

Teaser chapter for

The Silver Swan

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Chapter 1

The school hallways cave in on me as I walk through what would be my first day at Riverside Preparatory Academy. The sound of closing lockers and snickering voices surround me, and all I want to do is go visit my mom's grave. My dad moved us across the state, because he had found "the one." I'm beginning to think he can't count. This would be his third "the one" since my mom's passing.

Reaching my locker, I pull it open and place my brand-new textbooks inside before taking out my class schedule. *Calculus*. Great. My leather bangles jingle as I close my locker door and make my way to calculus. It's September, so at least I'm starting at the beginning of the school year.

Halting at the threshold of the classroom, I look down to my paper to check the numbers before looking at the ones mounted above the door. Ignoring the twenty or so eyes gawking at me, I manage to slip out, "Is this 1DY for calculus?"

The teacher, I assume, walks up to me, his black-rimmed glasses shielding his tired eyes and his gray hair illustrating his age. "Yes, Madison Montgomery?"

Swallowing, I nod. "Yes, that's me."

"Welcome to Riverside Prep. I'm Mr. Warner. Why don't you take a seat?"

I smile at him, clutching my books, and walk toward the crowd of students who are all sitting in their chairs, and that's when the whispering starts.

"Madison Montgomery? Isn't that the girl whose mom murdered her dad's girlfriend before killing herself?"

"Are you sure?" her friend asks, eyeing me skeptically. *"She seemed so much prettier in the newspapers."*

"No, that's definitely her. Her dad is loaded too. They're from old money, and her mom was a bored housewife who caught her husband cheating. So she stabbed the woman to death before shooting herself in the head—with Madison's shotgun." The air begins to thicken as I drop down to my seat.

"Her shotgun? She owns a shotgun? Ew. Better stay away from her. She might be as crazy as her mother."

They laugh before Mr. Warner clicks his fingers, demanding their attention. I close my eyes briefly, swallowing down any hope I had at getting a fresh start at a new school. Nothing and no one could give me a new beginning. Who was I kidding?

At first break, I walk to the outside entrance and take a seat on one of the steps. The way the school is laid out allows students to use the front steps to eat their lunch or the cafeteria. The atrium is filled with students, so I opt to eat out here where the sun is shining and where it's less... people-y.

"Hi!" a chirpy voice bellows, and I look up behind me to find a girl who's as small as a pixie. Her tiny body is covered in the finest labeled clothes, and her white-blond hair has the sun bouncing off it. I also can't help but notice that where my wrists are bound by black metal and leather bangles, hers are silver and gold. I know instantly we can't be friends.

"Hi." I tuck my brown hair behind my ear.

She sits down beside me anyway, taking a bite out of her sandwich. "I'm Tatum. You're new, right?"

I nod, sucking the juice from my apple off my thumb. "Yup. Sorry, you probably don't want to be seen with me."

She waves my comment away. "I know all about you. Madison Montgomery, seventeen years

old. Daughter of a murderer who then shot herself. Dad has money coming out his butt. Came from Beverly Hills to the Hamptons. Have I missed anything?"

I blink slowly before narrowing my eyes. "You forgot the part where it was my gun."

She laughs nervously. "I know. I was just hoping that wasn't true."

"My point. You probably don't want to be seen with me." I turn my attention back to my apple. She shakes her head. "Nope, you and I are going to be great friends."

After break, I carry on to my next class, and before I know it, the bell rings for lunch. Tatum insists on showing me around the school the best she can, pointing out all the different classrooms and where I can sign up for what. During lunch, the boys come from their side of the school, and we all join in the cafeteria, which splits the girl and boy sides of the school. On the rich side, it's up there on Bill Gates's status, and I'm seriously wondering how the hell my father managed to get me in. We're rich, yes, but there's something else about this school. You need a high level of pedigree to get in, too.

We walk into the cafeteria, and Tatum points down to my skirt. "You can accessorize your school uniform. We can hem it higher if we want." My plaid school skirt sits just above my knees, and I'm okay with the length. I don't want to attract any more attention, so I brush off her suggestion.

"Thanks," I answer dryly, before bringing my eyes to the doors that open out to the boy's side. A handful of guys push through the doors, talking and laughing with each other. They commanded the atmosphere instantly. Their grins are cocky with self-assurance.

"Who're they?" I ask, nudging my head toward the group walking toward the garden wall at the far side of the right wing.

"*They* are trouble," Tatum mumbles, taking a seat on one of the picnic tables. I watch them closely. They're all hot, *really* hot. Tatum turns around, following my line of sight. "And *that's* slut trouble," she mutters, pointing toward the girls who were babbling off earlier in calculus.

"What do you mean by trouble?" I ask, ignoring her reference to the girls and taking my eyes away from the commotion.

"I mean, not only are they advantaged assholes who own this school, and when I say own, I mean literally—at least for Nate anyway. But around here? They call the shots. The students of Riverside Prep are just pawns in their sick and twisted games. They own this school, Madison."

"You say that like they're in a gang." I peel open my yogurt.

"They may as well be," she replies, opening her carton of juice. "Apparently, they're members of this super-secret club." She leans in closer and smiles. "The Elite Kings Club."

Chapter 2

"The Elite Kings Club?" I ask, taking a bite out of my sandwich. Jimmy, our cook, made my favorite. Chicken salad with diced tomatoes and chopped lettuce mixed together with mayonnaise. He's so good at his job that my father uproots and brings him wherever we end up living.

Tatum waves her hand around, rolling her eyes. "They're like this undercover exclusive club. No one really knows what happens in this club, or who all the members really are, but it has to do with blood and your family lineage, apparently."

I continue eating my sandwich. The bell rings to signal that break is over once again, so I collect my books from the table.

"What do you have now?" Tatum asks, shoving an apple in her mouth so she can have a free hand to collect her books. I laugh under my breath as she takes the apple out of her mouth. "What?"

I shake my head. "Nothing, and I have PE."

She scrunches her face. "You do know that was optional, right?"

I nod, helping her pick up her books when I see she's taking too long. "I like sports."

We turn to walk back into the girls' hall, and just when I hit the doorway, something urges me to turn back around.

You know that feeling you get when you can feel someone watching you? Yeah, I had that times seven. When I pause in my step, Tatum halts her yapping about some game that's happening on Friday night, her eyes going over my shoulder before her face pales and her eyebrows pinch together. I slowly turn back around to look in the cafeteria to find all—seven, there's seven—boys staring right at me. I scan over each of them, lingering a little too long on the one with messy dark brown hair who's sitting slouched over a chair. He has wide shoulders and a strong, angular jaw. His eyes continue to summon mine when suddenly I feel as though I'm locked in a trance. Knowing I should pull away, I swallow and turn back around to go to my next class.

"Whoa! Hold up!" Tatum runs up behind me. "What the hell was that about?"

I shrug, pulling out my schedule from my pocket. "They've probably heard about my mom."

Tatum scoffs. "They wouldn't care about that, I'm sure. That was something else. But hey"—her firm grip on my arm halts my forward momentum—"you don't want *them* to notice you, Madison. They're not good people."

"Well, seems it's a little late for that." I shove past her and carry on toward the back doors that lead to the gym. I'm walking down the long corridor and am about to round the corner into the girls' locker room when I walk into a rock-hard chest.

"Holy shit," I whisper, pulling my hand back from his pec. "I'm so sorry." I look up to honey-brown eyes shaped by thick eyelashes. *Pretty boy.*

"Hey, no worries." He collects his duffle bag from the ground before reaching his hand out to me. "Carter. And you must be Madison Montgomery."

"Great," I mutter. "You've heard all about me." I drop my eyes to his chest, remembering how hard it felt under my palm.

He chuckles. "Which story?" he teases, winking at me.

I smile at his attempt to lighten up the mood, shaking my head. "I thought this was the girls' side?"

"The gym is co-ed. How're you liking your first day?" he asks, leaning against the wall.

"Well," I begin, my eyes darting around the long corridor, "a little intense."

"Carter! Get your ass in here!" an older man wearing a whistle around his neck and a baseball cap calls out from the other end of the corridor.

Carter's eyes stay on mine, a small smirk appearing on his mouth. "I'll see you around, Madison." He pushes off the wall with a grin, strolling past me.

"Yeah," I answer, once he's already gone. "I'll see you around." Turning back around to peer over my shoulder, I catch him watching me, so I wave lightly at him before carrying on toward PE.

That's two nice people I've met on my first day, and I didn't see him sitting with the Elite-whatever boys, so I'm hoping he isn't friends with them.

I'm waiting outside the front gate of the school for my driver when Tatum comes running up to me. "So, Carter Mathers." She wiggles her eyebrows.

I tilt my head. "How do you even know about that? It literally happened not one hour ago."

"News travels fast around here." She picks at her nails, unfazed.

"I'm starting to get that," I mutter.

"So anyway," she continues, hooking her arm in mine. "I need your number so we can plan this weekend." I see my black limo pull up to the curb, and Harry, my dad's driver, steps out of the

driver side. Tatum pulls out her phone, and I ramble off the numbers to her while making my way to my ride. “Okay! I’ll text you!” she yells out, as Harry opens my door and I clutch it in my hand.

“Do you have a driver?” I ask her, one foot inside the car.

She shakes her head. “I drive.”

I wave her off and slide into the back of the car. Today was truly interesting. I’m not sure how to take the events that have happened, but if every day is going to be like today, I’m in for a long ride.

Chapter 3

After pushing open the double front doors to our colonial home, I drop my bag in the foyer and make my way into the kitchen. Our house is exactly what you’d expect someone like my father to own. All neutral milky whites on the walls, with a crystal white staircase that leads up to the second level. I take a can of Coke out of the fridge before making my way upstairs. My dad and his new bride will be back on Monday, and I’ve only met her once or twice, but from what I’ve seen, she seems nice. Nicer than his last money-hungry broad, who he brought home anyway. I’m walking up the stairs when my phone vibrates in my back pocket. I fish it out quickly and slide it open when I see it’s my dad.

“Hey.”

“Madi, sorry, honey. We forgot to tell you that Elena’s son will be moving into the manor as well.”

I pause, scanning the long hallway once I reach the top of the staircase. “Okaaay. I didn’t know she had a son.”

“She does. He attends your school. I need you to keep him at arm’s length.”

“What does that mean?”

He sighs. “Just wait until we get home, Madi.”

“Dad, you’re being cryptic. I’ll see you when you get home, and I’m sure I’ll be fine.”

I hang up the phone before he can continue to badger me, or worse, give me “the talk.” After shoving my phone into the back pocket of my jeans, I walk to my bedroom door, halting when I hear sounds coming from the bedroom next to mine. Is he already here? Fighting my nosey tendencies, I push through my door and sigh with the relief of being back in my safe bubble. Kicking my door closed, I walk toward the Victorian-style glass doors that open out onto the little balcony that hangs over the pool. I push open the white net curtains and unlock the latch to let some air in. The light afternoon breeze brushes over me, sending my long brown hair swishing over my shoulder.

My safe bubble of relaxation is short-lived as Ludacris’s “What’s Your Fantasy” shakes the vintage art I have hanging on my walls with its deep-sounding bass. I shake my head, walking back into the room, which continues to house boxes of all my items I haven’t unpacked yet. I pull open the bathroom door that’s joined onto my room and close it before wiggling out of the clothes I wore to school. Slipping into the scorching yet soothing spray of water, I work double time at washing myself before turning off the faucet and wrapping a towel around my body.

I’m stepping out of the shower when I see someone leaning against the doorframe of the other room that’s connected to the bathroom. A loud scream erupts from me, and I clutch the towel around my body. *I forgot about that damn door.* Genuine’s “Pony” is playing now, and my eyes narrow on the tall, lean guy standing in front of me with his arms crossed in front of himself.

“Get out!” I point to his room.

He chuckles, his eyes traveling down my body, and his head tilts. “Oh, don’t be shy, little sis. I don’t bite...” He grins. “*Hard.*”

I clutch the towel tighter, scanning down his naked chest to where a tight six-pack sits proudly, with two muscular arms framing his torso. A large Celtic cross tattoo sits over his left pec, and on the right of his ribcage, he has a scripted tattoo sprawled out over it.

I look up to his face, where the corner of his mouth kicks up in a smirk. A lip ring sits to the side, and his eyes zone in on me, glistening with mischief. “You done eye-fucking me, little sis?”

“I’m not your little sister,” I hiss, narrowing my eyes. “Get out. I need to get changed.”

“You not gonna ask my name?” he questions, his smooth, sun-kissed skin glowing in the bathroom light, his blue eyes laced with mischief. He pushes off the doorframe he was leaning on, walking toward me with so much swagger he could give 50 Cent a run for his money. His dark blond hair sits messily all over his head, and his torn jeans hang nicely off his hips, showcasing the rim of his Phillip Plein briefs. He pauses when his chest is almost flush with mine.

Reaching for his toothbrush, he grins. “The name’s Nate, little sis.” He winks at me, squirting toothpaste onto his brush before his smile flicks to the mirror. He pops the toothbrush into his mouth and smirks.

Spinning around, I quickly dash out my door. What the fuck was that about? And there’s no way I’m sharing a bathroom with him. Picking up my phone from the bed, I dial my dad. When it goes straight to his voice mail, I growl lightly. “Dad, we need to talk about my living situation—STAT!”

Shuffling into some skinny jeans and a checkered top, I brush my hair out and tie it into a messy high ponytail. Shoving on my Converse sneakers, I head for the door. Just as I open up my bedroom, Nate is walking out of his, still with no top on, and still with those sinful jeans hanging off him. He annoys me instantly. His cocky smirk is spread out over his mouth, and his baseball cap is flipped backward. “Where you off to?”

“None of your business,” I answer, slamming my bedroom door and wondering whether I should have locks put on it. I continue toward the stairs when he races up behind me.

“Sure it is. Big brothers are supposed to look out for the little ones.”

I halt, spinning around on the fourth step and glaring up at him. “We”—I gesture between the two of us—“are not related, Nate.” That only makes his grin go wider. He leans on the rail of the stairs, and my eyes flick under his bicep, where there’s a scar embossed into his skin. He sees where my eyes go and quickly crosses his arms in front of himself. “But since you’re asking,” I say, walking the rest of the way down the steps. I turn to face him and tilt my head once I hit the bottom. “I’m going shooting.”

Chapter 4

Arriving home later that night, I thank Harry and make my way up the large cobblestone entryway, up to the front door. I can hear the music before I hit the entrance, so when I swing the door open and see a house party in full swing, I'm not even slightly surprised. Slamming the door shut—rather dramatically—I scan over the drunken crowd. Where our marble kitchen is, there are teenagers playing beer pong, and dancing and grinding on each other in the background.

Swinging my eyes to the sitting room that leads off to our outdoor pool and pool house, I see another crowd dancing in strobe lights, with Akon's "Ain't Saying Nothing" blasting from the DJ booth set up where our couch once sat. I look back outside and see the party lights on inside our pool, and half-naked people cannon-balling into it, with a few others making out in our Jacuzzi.

Motherfucker!

Narrowing my eyes, I can almost make out another crowd behind the pool, on the grass area where our backyard leads to the beach. *Oh, man, I'm going to kick his fucking ass.* When I see the black baseball cap with blond hair peeking out slightly from underneath, and the same lean, tan build—still wearing no shirt—I know I've found Nate. I walk toward the couch, where he lounges with a few other guys, his head bobbing to the beat of "Nightmare on My Street" by DJ Jazzy Jeff, as he loads up the tip of a bong with weed.

I recognize all of them from school today—the guys Tatum referred to as "The Elite Kings Club." Nate is apparently the one whose great-great-grandparents were the founders of Riverside Prep. I'm not sure if that was from his mother or father. Elena is lovely and is as rich as my father. That's probably why I like her more than anyone else he's introduced me to. I know she isn't just after his money. So I guess it's her side. My dad is good-looking for an old man. He isn't really old though, sitting at forty-seven. I guess there are fathers with kids my age who are older. He trains daily and eats well, and Elena is the same. She's fit for her age and takes care of herself. Though I have only met her twice—the first time was when we moved here a few days ago, and the second time was before they flew to Dubai for a business meeting—she was nothing but nice to me. How she managed to have a shithead son like Nate, I don't know.

"Nate!" I snap, rounding the couch until I'm standing in front of him. His arms are stretched wide over the sofa, his legs spread in front of himself, his lips forming an O before he slowly blows out a thick cloud of smoke, while his eyes stare straight through me. "Shut this down—now." The blur of movement catches my attention in my peripheral vision, but I ignore it.

He smirks. "Little sis, might want to go put that gun in the cabinet before you freak everyone out."

I clutch the straps to my 12-gauge around my shoulders. "Shut it down, Nate. I'm serious."

He shoots up off the couch with a red cup in one hand. "Wait! Come here." He pulls me under his shoulder, his mouth dropping down to my ear. He points to the first guy who was sitting beside him on the couch. "That's Saint, Ace, Hunter, Cash, Jase, Eli, Abel, Chase, and Bishop." My eyes drift over them dismissively. I recall a few of them from school, but there're a couple older-looking guys who I don't recognize.

"Hi," I manage to say—awkwardly, I might add. I turn back to Nate. "I'm serious. You will get us both into trouble. Close it down." I turn around, and just as I'm about to hit the entryway to exit the lounge, I spin back around and catch them all watching me. Nate is smiling from behind his cup, while the rest of them have a mixture of emotions sprawled across their faces. When I settle on... I think Nate said his name was Bishop, the same guy I had a stare down with at school today, who is now sitting on a kitchen chair with his legs spread out in front of him, my cheeks flare to life. His eyes burn into my skull, and if guys had a resting bitch face, then that would be it.

Shivers creep up my spine; I don't even know why. Maybe it's because he seems just so... unapproachable. I scoff inwardly. *Typical fucking prep school students.* Walking back up the stairs, leaving Nate to shut it down on his own, I walk into my room, placing my shotgun at the top of my closet, and take out some clothes while I'm there. Slipping into the bathroom, double checking the locks on both doors this time, and taking hold of the faucet, I turn it on to scorching hot before stepping into the cascading waters. I let the harsh pounding of the water drown out the bass of the music. I stay under the water until the warmth prunes my skin slightly.

Quickly drying my body and stepping into my silk pajama shorts and a tank top, I hang up the towel after ruffling it through my hair. Unlatching the lock to Nate's room, I then turn and step into the cool air of my own. The music has stopped, and I can hear distant shouting slowly descend outside with cars skidding off and girls screaming. I crank open the door to my little patio, opening it wide. Once the house sounds safe enough to set foot out again, I walk across my room and pull open my bedroom door, making my way down the stairs slowly. I'm halfway to the kitchen when I notice Nate and his friends still in the same position in the lounge. They pause their talking, right along with my steps.

I look at them. "Don't stop on my account," I murmur before I continue my trek to the kitchen. After shooting, I'm always hungry, and I'm not about to stop my routine because some "elite boys" were in my house. I woke up this morning an only child. How did I manage to gain not only a stepbrother but someone like Nate as a said stepbrother?

I pull open the fridge, taking out some eggs, milk, and butter, before going to the pantry for the flour and sugar. Placing all the ingredients on the kitchen counter, Nate walks in with his arms crossed over his chest as he leans against the entryway. I bend down and take out a bowl from under the breakfast bar along with a wooden spoon.

I point to him. "Do you ever wear a shirt?"

He snorts. "Girls rather I didn't." He winks before moving toward me as Cash, Jase, Eli, Saint, and Hunter walk into the kitchen, all eyeing me skeptically.

"What're you making?" Nate asks, watching me closely.

"Waffles." I look toward the other boys, who are all spread out in different spots in the kitchen. The air is a little uncomfortable.

I clear my throat and look to Nate. "How come I've never heard of you? My dad didn't tell me Elena had a son." I pour in all the ingredients as Nate walks toward one of the cupboards and pulls out the waffle maker, plugging it into the wall.

He shrugs, leaning back against the counter. "Don't know. Maybe because I'm such a rebel." He grins.

"Are the stories about you true?" Hunter questions, his eyes darkening on me.

"What stories might those be? There are a few," I retort, walking up to the waffle maker. Nate takes the bowl from me and begins pouring the batter into the maker.

"About your mom." A little blunt, but I'm used to it.

"The part about her killing herself, or the part about her murdering my father's side chick beforehand?" I throw back, my head tilting.

Hunter has what I'd call rough features. I'm not sure how to place his ethnicity. He has dark eyes, olive skin, and a scruffy but clean five o'clock shadow over his jaw.

He leans against his chair more, eyeing me closely. "Both."

"Yes and yes," I answer flatly. "And yes it was my gun."

I turn around to catch Nate glaring at Hunter. "Move," I order, pointing toward the waffle maker. Nate steps aside to let me in, and my arm brushes against his. I pause, my eyes going up to his face to catch him smirking down at me. Before I can tell him to wipe the smile off his face, Eli comes up beside me.

"I'm Eli, and I'm the eyes and ears of our group. I'm also the little brother to Ace." He points over his shoulder to an older and bulkier version of himself.

I smile politely at Ace, not gaining a smile in return. Whatever.

"You mean *club*?" I reply without looking at him. I pour more batter into the maker before noticing everyone is quiet.

“Tsk, tsk. I see rumors have already made it to you on your first day. Who told you?” Nate asks.

I step away from him, putting the waffle on my plate and deciding I want out of this kitchen because it’s a little too crowded with testosterone.

“Tatum.” I squirt maple syrup onto my waffle. “I’m going to go.” Then I snatch my plate and make my way toward the stairs. On my passing, I see Bishop and Brantley talking in the living room, still in their same seats.

I pause, gripping onto the stairwell, and turn my head toward them, only to find Bishop looking straight through me. I’m not sure what these boys’ deal is, but it’s a little intense. Bishop has an angular face with high cheekbones and a jaw that could be sculpted for a Greek god. He has loose dark hair that makes my fingers twitch to run them through it, and piercing, dark, army green eyes. His thick dark lashes fan out across his perfect skin. His shoulders are lean yet are set with confidence. The dominance that surrounds him is evident, and once I realize I’m still ogling, my eyes widen in horror before I spin around and dash back up the stairs.

Closing my bedroom door, I place my plate on my study desk that sits beside the balcony door and sigh. There’s no way I’ll be able to stomach eating anything now. Climbing under my crisp linen sheets, I turn on the television that hangs on the wall opposite my bed and push Play on the next episode of *Banshee* before sinking into my pillow, my body finally relaxing after one long-ass day.