

“Take the Rap” by Alexander Lee-Rekers

Hunt and Bella sit together in the waiting room outside the principal’s office. Bella, perfectly styled and dressed, looks nervous, jittery. Hunt is so slouched in his chair he looks like he might slide out of it completely and form a puddle on the floor.

HUNT: Will you relax?

BELLA: Will you sit up?

HUNT: Why?

BELLA: Because you’re slouching and it looks disgusting.

Hunt shrugs.

HUNT: I’m trying to slouch. More comfortable that way.

BELLA: It doesn’t look comfortable.

HUNT: ...yeah it’s not really. (*Sitting up.*) First time in trouble? Probably, hey? Don’t see you much in Mister Carver’s lunchtime lectures.

BELLA: Do you mind if we don’t speak about it?

HUNT: Sure.

BELLA: Thanks.

HUNT: Risky tactic, though. Keeping quiet. Only carries you so far. Y’see: it’s not like with the cops, who do have rules, technically. They can’t make you talk, and since you’re a kid they eventually have to let you loose. But teachers? Vice *principals*? They’ll hold you back and lie and cheat and lock you into a story. No lawyers, no law. Wild fucken west-

BELLA: Hunt? I’m really not in the mood.

HUNT: For what? Pleasant conversation?

BELLA: You’re making me feel nervous.

HUNT: Just you wait until Mister Carver gets here...

BELLA: This whole thing is a misunderstanding-

HUNT: Hey! That's my line! Ahh you can have it. Probably do you more good than me.

BELLA: Hunt?! Please! *Please.*

She looks away. Hunt studies her. Depending on where he's sitting, he might get up and sit closer.

HUNT: Holy shit.

BELLA: What?

HUNT: Fuck off...

BELLA: Will you stop swearing?!

HUNT: Bella Goodwin: you fucken did it. Didn't you? I got dragged in here because of you! You're guilty as hell right now. Look atcha-

BELLA: Hunt, I swear-

HUNT: I think you owe me an apology. I could have been skipping Biology right now, if it weren't for you and your selfishness. And you know who they're going to blame for this out of the two of us.

BELLA: Can you take this seriously? Can you please take one thing seriously, today? Just this once?!

Pause.

HUNT: We don't talk much in school.

BELLA: I wonder why.

HUNT: It's because you're pretentious.

Bella gives him a look.

HUNT: Doesn't make you a bad person. Just makes you-

BELLA: Pretentious?

HUNT: Kind of up yourself. You know what you need to do? "Check your privilege." You heard about this? It's what rich people need to do before they go slugging the rest of us off about slouching and swearing. Because life's been easy on you and you don't even know it.

BELLA: I do check my privilege.

HUNT: So why are you nervous right now?

BELLA: Because I'm in serious trouble.

HUNT: Wrong. You, Bella, are nervous because you still think there's a chance you'll get away with it. But with me, as soon as I'm caught, I know they're going to pin it on me. So I relax, 'cause there's nothing else to do.

BELLA: So you're an innocent victim?

HUNT: No, I'm usually guilty. But that's 'cause of the system that made me. You'd know that if you checked your privilege.

Silence.

BELLA: I'm nervous because I'm going to confess.

HUNT: That's stupid.

BELLA: It's the right thing to do.

HUNT: It's the stupid thing to do.

BELLA: I have a very strong sense of right and wrong, Hunt. I did this because I had to do it. And now that it's done, I'm going to own up to it.

HUNT: I heard you did it for Suzie. After what they were saying about her.

BELLA: I'm not here to justify anything.

HUNT: You should. When I heard that, I liked you for the first time since, shit, the first grade?

BELLA: Well. Thanks.

HUNT: Next time, you could hire me to do it. *(Pause.)* You could, uh, still hire me... to take the rap for you.

BELLA: Thanks, Hunt. I think I'll stick with the stupid thing to do. *(She breathes: deep in through the nose and out through the mouth.)* I feel ... better. Relaxed.

Bella looks over at Hunt and smiles. And then she slouches down in her seat. Hunt follows suit, until both of them tumble out of their chairs and onto the ground.