Kitty watched Father Uberti out of the corner of her eye as he pulled an oversize remote control from the depths of his cassock and aimed it at a small window near the top of the far wall. The video player inside the AV room whirred to life, projecting a clear, ten-foot-tall image of the Bishop DuMaine logo on the screen above her head.

Generic Muzak played as a montage of photos faded in and out, depicting students of every shape, size, and color laughing, posing, eating lunch around the outdoor quad. It was the kind of teen utopia adults envisioned for their kids, all perfectly understanding and cooperative and nice, the parental illusion of a modern high school. Only the students at Bishop DuMaine knew better. High school was a vicious place.

The Muzak faded and a light voice chimed in. “At Bishop DuMaine, we’re a family, a team working together for the good of our school and of each—”
Kitty's heart leaped to her throat. The image on the screen froze, then blipped as the piggybacked player Bree had installed over the weekend took control of the playback.

As promised, Margot's tech had worked perfectly.

A new image popped onto the screen: a bedroom, messy and disheveled. A sinewy arm yanked a chair into view and the burly figure of Coach Creed plopped down in front of the camera.

“I'm Richard Creed,” he said, his best shit-eating grin plastered across his face. “But you can call me Dick.” He wore a blue wifebeater two sizes too small, and his bulky arms looked as if he’d oiled them up with an entire tub of Crisco. He jabbed a thumb at his chest. “And I’m here”—he paused and pointed to the camera—“to give you three reasons why I’m going to win America’s Next Fitness Model.”

“Oh my God!” Coach Creed's roar pierced the silence of the packed gym. Kitty couldn't see him, only hear the general ruckus from the upper bleachers as he pounded his way downstairs.

Father Uberti grabbed Kitty roughly by the shoulder. “What’s going on?” he hissed. “What is this?”

Kitty looked down at him and desperately wished she had even an ounce of Olivia's acting skills. “I have no idea,” she said, trying to sound utterly bewildered. “The video started and then . . .” She let her voice trail off, and her eyes drifted back to the screen.

The video jump-cut to a new scene of Coach Creed seated behind an ornately carved wooden desk. Behind him, full floor-to-ceiling bookshelves flanked each side of a large window. The blinds were open to bright sunshine cascading across the front lawn of Bishop DuMaine Preparatory School. The entire gymnasium heaved one air-sucking gasp. Everyone recognized that view.

“My office?” Father Uberti growled.
“Reason number one,” Coach Creed said, gesturing to the library on either side of him. “I'm not just a fitness guru, I'm an academic.” He leaned back in Father Uberti's leather chair and propped a sneaker-clad foot up on the desk next to a framed photograph of the Pope. “Which makes me smarter than the average model, without sacrificing beauty for brains.”

“Douche!” someone yelled.

The next scene showed a full-body image of Coach Creed dangling from a pull-up bar. In addition to the skintight tank top, he also sported a pair of circa-1975 blue running shorts trimmed in gold, so inappropriately short that Kitty was terrified his man parts might peek out through the leg hole as he pulled his chin up over the bar. “Forty-nine,” he counted, his voice grunting with fatigue.

The audience erupted into laughter.

“Turn it off!” Coach Creed screamed. He tore across the basketball court and ripped the remote from Father Uberti's hand. “Work, you dumbass.” He marched toward the booth, pointing the useless device at the window. “Work!”

On the video, Creed strained into another chin-up. “Fifty.”

He let his body fall to the floor. “Reason number two: fifty pull-ups,” he panted. “One for each year of me. Dick Creed only gets better with age.” Coach Creed struck a bodybuilder's pose. “Yeah, you like that?”

Peals of laughter threatened total chaos. Father Uberti grabbed the microphone. “Mr. Phillips,” he said. “Get the AV room open. Now!”

The facilities manager was at the door already, searching his ring frantically for the correct key. Kitty smiled to herself. It wasn't there. Olivia had stolen the AV room key, and Bree had disposed of it after installing the video player. After several seconds, Mr. Phillips ran from the gym, probably to fetch the duplicate set.

Coach Creed threw the remote to the ground and sprinted to the locked door, wringing the handle with his meaty hands. “Someone open this fucking door!”

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The screen changed again, and the gym quieted, shivering with anticipation as every student and half the teachers sat on the edges of their seats. The new setting was a backyard pool. It was an overcast day, but the gray haze didn’t stop reality-show auditionee Dick Creed. He lounged on a beach towel by the water’s edge, his blue tank and track shorts discarded for a pair of swim briefs. His aging, overly tanned skin hung limply from his body, and his stomach resembled a deflated balloon, a combination of taut and flabby that reminded Kitty of Captain Kirk in the old Star Trek episodes her dad so dearly loved.

“Reason number three.” He cocked his left eyebrow. “Let’s face it, Dick Creed is a sexy piece of man meat. The ladies love it, can’t get enough of it, and will tune in every week for more, I guarantee.” He picked up a glass of sparkling wine and toasted the camera. “Smart, strong, and sexy. Dick Creed is all three and more. Don’t you think that’s worth an audition?” He winked and the screen went dark.

No one moved. The gymnasium held its collective breath. Father Uberti stopped screaming at Mr. Phillips, his jaw frozen midword, and even Coach Creed stopped pounding his fists against the AV room door as one final image faded onto the screen.

Black type against a white background, in an unmistakable custom font that looked like it came from an old-fashioned typewriter.

Compliments of DGM