

SELINA MAE

# LESSONS IN FAKING

English edition

Hall Beck University 1



DE FONTEIN

This book contains explicit content.  
For more detailed information, please see the last page.

Disclaimer: The content warning includes spoilers  
for the entire book!

We wish you the best possible reading experience.

Love,  
Selina & De Fontein

# CHAPTER 1



I was sure of exactly three things.

1. Revenge is just another word for justice.
2. Money does buy happiness.
3. Stay away from Dylan McCarthy Williams or my brother will have me murdered in my sleep.

And how badly did I need this, really?

Technically, I was failing Statistics II—yes. And sure, Professor Shaw said this weekly tutoring thing would be the only way to get through his class, after the midterm I had “completely violated” (his words, not mine).

But let’s face it. Perhaps college just wasn’t my thing. Despite my mother’s reputation, statistics certainly wasn’t. And McCarthy certainly wasn’t, either.

My eyes fell to the brunet on the other side of his desk with an internal groan. His tall frame hovered over a stack of papers, dark brows drawn together slightly, as he assessed one of them. Sitting in the small office chair, coffee-brown hair fall-

ing into his features, he hadn't acknowledged my presence in the doorway. Not after I'd knocked. Not after I'd opened the door. Not after I'd—

"Athalia Payton Pressley," he drawled, not looking up. Automatically, my body deflated in sync with the sound of his voice. "Would you just sit?"

The words left Dylan McCarthy Williams' mouth with irritable indifference, still scribbling into his notes, before the red pen dropped from his grip. And somehow, that gesture in itself, felt intentionally passive-aggressive. Like he was saying *How dare you interrupt my work?* without ever opening his mouth.

Instead, he said, "Or were you planning on staring at me for the entire hour?" His eyes found mine and his brows rose, with a prompting look on his face that made me want to run the other way, but instead, forced me into the chair opposite his. McCarthy followed my every move, watching cautiously as I took a seat, swooping my brown hair to one side, so it wouldn't get stuck behind my back. I crossed one leg over the other, holding the hem of my black skirt in place, smoothing a hand down the wool fabric of my long sleeve.

Innocently, I blinked at him. "I was promised Shaw's best and brightest." My head tilted with a smirk on my lips, not hiding the light disdain in my voice, as I got a stack of notes out of my bag. It was half the size of his, but I ignored that. "Have you seen them, by any chance?" With a loud thud, hoping the gesture would mirror the attitude of his pen-dropping, I maneuvered my papers onto the desk.

An unamused huff escaped him, as he reached for the passive-aggressive pen again. McCarthy thought, before his gaze lifted onto mine once more, lips turning into a wide, fake

smile. A smile that said: *I'm not here to bullshit back and forth with you, I'm here to ass-kiss for extra credit and a good reputation.* A smile that also said: *I'd much rather kill you now and live with the consequences than do this;* the threat was hidden behind deep dimples and the words "You can't really be surprised, can you?"

He gestured to his own frame, down the plain black T-Shirt, the silver chain disappearing under its neckline. He sported a cocky grin, when my gaze flicked up toward him again.

Dylan McCarthy Williams was, if nothing else, what my brother hated most in this world. More than strawberry ice cream ("It's a sorry excuse of a flavor, Athalia! No, I'm not debating you on this."). More than Eric (my first boyfriend). More than our dead parents (for... dying?).

There were a few noteworthy reasons (and a couple of hundred more).

1. McCarthy stole his jersey number.
2. McCarthy stole his spot as team captain.
3. McCarthy stole his girlfriend (Paula), three days after they had broken up.

Of course, it was pure coincidence McCarthy had ended up with the number seven on his jersey. In the end, their bickering had cost both of them their chance at captaining the HBU soccer team, though Henry Parker Pressley was of the firm belief that McCarthy had been out to get him, from the moment he'd laid eyes on him, three years ago. I didn't know why, and I didn't particularly care, either. All that mattered was that I stood in solidarity with him—which put McCarthy high up on my own metaphorical hit list, for the mere fact he was #1 on Henry's.

There wasn't much history between McCarthy and me. Although my brother didn't care about much regarding my life, he'd obviously made sure of that. What I knew of him, though—the arrogance, the sarcasm, the general attitude—it seemed he'd done me a solid. One that didn't change anything about the fact I was still sitting across from McCarthy now.

While I usually didn't mind facing conflict head-on, the thought of asking Professor Shaw for a different tutor was appealing now. His office was just next door. I could knock, apologize (for... failing his class?) and promise to get to a passing grade by the end of the semester, all by myself.

And with anyone else, that might've worked, but Shaw hated me enough as it was. Plus, what's to say I'd actually manage to pass by myself? The odds were stacked against me.

I shook my head with a sigh, eyes scanning the room. Honestly, whoever had chosen it couldn't have found a smaller one if they'd tried *really, really hard*. Compared to the vast dining halls of Hall Beck University (in which I'd eaten a total of four times), the massive library on the main campus (that I'd been forced into more often than I would've liked) and lecture halls, with hundreds of seats (that still ended up completely packed whenever I'd get there, two minutes before a lecture began); this was a broom closet. Crammed into it a wooden desk full of loose papers, a bookshelf filled with folders of various colors, and then a man too large for the chair he sat in.

Behind McCarthy, a window looked out onto one of the courtyards of the university, showing the mild fall weather of the east coast. Dust collected in the corners of the glass. The space was too small, too packed for this to end well.

"What makes you think this is a good idea?"

"It's not." McCarthy shrugged, technically agreeing with me.

The thought of the both of us agreeing on *anything*—even if it was the mere fact that we wouldn't get along—struck me as odd.

Odd enough, that I must've made a face, because he went on to say, "Poor Princess Pressley." A note of amusement lingered within his otherwise dismissive tone. His head tilted slightly. "Can't believe someone wouldn't be thrilled to spend time with her."

My last attempt at civility, was letting that comment slide. By now, I'd been called far worse than 'princess'. I watched him silently scan through the few notes I'd collected in the first weeks of the semester and hoped he could feel my glare, even if he wasn't looking at me.

"Jesus Christ." His silence had been far too short. "How did you pass Statistics I like this?"

I didn't need confirmation to know he'd found the midterm, that had gotten me into this predicament in the first place. The way his lip curled upward said enough, but for emphasis, he turned the pages and huffed, "A D? *Really?*", in the worst possible way he could.

My nose twitched, before I deadpanned a "Fuck you." McCarthy just snickered in amusement.

The truth, though? Blind as a bat, and with his long, greasy hair hanging into his face at every given opportunity, how would Professor Shaw have noticed little old me last year—with my phone under the table—snapping photos of the questions and sending them to someone who *did* know the answers? Exactly.

My brother, uptight and smart enough for the both of us, would probably call that cheating. I'd call it being resourceful.

The problem: my performance in the last class and my final, acceptable grade, didn't correlate. *Hah, statistics*. And though Shaw hadn't had any proof of my cheating last semester, he sure had been determined to get it, this time around. Hence the seating chart he'd introduced in our first lecture of Statistics II, and why I was seated in the front row. It forced me to take my midterm fair and square, and, well, here we were.

With a D.

McCarthy snorted with amusement, as if he'd heard my inner monologue and knew my answer to his question, even before it formed on my tongue. "Of course." He nodded knowingly. He rolled his eyes. "When do the Pressleys not throw Daddy's money at their problems?"

"It's Mommy's, actually." I smiled innocently, watching him place my notes on the desk between us, turned, so we could see them from either side. "And clearly," I continued, "this is me not throwing it at my problems, or you'd have noticed by now."

"That's funny." He didn't laugh.

And after he didn't laugh, he cleared his throat like we were really doing this. Like he would really teach me 'A-B tests' and 'bandit algorithms'. And like he really expected me to get it.

I honestly had believed him to be as opposed to this as I was. To figuratively scream and fight, until Shaw would let him out of it, throw a tantrum if he had to. As long as we wouldn't be sitting here by the end of it...

"Why would you want to torture us like this?" I hoped my words would divert us from the path toward hypotheses and variables. "You're out of your mind if you think—"

"It's my job, Pressley," he said, face straight, expression unreadable for a second. Then, the right corner of his lip twisted, just the tiniest bit, in a cruel, yet irritably intriguing way. "You



know,” he teased. “That thing where you show up, do what you’re told, and get money for it at the end of the month? With your background, I don’t know if you’re familiar—”

“Wait.” I was just beginning to get it. “You’re TA’ing for Shaw?” I shook my head a little, confusion lingering in my expression. “Why?” I basically spat the word.

“Why not?”

“You don’t need the money,” I assessed, green eyes narrowing slightly. Very quickly, they flicked to the watch around his wrist (that had probably cost as much as the pair of Miu Miu’s in my closet). “You definitely don’t need the money.”

“And yet here I am.”

*And yet here he was.*

So, on I went. “What happened to the cute senior from last year? I liked him.” I faked a pout.

“Believe it or not—he *graduated*.”

“And you just had to be the one to replace him?” The smug smile on my lips was a complete lie. A front that kept the realization from manifesting on my face. My chances of getting another tutor had been slim before, but knowing McCarthy was TA’ing for Shaw had just reduced them to zero, and I was dying inside.

There was no way he’d bother assigning me another tutor, when he had McCarthy—his *TA* to do it. “No one else up to the task?”

“They dodged a bullet.” He was beginning to get annoyed. I could feel it. In the way he impatiently drummed his fingers on the wooden desk and the way he fumbled with the papers between us, to steer my attention onto them. “Now, if you don’t mind—”

“*Man*,” I sighed with a victorious smile, dragging the word

out. I couldn't help it. I leaned back into the uncomfortable chair, and his exasperated groan almost made me laugh. "TA'ing for Shaw, huh? Must be the worst." Our eyes stayed connected; the bags under his told me he couldn't have slept more than a few hours last night. Still, somehow he looked more put together than I would, after a full night's rest. "Do you get in trouble if you can't get the job done?"

He leaned his forearms onto the desk. His dark hair fell into his face, and the glimpse of a smile played on his lips—not an amused or happy one. Challenging. "That depends," he said softly. "Will you get in trouble if you fail his class?"

"What's his punishment? Do you get your pay cut? Overtime?" I ignored his words. "Or do you just get fired?" I swallowed hard; smile still on my lips when my head tilted. "Could I get you fired, McCarthy?"

I could see the gears in his head turning, the corner of his mouth twitching, and his Adam's apple bobbing before he answered. "Doesn't matter." Crossing his arms in front of his chest, he shrugged as he leaned back into his chair. "I always get the job done."

Then he sighed, and I shifted in my seat, uncrossing my legs. "And just so you know," he began once more, gaze falling to my right. "That door connects to Shaw's office." He nodded toward it. "In case you want to make sure he can hear your insults, speak up just a little more next time." He huffed in light amusement. "You can guess how thin these walls are."

I tried to prevent the panic currently seeping through every fiber of my being from showing on my face, as best as I could. Quickly shifted my eyes from the *alleged* connecting door. To distract him, I cleared my throat, leaned forward, and flipped through my own notes.

“Right,” I exclaimed, and I could tell how pleased he was. “You were saying? About...” My voice trailed off, reading the half-hearted notes I took in the last lecture. “About ‘two-sample comparison’?” My eyes batted open to find the victorious smile I’d expected from him, and I almost regretted caving.

Though, if there was one thing worse than McCarthy’s presence, it was the wrath of a certain Professor Simon Shaw.

My brother would understand.

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