

Chapter 9 of *The Debate*

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That week-end the Cal Poly Tournament rose up like a hydra, breathing fire, ejecting blood. All that rain. I smoked under the aluminum awning with Christian, and the boys from Stanford, and flirted with Virginia Pierce. Virginia was a bitch, but that didn't mean I had no desire to fuck her. In some ways, it only sweetened the deal.

Virginia was in some way involved with that strange tangle between Cindy, and Speed, and Zoë. A confederate, and confidante, or conspirator. This is certainly to have been the case. (First, this is all my conjecture, of course, and you're welcome to make up your own mind, but I was there, and I'm telling you with plain honesty, that this is what anyone in my position would have been lead to believe. Second, you're welcome to think otherwise, but remember, you weren't there, and without me you wouldn't know anything. Next, you can say there are nicer, more generous ways to look at things, but if you do that for too long you get so sick to your stomach that you fall over and rot from the inside out where you lay, and no one will bother to help you up, for fear of contagion. You want to think better of yourself and others, but that's all it is, thinking better, and that's a voter.)

The smoking circle broke up as the octa-final round was posted. Christian and I spoke hurriedly with Virginia as the last cigarettes were sucked down, and the whirlwind rushed around.

Christian asked about the puted rape.

"She's pressing charges," Virginia nodded.

"Have they arrested him? Is that why Speed and Zoë aren't here?"

“No. Cindy’s doing it though the administration,” a distant and lugubrious glaze rolled down her features.

“Zoë says he didn’t do it,” I said.

“Then Zoë’s a cunt and a liar, okay?” she snapped.

“If Zoë’s such a liar,” I smoked calmly, “why isn’t Cindy going to the police?”

“Because it’s her prerogative-”

“To cry wolf.”

“Fuck-off,” she argued with bulbous eyes, “What do you want? A debate? You want to **debate** me?”

“Come on, Rich,” said Christian.

“No, and don’t call me ‘Rich,’” I returned to Virginia, “A fucking accusation is enough for those campus kangaroo courts, and that’s fucked-up shit. Nothing stops you from crying rape and ruining my future.”

“That wouldn’t happen,” Virginia stared at the concrete and whispered, as if it were a secret, “because if you even tried, I’d sooner rip your balls off and shove them up your ass.” And she crushed the butt and stomped off, “You’re such a fucking asshole.”

“She runs hot, then she runs cold,” I smiled at Christian.

“Why did you have to do that?” he asked.

“See how she reacted? She has secrets . . .”

“What are you talking about? You were mean.”

“She escalated.”

“You escalated.”

“I wasn’t wrong. Zoë even says so. Who do you trust Virginia or Zoë?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“It doesn’t matter who’s right? You’re fucking kidding.”

“Do you want to be right or do you want to be human? That’s something else Zoë says.”

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“I’m not sure,” I thought about what Collin would have said, and gritted another smile, “I’ll flip you for it.”