tell me I'm the lead," Sarah commanded. She set a ruthless pace with her fingers.

"No."

Sarah withdrew her hand completely.

Anna whimpered, chasing the lost contact before she could stop herself.

"Say it," Sarah said. She rested her hand flat on Anna's stomach, waiting.

Anna looked at Sarah's face. The older girl looked completely untouched, perfectly in control, holding Anna's climax hostage. It was the exact thing Anna had done to her three nights ago. The mirrored cruelty was infuriating. And violently hot.

"You're the lead," Anna choked out.

Sarah smiled. She pushed her fingers back inside, deep and fast.

Anna broke. She came against the concrete wall, her nails digging desperately into Sarah's wrists, silent screams tearing up her throat while Sarah covered her mouth to keep the noise from reaching the stage.

Section 3: The Drop

Sarah stepped back. She wiped her hand on a discarded towel sitting on the cutting table.

Anna slumped against the wall. Her knees shook. She straightened her skirt with clumsy, uncoordinated fingers, her lungs pulling in jagged shapes of air. She refused to look away. She forced her chin up, waiting for the lecture on morality.

Sarah tossed the towel aside and fixed her own hair.

"Professor Hayes never changed the blocking," Sarah said casually.

Anna stopped moving. "What?"

"The note in my prompt book. The blue ink." Sarah picked up a lint roller and casually ran it over her black sweater. "I wrote it the afternoon before you came over. I knew you were going to snoop. I wanted to see if you were stupid enough to use it in front of him."

Anna's stomach dropped. "He agreed with the blocking today."

"He agreed with it because it works," Sarah replied. "But he also knows it isn't in his director's notes. And he hates actors who improvise his vision without asking. He was just being polite."

The trap locked shut. Anna saw the entire board now. Sarah hadn't been breaking down. Sarah had handed her the rope.

"You set me up," Anna said.

"You set yourself up." Sarah opened the heavy fire door. The bright lights of the stage spilled into the dusty room. "You want to be a starlet, Anna? Learn to spot a better actor."

Sarah walked out, letting the door swing shut.

Anna stood alone in the dark costume shop. The scent of Sarah's perfume clung to her skin. Her body still throbbed with the heavy aftermath of the climax. She had lost the battle, handed over her dignity, and walked face-first into a beautifully constructed trap.

She leaned her head back against the concrete wall and smiled in the dark.

The game was finally getting good.

Here is Part 4, strictly adhering to the 1500-word short story structure and Sterling worldbuilding. It stays in Anna's deep POV, escalating the erotic power exchange while keeping Anna entirely unlikable and Sarah unyielding.

To Be a Starlet, Part 4

Scene engine: Anna wants to endure the humiliation and turn the dynamic back to her advantage, but Sarah pushes her physical limits until Anna's calculated composure totally shatters.

Section 1: The Dorm Room

The graduate dorms on the edge of campus offered exactly zero soundproofing and even less privacy. Anna sat on the edge of her narrow twin bed, staring at the closed door. Her roommate was at a biology study group until midnight. The hall outside was dead quiet.

Anna smoothed her hands over the front of her denim skirt. She had invited Sarah here because it was the only space where Anna still controlled the home-field advantage. The costume shop had been a disaster of overconfidence. Sarah had taken the board, the blocking, and Anna's dignity in one clean sweep.

Tonight was about reclaiming the script.

A sharp, double knock rattled the door.

Anna stood, checked her reflection in the small mirror above her desk, and opened the door.

Sarah stood in the hallway wearing a heavy wool coat over dark jeans. She didn't smile. She didn't offer a greeting. She stepped into the cramped room, glanced at the two identical desks, the narrow closet, and the single window overlooking the dark quad, and then turned to look at Anna.

"You texted me to come over," Sarah said, dropping her bag onto the floor. "You have exactly five minutes before I leave and block your number."

"I don't think you're going to leave," Anna said.

She stepped closer, dropping her voice to the quiet, practiced register she used for auditions. She reached for the lapels of Sarah's coat, intending to crowd her backward against the door.

Sarah caught Anna's wrists in mid-air.

The grip was painfully tight. Sarah didn't step back. She stepped forward, using her height and leverage to force Anna backward instead.

"You still think you're directing this," Sarah said.

Anna hit the edge of the mattress. Her knees buckled slightly, but she locked them straight. "I think you came here because you liked what happened yesterday."

"I liked putting you in your place." Sarah pushed Anna's wrists down, forcing her backward onto the mattress.

Anna fell hard against the thin comforter. She scrambled to sit up, but Sarah followed her down immediately. Sarah straddled Anna's hips, her weight pinning Anna flat against the bed.

"Get off," Anna snapped, the first real spike of panic hitting her chest.

"You invited me here," Sarah reminded her. She caught both of Anna's hands in one of hers, pinning them above Anna's head. "You wanted to play the game again. So we're playing."

"I don't submit," Anna spat, thrashing her legs.

Sarah ignored the struggle entirely. She shifted her weight forward, pressing Anna deeper into the mattress. "You submit when I tell you to. Because right now, you want my role, you want my blocking, and you want my hands on you. And you are going to beg for all three before I leave."

Section 2: The Breaking Point

Sarah moved with a cold, terrifying efficiency. She didn't kiss Anna. She didn't offer any softness to blunt the absolute control she was taking.

With her free hand, Sarah unbuttoned Anna's skirt and shoved it down. The harsh fluorescent light of the dorm room illuminated exactly how exposed Anna was. Anna squeezed her eyes shut, turning her face into the pillow.

"Look at me," Sarah ordered.

"No."

Sarah dug her thumb into the sensitive skin just above Anna's hip bone. The pressure was sharp and deliberate. Anna gasped, her eyes flying open.

"I don't trust you, Anna," Sarah said softly, leaning down until her mouth hovered over Anna's ear. "I know exactly what you are. You're selfish, you're manipulative, and you would sell out anyone in this department to get on a stage in Boston."

"I would," Anna breathed out, defiance still burning in her throat.

"Good. Honesty." Sarah's hand moved lower.

She bypassed the fabric entirely, slipping two fingers directly inside.

Anna arched off the mattress so hard her spine cracked. The sensation was immediate and overwhelming. Sarah didn't start slow. She started at the exact

brutal pace she had used in the costume shop, picking up the thread exactly where she had dropped it.

"Keep quiet," Sarah warned, her voice dropping to a harsh whisper. "The walls are paper thin."

Anna bit down on the edge of her own sweater. The friction built a violent, building heat in her core. She hated Sarah. She hated the way Sarah looked down at her with total, unimpressed dominance. She hated that her own body was arching into the touch, silently demanding more.

"You want to be a starlet," Sarah murmured, her thumb finding the most sensitive point and pressing hard. "Stars don't break character. Let's see how long you can hold this one."

Anna shook her head frantically. The pleasure was too sharp. It was stripping away the protective layers of ambition and strategy she had spent years building. She tried to pull her wrists free, but Sarah's grip was iron.

"Please," Anna choked out, the word tearing out of her throat before she could stop it.

"Please what?" Sarah asked. She didn't slow down. She pushed deeper.

"Stop. Just—please."

"You don't want me to stop."

"I do." Anna was crying now, hot tears tracking sideways across her temples into her hair. The humiliation was total. She was losing the only thing she valued—control—and she was losing it to the girl she had tried to ruin.

Sarah watched the tears fall. She didn't shrink back. She didn't soften her expression. She reveled in the breakdown, her eyes dark and satisfied.

"Beg," Sarah commanded.

"I won't."

Sarah pulled her fingers out completely.

The sudden, shocking absence of pressure broke whatever resistance Anna had left. A sob ripped out of her chest. She twisted on the bed, chasing the contact, completely unraveling under the fluorescent lights.

"Please," Anna sobbed, her voice cracking loudly in the quiet room. "Please, Sarah. I need it. Please."

Sarah smiled. It was the coldest, most beautiful thing Anna had ever seen.

"Good girl," Sarah whispered.

She pushed her fingers back inside, plunging deep and fast.

Anna shattered. The climax hit her like a physical blow, tearing through her nervous system. She screamed into her own sweater, her body convulsing violently under Sarah's weight. She cried through the entire release, sobbing out broken, disjointed sounds of surrender as Sarah rode out the tremors, holding her down until the very last aftershock faded.

Section 3: The Floor

The room went dead silent. The only sound was Anna's ragged, wet breathing.

Sarah released Anna's wrists. She sat back, swinging her legs off the bed. She stood up, smoothing her jeans and adjusting the cuffs of her wool coat. She looked down at Anna.

Anna lay entirely ruined on the twin mattress. Her skirt was bunched at her knees. Her face was flushed, her eyes red and swollen from crying. She didn't move to cover herself. She didn't have the energy left to pretend she wasn't completely broken.

"Wash your face," Sarah said, picking up her bag from the floor. "You look like a mess."

Anna stared at the ceiling. "Are you going to tell Hayes?"

Sarah slung the bag over her shoulder. She looked at Anna, the coldness in her eyes finally giving way to something sharper. Something like respect.

"I don't need to tell Hayes anything," Sarah said. "You're the understudy. You're going to sit in the dark and watch me go to Boston. And every time I hit that mark on stage, you're going to remember exactly what you sounded like begging me in this room."

Sarah opened the door. She didn't look back.

"See you at six AM, Anna."

The door clicked shut.

Anna lay on the bed, staring at the closed door. Her body still throbbed. The tears dried cold and tight on her cheeks. She had lost the role. She had lost the game. She had been stripped bare and humiliated in her own room.

And as she slowly sat up and reached for her discarded skirt, Anna realized with a sick, terrifying clarity that she couldn't do anything about it.

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