RE:CLAIM

CHAPTER ONE

They counted on her silence.
They should have counted the wolves.

AN ADULT, CONSENT-FORWARD SAPPHIC FEMINIST THRILLER

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BEFORE YOU ENTER

Re:Claim is intended for adult readers. This chapter includes discussion and depiction of attempted sexual assault, victim blaming, institutional betrayal, coercion, and strong language.

The novel is consent-forward, but it does not look away from violations of consent or the systems that protect them. The story centers agency, evidence, solidarity, and the right to define your own experience.

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Still yes? Turn the page.

CHAPTER 1: THE HEARING

Fuck feral. It's time to take it up a notch.

Maman did not speak in the car.

Silence was one of her more expensive habits, acquired long before I was born and maintained with the discipline other women reserved for prayer, but that morning, it felt punitive. She sat beside me in a navy wool suit cut so precisely it seemed decided, her gloved hands folded over a leather portfolio on her lap, her wedding ring turned inward against her palm.

Outside, Paris moved with its usual indifference.

The car slid past stone façades, black railings, winter-bare plane trees, women in camel coats walking tiny dogs with more entitlement than most diplomats, men in scarves smoking outside cafés like the entire city had been arranged to give them something to lean against. Everything looked polished by money and old rain; like nothing terrible could happen here unless properly scheduled.

I watched my reflection in the window instead of the street.

My face looked calmer than I felt - which was something, at least. Maman had always said panic was a vulgar emotion, best left to people who could afford no better strategy. I had dressed accordingly: white blouse, gray skirt, black blazer, hair pulled back, no lipstick dark enough to suggest defiance, no jewelry loud enough to be mistaken for appetite. Assembled for judgment, but not yet for surrender.

The car turned through the gates of the lycée and my stomach tightened before I could command it otherwise.

"Do not make this worse," she said in a quiet, almost bored, voice.

The car stopped before the administrative entrance, where the limestone steps had been swept clean of leaves and the brass handles shone with the obscene confidence of institutions that believed themselves permanent. Our driver opened the door on Maman's side first.

For one ridiculous second, as the driver opened my door, I thought of turning and walking away. I imagined myself walking, very calmly, down the steps, through the gates, past the car and the driver and the old women in neighboring windows who always saw everything while pretending to see nothing. I could disappear into the city before anyone inside finished arranging my ruin.

Maman loudly cleared her throat outside, rushing me back to reality.

Inside, the hall smelled of waxed floors, old paper, and lilies dying somewhere out of sight. The heating had been set too high, as always, so that the building held the early cold of late fall at the windows but refused to admit it had entered. Footsteps echoed differently here than they did in the classroom wings.

The receptionist looked up when we entered, then immediately down again.

"Madame de Rochemaure," she said, ignoring my presence. "They're expecting you."

Maman removed one glove finger by finger, each movement unhurried. "Is Monsieur Servan already here?"

“Yes, madame.”

The receptionist’s eyes flickered again toward the doors. Through the frosted glass, shapes moved behind the blur of privilege and procedure: one tall figure stood, another seated, while the outline of the headmaster near the window was recognizable by the slight forward bow of his posture - a man who had spent decades mistaking caution for wisdom.

The door opened. Étienne’s father came out with a smile that quickly faded as he saw Maman and me.

“Bonjour, Isabelle.”

“Monsieur.”

He looked at me silently before returning his gaze to Maman.

“Will Monsieur de Rochemaure be joining us?”

“He is too busy to address such small matters. Ah, Julien,” she said warmly to the headmaster, as she entered the room.

“Madame de Rochemaure. Your presence is unexpected, but always welcome.”

The room had been arranged to suggest neutrality, though nothing in it felt accidental. Glasses of water had been set before us, untouched, their surfaces unbroken. The table stretched long enough to create distance, the chairs placed with an almost mathematical precision, the light angled so that it settled cleanly over Étienne while leaving the rest of us in a softer, more forgiving shade. No one remarked on it. No one needed to.

“At the risk of repetition,” the headmaster began, his tone measured in a way that suggested both patience and inevitability, “we are here to clarify the events of last week.”

Maman sat beside me, composed in the way she always was in rooms where outcomes mattered more than appearances. She had not spoken since we sat down, nor had she offered even the smallest gesture in my direction.

Across from me, Étienne leaned back, one arm resting along the edge of his chair like this was merely another obligation to be dispatched before something more interesting began. The scratch mark along his jaw had already begun to fade, but the light caught it just enough to give it presence; to allow it to stand in for something larger than itself.

“Étienne?” the chair said, his attention already fixed on him, like nothing else in the room required it. “For the record.”

Étienne inclined his head slightly. “We were in the library,” he said, his voice even, the cadence unforced. “It was late.”

He paused.

“Manon always liked the stacks…”

“You said you wanted to talk ab - ” I interjected.

“Let him continue!” The headmaster shut me down before I could even highlight the lie.

Maman shot me a death glare as Étienne smirked.

“Because she knew it was a place we could always be alone,” he said. “It’s clear she had planned this all day.”

“That’s not what happened. You - ”

“That’s enough,” the chair, his patience gone, said firmly. “One more interruption from you and we will have to take action.”

“But he’s lying.”

“You will wait.”

I could sense Maman tense up but even she, ever the strategist, understood that this was more inquisition than investigation.

Across the table, Étienne did not react. If anything, the interruption seemed only to confirm the space he had already been given.

The light caught at the edge of the bandage at his neck when he shifted; a narrow strip of white against his porcelain skin, placed precisely where the eye would land without being told to.

“She came at me,” he continued, his tone unchanged, each word placed with the same measured clarity, until his lips suddenly quivered and the theatrics began. “I tried to stop her,” he sobbed.

He lifted his hand slightly, hovering near the bandage, the gesture incomplete and sufficient.

A faint nod from the headmaster. “Go on. I know it must have been traumatic.”

My nails started to dig into the chair, my hands remaining still as I felt rage gather up. Maman remained beside me, composed, her gaze forward, her expression unchanged, like nothing said here required intervention.

Étienne finished without raising his voice, without altering his pace, his version settling into the room like it had always been there, waiting to be spoken. When he stopped, Étienne’s father folded his hands. The headmaster looked at the bandage instead of me. Maman appeared to feel the way I did, too, but did not say a word.

“Noted,” said the headmaster before a long pause.

“Based on the seriousness of the incident, and the evidence we have before us, nothing short of expulsion will do,” Étienne’s father said. “This school has a reputation to protect.”

“A scandal benefits no one,” Maman said quietly. “Least of all the school.”

The headmaster turned toward her.

“Manon will transfer to Le Rolle.”

The silence that followed was immediate and absolute. The headmaster shifted in his seat, the movement small but unmistakable. Étienne’s father paused, the faintest interruption in the composure he had worn so carefully until now.

Le Rolle Academy existed somewhere above ordinary institutions, spoken about as a finishing ground for dynasties old enough to consider governments temporary: ministers, royals, heirs to industrial fortunes

whose names rarely appeared in newspapers but somehow remained attached to entire sectors of European life.

Admission itself bordered on fantasy. Midyear transfers were extremely rare. The headmaster cleared his throat softly.

“Madame de Rochemaure,” he began with visible care. “Le Rolle’s admissions process is exceptionally selective. Under the circumstances, I’m not certain…”

“It has already been arranged.”

The headmaster adjusted papers in front of him, like they mattered when all present understood the shift in power. Across from us, Monsieur Servan leaned back slightly. For the first time since we entered, he was no longer watching me as the key issue in the room.

Maman opened her portfolio at last, pulling out a single sheet of paper, thick cream stock folded exactly once, and handing it to the headmaster. As she did, I could make out an embossed seal, dark ink, and a signature unreadable from where I sat, its presence changing the temperature of the room.

“There will be no record of this incident,” she said. “The transfer will be for health reasons.”

Étienne’s father was debating an objection but was shut down before he could even raise it.

“I see,” the headmaster said, adjusting the papers before him unnecessarily.

My blood started boiling as I looked at Maman. She had known before entering the room how this would end.

“In light of the transfer,” he said carefully, “the board would be prepared to resolve the matter internally.”

There were rooms in which anger could be useful and rooms in which it became another instrument in someone else’s hand. This was the latter. Every raised voice would become proof; every tear, instability. Every accusation would be weighed against the white bandage at Étienne’s throat and found inconvenient.

I could feel the polish of the chair beneath my palms, the cool, expensive smoothness of it; the civilized surface of an uncivilized thing.

The chair beneath me went over backward with a violent crack against the floor as I stood. The sound broke through the room so completely that even Étienne flinched.

“Manon,” Maman said, the single word sharpened by restraint.

The headmaster’s face tightened. “Mademoiselle de Rochemaure…”

“Putain, non! Are you fucking kidding me?”

The chair lay overturned behind me, one leg still faintly rocking against the floor before settling into stillness.

Something moved in Maman’s eyes, too quick to name and gone before anyone else could have seen it.

“Sit down,” she said.

I laughed hysterically at the realization of how ridiculous this whole room had been.

The door was closer than it had been when I entered - or perhaps I had only stopped believing the room was larger than it was. My steps were steady, my pulse anything but.

“Mademoiselle,” the headmaster called, the authority returning to his voice now that my back was turned.

My hand wrapped around the handle, its metal both cool and hot as I turned it decisively.

The hallway light struck hard against my face, too bright after the muted elegance of the room, too honest in its brutality.

I do not remember stepping into the hall as I started to laugh hysterically, slamming the door behind me and walking away. And as I did, the only words I could hear, even though I was alone in the hallways, kept rolling back like waves on a shore:

They will pay for this. All of them. I don’t know how yet, but I will find a way.

STILL YES?

Manon's story continues through Le Rolle Academy, Anaïs Diop, Les Louves, and the Geneva archive powerful men believed would remain buried.

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