

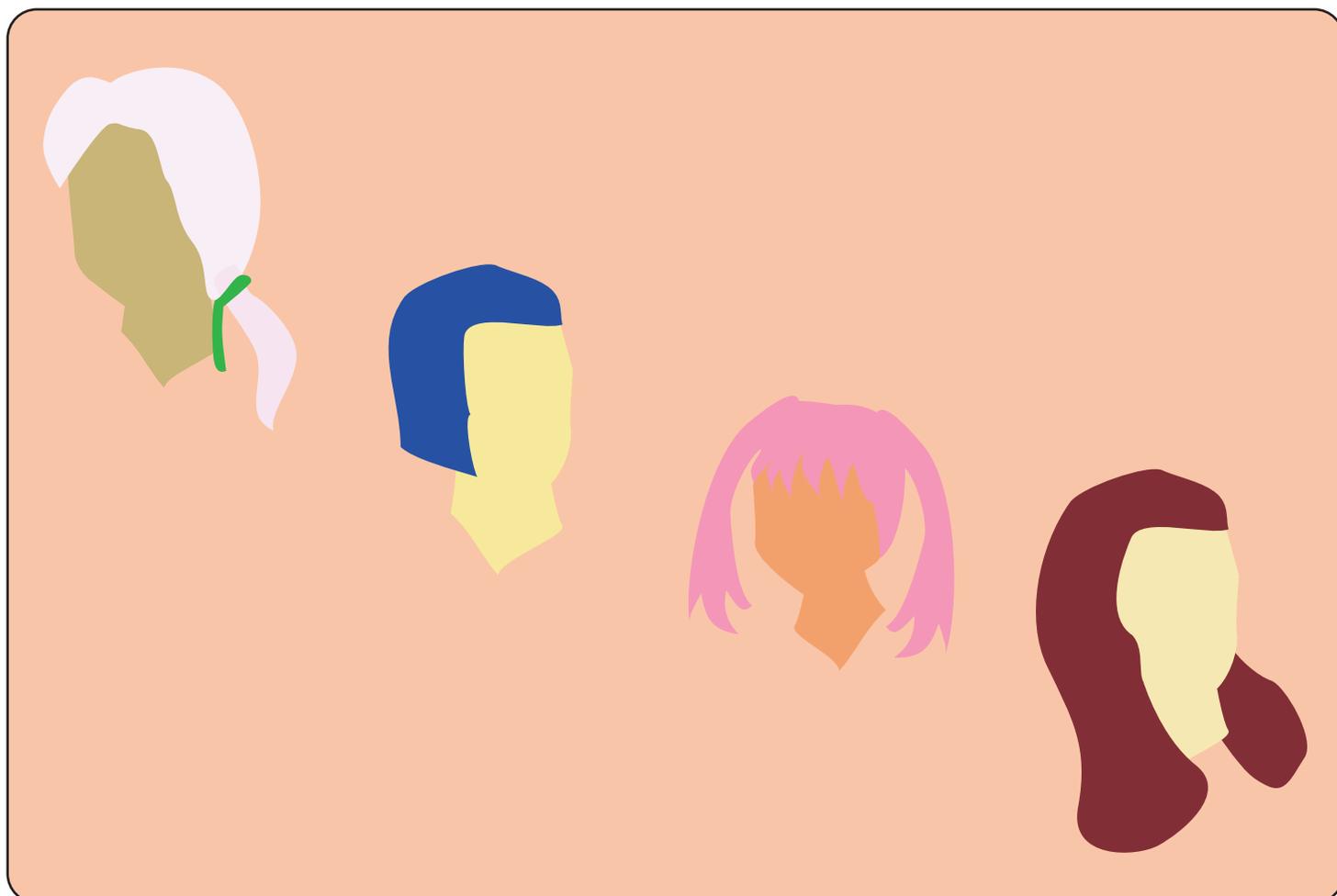
ROMANCE CHOICE ADVENTURE! - 1

TELL YOUR OWN STORY!  
CHOOSE FROM AN INFINITY OF ENDINGS.

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# THE ACADEMY IN AUTUMN

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**THE ACADEMY IN AUTUMN**  
a Romance Choice Adventure



It's homeroom at Candlecraft Academy, and as usual, you're working very hard to tune out the teacher. He's talking about something boring, obviously, so you look around the room again, hoping to see something interesting.

You glance over at Harriet, who's being absent-minded again. Now that you think about it, she's been wearing her hair in a ponytail more often, and with the same green ribbon in her long white hair. You always thought of it as "elf hair". She doesn't seem to be paying attention to anyone or anything in the class, so you keep looking around.

Is that a new student? Wait, no. You remember her back at the start of class the past couple of weeks... she was a transfer student named... Barbara? No... Bobbie, that's it! Short, azure hair and intense eyes that are focused on the lecture. Like, she's *really* into this lecture. Good for her?

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***Turn to page 2...***

After school, you swing by the art club; your best friend Emi is there, bouncing up to you with a bright smile and energetic pink hair. “Hey! You’re just in time for things to wrap up! Did you want to walk back home? I haven’t hit my talk quota today!”

Talk quota? What on earth? “Yeah, yeah, just let me get my stuff, alright? I’ll meet you out front.”

You’re on your way to your locker when you run into another familiar face--Zoe, her fiery red hair framing a focused gaze. Her hair is still wet--right, she had swim team practice. She pauses, turns, and looks at you, studying your face intently. Weird. You clear your throat. “Uh, can I help you?”

She tilts her head. “Remember we have a test coming up. You should study with someone.”

Then, she’s gone. You meet up with Emi and walk home with her, chatting all the way (although most of the chatting is Emi), but Zoe’s strange behavior sticks in your mind.

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***Turn to page 7...***

The walk back home is strangely quiet. Emi's been unsettled by all the rumors. You try to break the silence. "You know, I heard Harriet carved a big 'H' into one of the benches at the park. I wonder if she's hanging out there."

"That's weird," she mumbles dismissively, and you drop the subject.

You're at the door, and she's about to go in. You're lost in thought as she says goodbye; is everything really alright with her? And what is going on with Harriet, anyway?

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***If you go to the park, turn to page 14...***

***If you keep an eye on Emi and ask to stay with her, turn to page 17...***

You check your next classroom, and Emi isn't there. You go to the art room, and Emi isn't there. You're starting to worry. She isn't in the nurse's office, or sneaking out to an early lunch. As you run through the school, you notice that the door to the pool is open. Confused, you step in.

There's someone floating, facedown, in the pool. Something twists in your chest; you recognize that vibrant pink hair, and there's no air bubbles. She isn't moving.

She isn't moving.

There's a sound behind you. You look up, and you recognize the other figure. It's Zoe, kneeling at the edge of the pool, water dripping from her hair and her clothes and her hands. She looks up at you, a wild intensity in her eyes, and smiles. Behind her, the door is shut.

"Finally. There's nobody in my way now. I feel so *happy* right now!"

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***THE END***

Your attention turns back to the website; there'll be time for everything else later. You read through the articles; it looks like the site was run by a student in the computer club. Interesting! You also read **u**p on the scene of the **p**resumed crime; it's a cliff not too far from the school, if you take the bus. Maybe you could look around.

Rushing to the computer club, it looks like they're still there, just **p**acking up, and the student who runs the website is easy to find. It's really impressive how fast he got it up, honestly.

"Hi, um, is there **r** anything I can--" You figure you don't have much time.

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***If you ask the student about the website,  
turn to page 8...***

***If you go to the cliff where the ribbon  
was found, turn to page 16...***

Going back over the whole situation in your head, you wring your hands. Even though you should be ready for this, you aren't; there are days like this where your life seems unreal. Not because your life is in danger, but because you're a *highschooler*! Reading through the file your father gave you, you run the details of the mission through your mind. Exactly what you've gone over again and again--escort your sister, watch for police interference, get her to the safehouse.

Suddenly he stops, with a look of horror on his face. He stands rigid, pressing a hand against his heart. He takes the cigar out of his mouth and goes slowly on towards the door, camera panning with him. When he has almost reached the door, the guard stationed there throws it wide, and a blaze of sunlight comes in from the prison yard outside.

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***Turn to page 9...***

The next day at homeroom, you notice that Harriet's not in, and the entire class is swirling with rumors. They're saying she went missing, and a green ribbon was found at the cliff on the edge of town.

After school, Emi's in art club, and she looks distraught. She asks you to walk home with her again. It's definitely concerning to see her like this. "Yeah, I think I could...hold on, there were some letters I needed to drop off at the principal's office. I'll catch you out front."

She grumbles. "Okay, but I can't wait too long!"

On your way to the principal's office, you get sidelined by something on your phone--a student-run website with some disturbing theories about what really happened. By the time you snap out of your rabbit hole, you realize it's getting late!

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***If you meet with Emi, turn to page 3...***

***If you dig into the investigation more,  
turn to page 5...***

“Hey, yeah,” you tell the student, before he can finish talking. “So I’m looking into the whole Harriet thing, and I have some questions to ask.”

You spend the rest of the day asking questions, getting leads to other students, and then asking questions of them. You’re starting to collect a portfolio of information, and a picture is starting to build. It happened late at night. Harriet left her home to go get her sister from the bus stop. Someone waylaid her before she got there.

You’re putting together your own folder of notes when you get a text from a number you don’t recognize. “meet at old gas station edge of town important harriet information”

Probably one of the many people you talked to, and you forgot to put their contact information in your phone.

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***Turn to page 11...***



Fantastic; another boring day in homeroom, and the teacher's droning on and on about something. Of course, nobody else seems to be paying attention either, except "Bobbie". Really, she's just intensely looking for threats; there's some perks to having someone looking after you, somewhat, and you wonder if she realizes you know about her.

Don has risen from the couch and has picked up the glass of whiskey. There's a second of hesitation, then he uses it for an ashtray, dropping the cigarette into it. A smile of relief comes on Helen's face.

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***Turn to page 12...***

Emi was surprised when you stuck around in the morning, but she actually seems a lot happier than before. She gives you a big hug before you both set out for school. “Hey, aren’t we stopping by your place?”

“No time,” you point out. “It’s fine, I’ll deal with it. Don’t worry, you’re not being a bother, I want to make sure you’re okay.”

She blushes, and then beams. “I appreciate that.”

The conversation is pleasant, and when you get to your second period class, Emi keeps passing notes to you. Mostly innocuous, but festooned with her trademark handwritten hearts. The teacher doesn’t notice, but there’s a few people in class who do, like Zoe, who has a disappointed look in her eyes and looks down at her notebook, scribbling away.

The bell rings, and there’s a passing period to your next class together. You stop to use the bathroom, and when you get out--Emi isn’t waiting for you. That’s unexpected. You thought she’d want to walk to class.

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***Turn to page 4...***

The gas station is dusty and abandoned, and there's an eerie feeling to it. You brought your binders of notes. They actually look a little paranoid, now that you're thinking about it. You lean against a gas pump, and you hear a sound.

Turning around, you see Bobbie standing there, but now she's wearing a long coat and casual clothes. She frowns, looking up and down at you. "Didn't think you would actually show up. You've gotten more invested in this case than anyone I've seen investigating."

"Just trying to figure out what happened to Harriet." You shrug.

"I've seen the way you looked at her, kid." She reaches inside her coat. "There's some powerful people who sent me here to investigate threats to Harriet, and now she's dead. And you know what?"

"I...don't understand," you mumble.

She pulls a sidearm from her coat. "Nobody will ever know what happened to you."

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***THE END***

Enemies abound for you and your family in this country, but you're getting used to it. Xenophobia for some, political struggles for others who want your power for themselves. The message on your phone interrupts your musing; it's your father. "Reconsidering the mission tonight; the threats have me worried about you." Always fretting and fussing over both of his precious princesses, *of course*.

Norris inclines his head, then goes off down the hall. Marlowe and Vivian give each other one of those looks, and Marlowe takes her hand, drawing her close to him. They follow Norris.

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***Turn to page 13...***

Concealing the revolver in your handbag, you take a deep breath, putting on walking shoes and checking the map. One more hour until you meet with her at the bus stop. Natalie's arrival in this town is just one step in a much longer plan to consolidate power. The whole thing seems so absurd, but maybe that's because this is the first time you've really been involved in the family business. Every other important action has left you out of things, because of course your father is scared to let anything happen to you. Now, you're finally being trusted with a responsibility; you're being treated like an adult. The moment means something you don't entirely grasp right now, because it's so new...even exciting.

Norma arranges the golden scarf about her and proudly starts to descent the staircase. The cameras grind. Everyone watches in awe.

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***Turn to page 19...***

The park looks strange and silent in the early evening. You walk past a tree, and run your fingers down the benches. After ten minutes of searching, you find it, an “H” carved lithely into the back of the bench, Harriet’s signature letter. Could she really have vanished, or even...died? A shiver passes over you...or is that just the weather?

Lost in thought, you only dimly hear the footsteps behind you. Your thoughts switch into overdrive when something hits you on the back of your head. In the swirl of your vision, you see short, close-cropped black hair, and a voice murmurs, “Of course it would be you. The way you watch everyone in your classroom. Coming back here because of your obsession. You won’t get away with what you did to Harriet.”

You lose consciousness.

You don’t wake up.

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***THE END***

The park doesn't have anyone in it, but there's a bright atmosphere to it, and the light actually falls in a soft way on Zoe's hair. She brightens when she sees you approaching. "Thanks for coming here. It's been a lot to sort through, and--"

Her eyes widen, and you follow them.

To Harriet, who is standing behind you, watching intently. You can feel Zoe gripping your hand tightly, murmuring something behind you. "N...no, that can't be, I pushed you over..."

"And here I am," Harriet says, eyes gleaming with fury.

"It was his idea!" Zoe blurts out, shoving you forward.

Harriet narrows her eyes. "So, you're both guilty."

Two gunshots ring out, breaking the silence of the park.

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***THE END***

For the site of what is seeming more and more like a cold-blooded murder, the clifftop seems fairly placid. You notice plenty of depressions around in the grass, but most of them were probably investigators at the cliffside, whether professional or amateur. You kneel down, running your finger through the grass; you can almost feel her green ribbon in your fingers, left on the grass.

It feels surreal to think that she died here. You creep closer to the edge, looking down at the abyss that looms below--crashing waves that would do little to break your fall and quickly swallow you up, if you fell.

In your reverie, you don't notice the push between your shoulders. As you slip forward, you look back, and in the corner of your eye, you see Zoe's face, filled with a quiet satisfaction.

As she falls out of view, you see tears trickle down her cheeks.

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***THE END***

Emi looks relieved when you ask to stay. The two of you watch a calming cartoon, and it's actually nice. You haven't seen this one in years. She starts getting tired, and falls asleep on the couch. You look around; you didn't bring a bag, but you could probably sleep here tonight. She'd probably feel better with a friend walking to school with her.

You get a text on your phone; it's Zoe. "need 2 study, exam 2morrow morning!!! plz?"

You groan. All your study notes are back at your house, and there's no way you can grab them tomorrow morning and have time to get Emi to class. You might have to disappoint Zoe.

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***If you stay and walk Emi to school, turn to page 10...***

***If you meet up with Zoe to study, turn to page 18...***

“Thank you for coming,” Zoe says, even as you yawn deeply. “I’m really happy we get to study together.” There’s a big grin on her face, as she twirls her scarlet hair.

Sure, whatever. You’re here to study. You run through the topics, and it goes pretty smoothly. Somehow, the conversation turns to Harriet. From the sound of it, Zoe knew Harriet pretty well. “I never noticed. She always stood out to me, though.”

“Yeah,” Zoe replies. “Hey, do you want to meet up after school at the park she liked to go to? I feel like spending some time thinking about her.”

“Oh, that’s a good idea,” you hear yourself say. And honestly, it doesn’t seem like too bad of an idea to spend some more time with Zoe. She’s a little odd, but you’re warming to her.

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***Turn to page 15...***

Evening has fallen on the cliffs, and the wind sweeps past you with a fresh chill. In the dim light, you think you see Natalie standing by the sea. Green ribbons are tied in her hair, just like your own; it's a bit of a private joke between you two. "Harriet!" someone screams, and then you see it happen, as a figure comes out of the darkness. Tumbling over the edge, Natalie screams as the figure shoves her over, standing silently and watching; torn loose in the struggle, a ribbon flutters to the grass.

Mike gets in behind the wheel next to Susan. The camera cranes back as the car starts up the honky-tonk street.

Camera continues to crane back and up, showing the dead bodies of Quinlan and Menzies and finally, in the foreground, the street's "Bienvenido Amigos!"

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***Turn to page 6...***