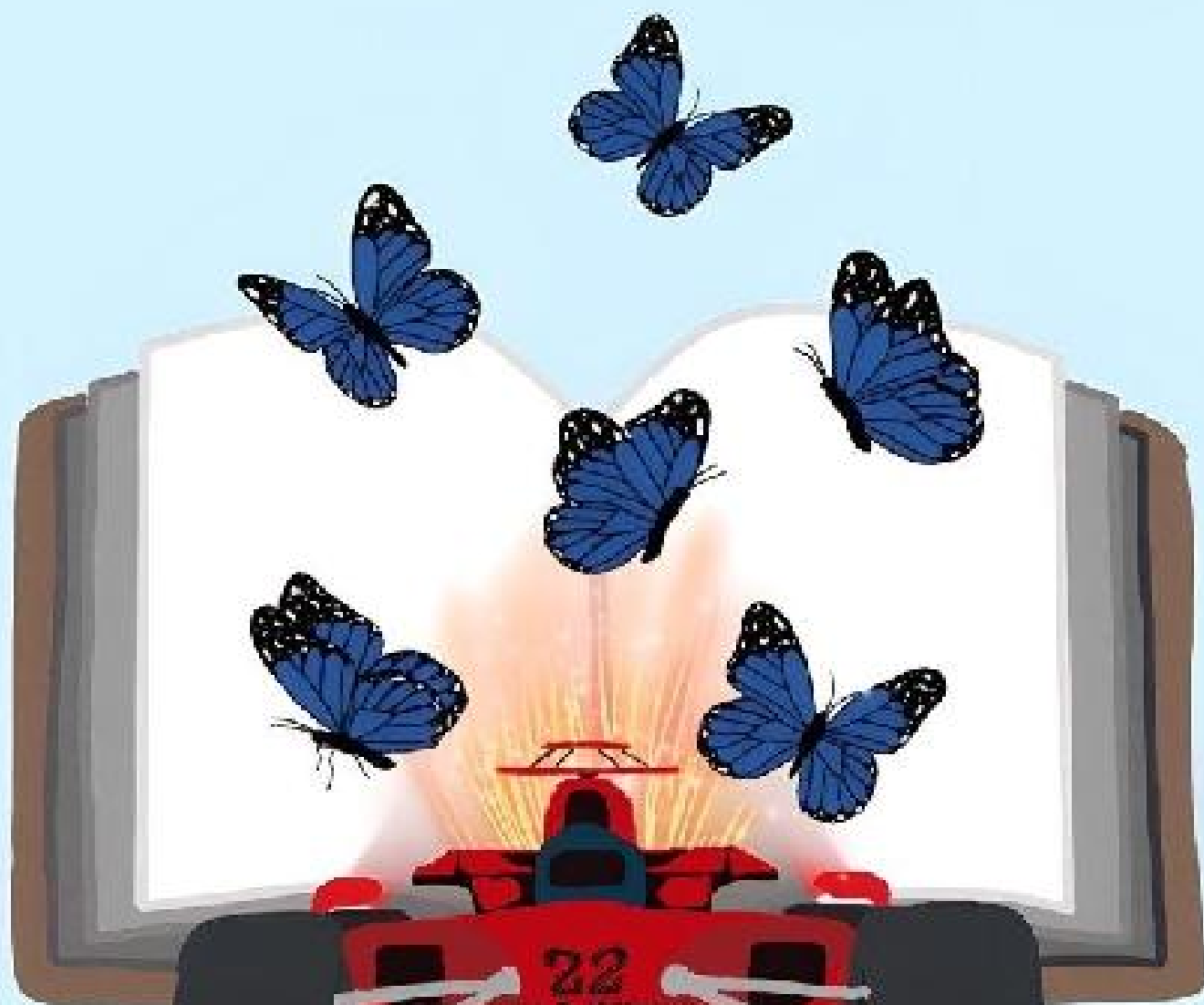


PITLANE SERIES #1

Mark Revealed



HANNAH ALLEN

Unrevealed

Hannah Allen

Pitlane Series book one

Cases

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For S.

Cheers to you and your failed situationships.

And this also goes out to the anxious girlies,
Those who are scared they might be invisible.

I see you, and I am so proud.

Keep shining brighter than the whole sky!

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Author's note:

Hello dear readers,

The story is in dual POV views of both of the main characters and the story is also written in British English to stay true to the characters.

-Hannah

Playlist



| | |
|-------------------------------------|------|
| Bigger than the whole sky – TS | 3:38 |
| The Archer - Taylor Swift | 3:31 |
| Gorgeous - Taylor Swift | 3:29 |
| It's better with you - Alice Shone | 3:00 |
| Dangerously - Charlie Puth | 3:18 |
| 22 – Taylor Swift(Taylor's version) | 3:50 |
| Birthday Cake – Dylan Conrique | 3:25 |
| Butterflies (Acoustic)–Abe Parker | 3:19 |
| That way - Tate McRae | 2:53 |
| I hope you're proud – Rachel Grae | 3:08 |
| This Love (TV) – Taylor Swift | 3:55 |
| Company – Justin Bieber | 3:27 |
| Fine Line – Harry Styles | 6:17 |
| Wildest Dreams – Taylor Swift | 3:40 |
| Can we dance – The Vamps | 3:11 |
| Rewrite the stars – | |
| James Arthur & Anne-Marie | 3:38 |



Age 7

“Mama! Mama!”

“Liam, please no shouting. Mama isn’t feeling well.” Papa tells me as I am running towards her room. I start to tiptoe to her bedroom slowly. Papa told me she was back from her little adventure. Mama has been gone for a long time and I have missed her. Every time I ask Papa why Mama is always away; he says she has important business to do.

“Mama,” I whisper as I enter the room. She is lying there, her eyes smiling at me as she calls me to her.

“Liam.” She says my name as I sit down on the bed next to her.

Mama is so beautiful. She says beauty is in butterflies so I believe she is just like one.

“How was karting yesterday?”

“It was awesome,” I whisper to her, scared that Papa will come in to tell me to be quiet again.

“You don’t have to be quiet. I can perfectly hear you when you speak normally.”

“It was awesome!” I shout out in excitement, throwing my hands in the air. “Marco and I were allowed to race and I won!”

“That’s my boy!” she ruffles my hair, laughing at me as I continue the story of how I won against my friend Marco. He is a year younger than me, but that doesn’t matter to me. I am still better than him. “Mama, I will become a World Champion one day!”

“Are you?” she laughs at me with a happy smile.

“Yes, with those little red cars, you always cheer for. I will win in those!”

“And I will be cheering you on as you do.”

“You and Papa will be down there waiting for me while I hold up that big, big trophy!”

“Is that how you want it to be?”

“Yes! You, Papa, and Sofia are the only people I want there. And then we will celebrate with a cake after I win that big, big trophy.”

“Oh really, no friends?”

“Nope, just my family.”

“And your girlfriend.” Oh no. Mama knows about her?

“She isn’t family.”

“She isn’t?”

I shake my head. My girlfriend doesn’t count as family, right? Maybe in the future but for now, Mama, Papa, and Sofia are my only family.

I watch as Mama smiles at me and coughs. Really badly. I am scared. What if she is heavily sick?

Will she leave me?

“Mama?”

“Yes, my little champion?”

“Will you be there when I win with the little red cars that you always cheer for?”

She smiles at me. “Always, my boy. Remember...” She takes my small hand into hers. “I am always there with you. In your heart.” And points at my chest to where she believes my heart is.

“Mama, that’s the right side, the heart is always on the left.” She laughs again.

“Sorry, Liam. Mama has right and left problems. But please remember that, okay.” I see a small tear fall from her eye, and she wipes it away.

Why is Mama crying?

“Mama, are you okay?”

“Don’t worry about me.”

“But I am worried.”

“I am okay, my boy. Mama is okay.”

“Okay.” I lean into her and Mama wraps her arms around me. I love Mama’s hugs. They are always so warm.

“I promise to always look for you when I win, Mama.”

I will keep my promise to Mama. I will win and she will be there as I look for her.

She just told me she will always be here.

She wouldn’t lie to me.



Age 15

“Liam!” I hear Mum shout at me in her delicate tone as I stride toward her, coming with exciting news for her and the whole family.

“How was racing?”

“Awesome, I have huge news to share.”

“Tell me more.” I sit down next to her on the bed in the hospital. Mum was diagnosed with cancer a few years ago. She is in critical condition. I try my best not to waste all of my time racing to be there more for Mum.

“I recently got a contract in Formula Four Italy for the next season!” I tell her the exciting news, seeing the joy in her eyes.

“You did? Oh my god, my boy did it!” she kissed the top of my head, laughing and crying as I told her the news.

I turned my head to the door as I heard a knock. “Did you tell her?” My dad peaks through the door with his head.

“Our boy is going to Formula Four!” She shouts in excitement. A second later Sofia comes running in, with her exciting news.

“Mama. I got an agent!”

“A what? Oh my god.” She kisses Sofia’s head, turning to look at Dad. “Luca our kids are growing up.”

“I know.” He laughs at her enthusiasm, places the flowers he brought in a vas, and gives her a small kiss on the cheek.

“Mama, I am going to model!”

“I know my sweet angel. And I am so proud of you!”

Sofia has always dreamed of modelling as I have dreamed of becoming a racing driver. Our parents never held us back from our dreams. Even if Papa had to work over hours to pay for my racing, they never disappointed or forced us to do something else. And with Sofia’s huge contract, it will be easier for him to afford it all now that he doesn’t have to worry about paying for her modelling classes. And my contract gives me the benefit of more sponsors and a huge paycheck. I will become rich.

“And you all are invited to watch me walk on the runway as a supermodel!”

“Me too?” Dad asks Sofia as they had gotten into a small fight earlier.

“Yes. Even if I don’t like you at the moment. You are my family.”

“Mum will be there too?” I ask, not thinking first that Sofia couldn’t handle Mum not being there. She knows Mum is sick, but not that it’s cancer. Dad said to better not tell her because she wouldn’t be able to live through it.

Mum will get better. That’s what the doctor told us.

I guess a few months after the announcement of my contract, the news changed drastically.

Mum didn’t make it.

Cancer took her away from me.

I was devastated when I found Sofia crying in her room and felt even worse when I had to hold her in my arms so that she had someone to cry to.

I only cried twice.

When I held her lifeless hand as she told me the last ‘I love you’.

And at her funeral.

But after that, I told myself I had to be strong for all of us.

For Sofia.

For Dad.

And for myself.



I inhale deeply, welcoming the smell of rubber and engine exhaust. I pull down the visor on my helmet and my gloved hands grip the Aravis Formula 1 steering wheel.

It is the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix and after yesterday's qualification got me to the first place-grid spot aka Pole position, I am confident enough to say that I can win the championship this year. It is in my hands. Let us just see if I can reach it.

Do not get too confident, Liam. You will lose it before you know it.

Slowly, one by one, the red lights illuminate above me, making the adrenaline in my body rise and my grip tighten on the wheel. I hear the silence of the fans as they wait for the race to start.

I try to push away the voice in my head. Focusing on the track.

You can do it, Liam. Just be careful in corner six.

I keep reminding myself. That forsaken corner.

The lights shut off, signaling the race to start. I press against the throttle and my car rushes down the straight line of the track, before making it to the first turn.

I hear the tires of the other cars squeaking behind me and at this moment it is just me and the road. If I want to win, I must focus on me, myself, and I. Like always. I am my main priority.

I make it to the next turn before I hear the team's principal's voice over the radio telling me to be careful on turn six. After last year's disaster on that turn, I made sure to be careful.

"I'm just letting you know, Liam, that Nate Harper is 2 seconds behind you. Alongside Marco Garcia and Arden Fane. Just keep up the pace and you should be good. And be careful."

First lap down. Fifty-seven more to go. I stay defensive of my position, blocking any way Nate can get through, or anyone. That English blondie - or more like brunette since his hair got darker over the years - already has three world titles.

I love him, but someone needs to humble him and tell him to his face that he cannot win four championships in a row. And I want to be that someone.

After he beat me last year, I will go through hell to make sure he does not overtake me this time and that my engine doesn't explode.

Last year was not such a happy year for me.

The first ten laps went without a struggle, and I managed to stay in my position and even blocked Nate from overtaking my position. Adrenaline overflows in my body as I finish my eleventh lap. The screams of the fans in the background become louder and louder as the last lap comes closer and closer.

Time passes by like a fly. One second ago, Nate managed to overtake me, which now leads me to be stuck in P2. I take a risky move, pushing on the brake a few seconds later than recommended on turn six, and almost got me into a situation.

You can say I never learn.

But still, with what I risked I was unable to reach Nate. No doubt that the London boy is good, he increases his pace, driving faster and leaving me in the position I am stuck in.

“Okay, now be careful, boy. We still have forty-six laps to go, and we do not want you to get DNF’d. We still have a good chance to get you to P1 and get that championship. No need to drive like a *menace*.”

I chuckle at his advice.

We?? Seriously? I am the one driving the fucking car, not them.

I take a quick pit stop, changing the tires. When I get to the pit exit, I see Arden Fane’s car speed through. I am now in P3.

I keep driving like a *menace* and eventually overcome Arden. The adrenaline in my body spikes up as I drive through the twists and turns.

Ten more laps. The finishing laps.

If Nate takes another pit stop - which I highly doubt he will - then my chances of winning will increase.

We race through the finish line and the adrenaline starts to cool down in my body. I hear the team shout over the speaker. “We made it buddy. P2! P2! Congratulations. You did an amazing job this season.”

“Grazie amico. Grazie mille!” I tell him.

We did not manage to get a championship but at least I am now one step closer to it. Not like last year when the engine exploded halfway.

I need to stop reminding myself of that devastating moment. What happened in the past, stays in the past. Always.

I should be proud of myself. After everything that happened this season. I am proud of myself. And my mum would be too.

Next year.

I will win it for her.

I drove the car to P2 after I managed to find it in the smoke because Nate thought it would be a clever idea to do the donut.

And it was.

Weirdly, such a small thing brings so much joy.

I climb out of the car. I get out of the helmet, pull down the balaclava, and ran my hands through my hair. Sweat was dripping down my back, making the suit stick to my back like glue. Hearing the fans cheer and scream as I wave at them. I finish the last of my interview and walk down to the cooldown room.

Losing the opportunity to win the championship once again, gave me an odd feeling, the promise I'd made to Mama all those years ago weighing on my shoulders - but I knew she was proud. And damn if that didn't give me a bittersweet feeling.

On my way there I see Nate hug someone. She smiles at him, pats his shoulder, and tells him she is proud of him.

She. Is. Mesmerizing.

Like a butterfly.

And she has butterflies on her.

Blue butterfly earrings were tangling on her earlobe with a small chain connected to the tip of her ear where the letter L was.

I am guessing that she is Nate's sister. She looks a lot like him. Dirty blonde hair, and amber eyes that remind me of autumn.

And the most breathtaking smile.

I halt in my steps finding myself once again mesmerized by her beauty, as she tips her head back in laughter, the sound carefree and light.



The best part after a race is the after-effect. Meeting fans on the paddock and just talking and walking around. I like that.

Weirdly enough, it is calming and gives me enough time to think about what I did wrong.

I just should have done better. I shouldn't have done the risky moves, or I should have done more of those risky moves.

It's the time when all my thoughts gather and have a little tea party in my head.

Somehow being around people that I inspire and bring me joy, shuts the voices in my head out.

Without looking where I am going, I crash into someone.

"I am so sorry." She apologizes as we both bend down to pick up the water bottle that she dropped when we crashed.

She chuckles and I finally see her face and realize who she is.

Her smile drops a little as she points a finger at me.

"Liam, right?"

I let out a small laugh.

She knows my name.

What is wrong with me? Of course, she does.

"That's...me."

Her smile widens into a grin. I stretch out my hand for her to shake. “Nice to meet you,” I say as she gently grips my hand.

“Nate’s sister?” I question myself, not sure if I am right about my assumption.

“Thank God finally someone notices it. Everyone keeps mixing me up as his girlfriend.” She lets out an audible breath. “You can guess how awkward those conversations were.”

We laugh at the awkwardness that settles between us.

I take my time to study her. She was not much shorter, with sun-kissed legs and a petite figure. Her blonde hair reached her shoulders.

“I have never seen you around, what brings you here today?” I playfully ask her. She rolls her eyes in the same manner, hiking her purse up her shoulder. “Maybe I just felt like seeing you lose, *again*.”

I gape at her, feeling wounded.

She laughs at my expression, just as Nate’s infuriating voice calls out for her.

She turns her head and acknowledges her brother with a smile. “It was nice meeting you. Have a fun evening, *vice-champion*.” She bid me goodbye and went on her path into the McAli motorhome.

I keep staring at her back, watching her walk away. In a split moment, she looked back over her shoulder and I noticed her cheeks flush when she noticed me watching her.

She is so beautiful.

And I can see her become my addiction.



Chapter Two LAUREN

A few months before the seasons start.

When I submitted my debut novel, I didn't expect to become a bestselling author, so I clearly didn't prepare myself for situations like book signing events. I love the fact that people adore my novel and enjoy reading it. Just didn't expect that many.

"Just relax, blondie." My brother teases me.

"You are a blondie yourself, *twat*." I elbow him into his ribs.

"Language," Dad warns me, not happy with the language I used on Nate. I roll my eyes.

"Yes, Lauren." He turns to me, giving me a look of satisfaction that Dad caught me cussing. "Language."

I stare at him, gritting my teeth and just flip him off as he walks away, whistling. Dad shakes his head at me.

"And by the way, my hair is mostly brown, so I don't really count as a blondie," Nate calls over his shoulder.

"Yeah, what genes do you have?" I call back with raised eyebrows.

“Those are mine.” Dad points out, smiling proudly.

I press my lips, trying not to laugh. “Have fun with baldness at forty, Nate,” I tell him, hoping deeply that Dad didn’t hear me.

“Young Lady,” Dad warns and Nate lets out an audible laugh at the same time.

“It’s kind of true Dad,” Nate tells him.

Dad glares at him, “Have fun with Baldness in ten years Nate.”

I laugh at them as they try to keep my mind occupied by making me laugh.

I hate crowds of people. That’s why I thought life as an author would be great for me.

What a joke.

“I get it, honey. Just don’t let your anxiety get the best of you and you will see, you will have the time of your life on the stand.” He soothes my back, reminding me with no words that this is what I signed up for.

Thanks for the words of encouragement, Dad.

“Okay, blondie.” Nate comes back to the main entrance where we were standing as I am too nervous to step in. Good thing I came here twenty minutes early.

I shoot him a glare, the nickname *blondie* getting on my nerves. He holds up his hands in mock defense, smiling at my reaction. For a grump, he is way too happy-ish. Might be because he recently won his fourth championship and is still on cloud nine.

I am happy for him but his smile is scaring me.

“I think it’s time you move your arse in there.”

“You think?” I question him.

“You sound sarcastic.” *Because I am.* I just roll my eyes at him, saying fuck you to anxiety and the sensation of being

caged that my heart was trapped in, begging to be let out. The closer I step towards the entrance, the more I feel myself growing uncomfortable in my own skin, wanting to run away as fast as possible. I swing my backpack over my shoulder, hold my head up high, and make my entrance into the hall.

I look around, trying to find the stand with the number F21 where all of the copies of my books were already laid out and waiting to be given away to the amazing readers.

All these copies of my books. Never seen that many at once.

Hiding those from my mum. She is expecting I will give her a copy of my book when I swore to myself that I would never give my mum anything to read that I wrote because if she found out I wrote those scenes in my books, she would ground me for life and never look me in the eyes again.

The same goes for Dad.

And Nate.

And basically, everyone in my family.

They know I wrote the book but they won't read it, at least not until I give them the 'okay'.

Which they promised to keep. We are very big on promises. They mean a huge deal to us.

"When will we be able to read this masterpiece of yours, sis?"

I flash him a sarcastic smile. "Soon enough."

In my own words, it means *never*.

"Yeah, yeah."

"Look at all these books." My mum comments with a smile and pride written all over her face. She huffs in relief and walks around the table to squeeze me in her traditional hugs. They are always filled with so much love and warmth, I love the hugs. And mum, of course.

“Mum, please don’t get all emotional,” I mumble as I feel my cheek pressed against hers. She squeezes me one last time before she lets go and gives me a small kiss on my cheek and I notice a small tear rolling down her face.

“Mama,” I chuckle, wiping the tear down before it reaches the end of its journey down her face and onto her beautiful blouse. “Please don’t cry.”

“My babies are all grown up.” She acknowledges, fixing my hair and combing lightly through it with her fingers.

I smile at her comment. “Tell that to Nate, he sometimes still acts like a ten-year-old.”

“What the hell?!”

“Love you too.” I blow him a kiss, loving the fact that I can get on his nerves so easily.

“Okay, I think we are all going to leave now.” He pulls Mum away from me. “Call us if you need anything, we will be at Bob’s diner nearby.”

“You are going to Bob’s? Without me?” Slightly offended by the fact that they were going without me.

“Ha-Ha sucks to be you.”

“Hold your tongue, Nate.” I curse at Nate.

“No need to be rude to your sister Nate,” Dad warns him.

“I am just saying.”

“Just don’t.”

He rolls his eyes and walks off. “Have fun and call us,” Mum shouts after me as they walk away, leaving me alone, feeling like I will drown in my own anxiety slowly and surely.



I smile at a girl, watching her eyes spark as I write a special message in her book, my hand slowly cramping up as I had already signed over eighty copies.

If my hand doesn't fall off by the end of the night, then I can say I am surprised.

"Can I just ask you one thing?"

"Go ahead." I look up at her, giving her all my attention.

"Can you sign my arm; I want to get it tattooed."

"Woah, you do know you are trusting me with your life with that request, do you not?"

She holds her hands closer, signaling me to sign it.

Oh, she meant it.

I laugh at her request, highly concentrating on signing her arm, feeling myself sweating. I am trying to make sure that I don't mess up because that tattoo will obviously be permanent.

She strolls off, happily jumping up and down the way to her friend, showing off her soon-to-be permanent tattoo.

The feeling of pride fills me.

People love me.

Not for Nate.

Me.

If I said that to my college self, where everyone only cared about Nate, she would laugh in my face and call me a loser.

I am still a loser, but now I am also an author. That's all that matters.

I packed up the rest of my stuff as the evening ended, dialing Mum as soon as I finished packing up to come and pick me up.

Time for Austria.

I have another book signing event there at this bookstore Thalia.

Who knew I would be traveling for this job? I expected to chill at home all day and night, cramped up in my cozy blanket with a bag of crisps and a few cups of coffee, writing my books.

I love coffee, but not black coffee. That 'drink' just makes me want to throw up.

How can people enjoy a bitter liquid and call it *delicious*?

Respectfully, go away.



Chapter Three LAUREN

I watch the cars speed through. The smell of rubber and engine hit my nose, causing me to frown. God, I hate that smell.

But who cares for the smell and noise if you get to watch twenty cars drive around weird circuits.

I promise I love Formula One.

Everybody does.

And the view from the box is way more interesting than I thought it would be, even though the hot weather is not helping. I am sweating my tits off, and I have no idea how the drivers survive that but *respect*.

When I first visited the paddock, it was last year in Abu Dhabi when my brother Nate won his fourth championship title.

Proud sister moment.

And to say that the paddock is huge is an understatement. I got lost twice and it was a fun time trying to find my way back to the McAli motorhome. And saying the paddock is boring and small is like saying Taylor Swift songs are bad.

Both of those things do not exist.

Taylor at the top, *always*.

But I have to say that my brother's team is one heck of a team. Having to put up with him for nine months a year and survive.

I have no idea how I survived but I did.

When it comes to Formula one people expect money. We did not exactly come from money. My parents worked their arses off for Nate to be here where he is.

Racing for one of the most accomplished teams on the grid is not given. And he worked his arse off. He wanted to make the money that Mum and Dad spent on him worth it.

For the time being, they tried to help me navigate into the author's world.

But for the last couple of months. I have been struggling. Normally I am a creative person, producing all kinds of scenarios and ideas in my head. I might add that not all of them are very...

You know, *Holy*.

The struggle started as soon as I got out into the world and *boom*.

I had no idea what to do with my major. I know I wanted to inspire people with my stories and bring their standards for love up but *how* is a good question.

I had the idea of traveling. Solo, of course, but my idiotic brother produced the idea, at dinner, that I shouldn't be left traveling alone.

Okay. He did not say it like that. I am overdoing it.

My dear brother had the idea that I travel with him, during the whole season.

I was so skeptical about this idea.

The first reason is that even if I wanted to, Nate would be a pain in my arse.

An overprotective brother sounds nice until you have one. Annoying. Do not wish for an overprotective brother.

Second, I don't have a friend who I can spend my time with while Nate is doing his stuff.

It can get boring. Who am I kidding? The paddock is huge. I could run tracks around it. five kilometres is not an ideal running length, but I can make it work.

Nonetheless, I am stupid enough that I agreed to this plan.

I needed some time off. As much as I love London, seeing the same city over and over again can get boring.

It was the same in Princeton. But I had to endure it. And if I have the chance to annoy my brother, I should take it.

So here I am, in Bahrain with my brother watching as he crosses the finish line in the first place. The cheering in the motorhome got loud and I watched his team climb over the fence and scream in excitement. One win for the championships is won.

I am proud of how far he has gotten in the last eight years. He was scared when he first joined Formula One. But with time and dedication, he made it.

I could barely understand what Nate was babbling to me as he came over to hug the team and me, of course.

“Speak louder, please.”

“Wasn't such a bad idea to listen to me for once huh?” He tells me – correction - shouts in my ear, almost damaging my eardrums.

“Wasn't such a bad idea to listen to me for once huh?” I mock him, doing some weird motions with my hands. I have no idea what I am trying to do. “We'll see about that at the end of the season.”

He pushes down my cap, covering my eyes and he smiles and runs off to do some interviews.

I correct the cap on my head and watch ahead, seeing him in his element, smiling as he answers questions. We don't get a lot of those smiles because of his grumpy attitude.

He is the worst.

Nate has never been the relationship kind of person or smiley person.

He has always been anti-romantic and anti-emotions. Plus, anti-love. Anti-anything-human.

The race weekends feel like the entire world is there. It can get loud before, during, and after the race.

I like to call myself the invisible Lauren when it comes to visiting for a Grand Prix.

World-known author yet still invisible.

It comes with a lot of benefits to being invisible. I can breeze through without any drama and bullshit following me around. But it also has its cons.

But I am not that invisible. If I wanted to remain that way, I should have chosen a different brother and a different career.

Oh, how fun life is.

But sarcasm aside. I love my brother. The pain in my arse and the problem to all my problems.



I should have said no. Not only is Nate dragging me to races all weekends long, but also to the after-parties.

I have a reputation to keep up, dude. *Aka* the reputation where I am not involved in drama, but still know everything about everyone. (I don't)

But for the sake of the world and my head, I decided to leave the arguments behind and just attend one party. What's the worst that can happen?

Uhm, maybe I will finally find a friend who is also traveling.

Just a suggestion.

But my outfit choice of mine was a little concerning when I enter the club. They were all dressed casually like their white button-up shirt wouldn't have a wine stain by the end of the night.

Guys were mostly dressed in white button-ups and suit jeans or khaki or blue jeans.

Do they have a dress code?

And the girls were here with their finest cocktail dresses. They do look good.

And I - the total 'party terrorist' according to everyone I know - am here with blue denim jeans shorts and a white crop top with a fishnet kind of design sweater over it. Casual - sort of - and good enough for a party. And to pair it up, I wore my favorite white Converse.

Comfort over style. My motto in life.

I take a deep breath as I walk into the club, the smell of alcohol and expensive colognes permeating the air, making it almost impossible to breathe. You can say the people here are suffocating in the un-humid air.

"I'll be in the VIP section. Join me or enjoy the party." He gives me an option that I decline before he runs off, giving me no chance to rethink my decision.

Arsehole.

I make my way to the bar and get myself a drink. If I want to survive the night, alcohol is the solution.

It will help me stay sane. Even if it's not something that should help me feel sane but whatever.

I look around the club, seeing a couple making out in the corners and some other people getting drunk. Are my eyes deceiving me or did I just see someone do drugs?

Stay away from drugs, kids. Otherwise, you'll learn it the hard way.

I look down at my drink, fidget with my straw, swirling it around in the glass. I see a small writing on my napkin underneath my glass. I grab the napkin and see a note written inside it.

Alongside a number. I look forward, seeing the bartender clean glasses and smirk as he watches me.

Ew.

I crumble up the napkin and throw it into the bar, not caring how I leave a small mess behind.

He should be working and not asking girls out who might be interested in sucking his dick. Because I am not.

He looks at me with a disappointed look. I raised an eyebrow at him and returned to minding my business.

A girl appears next to me. She leans against the counter and orders her drinks.

"I'll take two vodka shots. Add them to my tab." She sat down on the chair as the bartender got to work, getting her shots ready. She looks around like she is looking for someone. She sees me staring at me. I look away.

I didn't even realize I was staring at her. She let out a small laugh at me.

"Make those four."

She comes closer to me and sits down on the empty chair.

“I’m Alex,” she stretches her hand out for me to take. I shake her hand, still feeling a little awkward about my ‘starting contest.’

“I’m Lauren.”

“Pretty name.” She compliments me. I smile at her. I point to the drinks that arrived.

“You didn’t have to get me those. I am still occupied with mine.” I shake my glass, the ice cubes hitting against the glass, making a noise.

“Please, princess. I saw what happened with the bartender.” She confesses as she hands me two of the shots and lays them in front of me. I raised my eyebrow at her, confused and surprised when she saw that happen. “I’m here to hype you up and maybe even help you find someone who has the guts to talk to you, instead of leaving a letter.” I smile at her.

I just made a friend. Let’s hope that she is traveling and not living here.

She is pretty. Long chocolate brown hair that went down to her waist, she pinned it back and curled it all over. She is wearing a long-sleeved black mini dress that compliments her tanned skin tone with matching black platforms that make her seem taller than she is.

“You look like you are on a mission or something.”

“If you call ignoring my ex-boyfriend a mission then yes. He has been a pain in my arse.” She lets out an annoyed sound and grabs her phone from her purse. “Just look at the texts he has been spamming me with.”

Psycho ex (12:02 am):

Baby, I love you.

I’m sorry.

I didn’t mean to cheat.

Please, baby. Give me another chance.

Juck, the nickname *baby* gives me the ick.

Blah, blah bloody blah. The texts kept going and going and going and going. She never stops scrolling. Those texts are never-ending.

“Okay, let’s just forget about him and just get on with your mission.” She packs her phone back in her purse and places it on the counter. She raises a shot glass and raises an eyebrow at me as she is waiting for me. I take a glass click it to hers and chug it down. The alcohol burns my throat. Giving a burning sensation and a comforting feeling all at the same time.

“Okay, okay. The first one was to cheer you up. And now cheers to ignoring my ex-boyfriend and having some fun since he was the weirdest person I had ever met and never let me go out.” She finished her speech and down was the second and hopefully last shot.

“Like, never?”

“Nope, he was a huge cunt, who acted like a stalker.” She grabs her purse and leaves the bar like she didn’t just drown herself in two vodka shots. “Okay.” She says aloud as she gets off her seat. “Let’s get to the VIP section.” She is allowed into the VIP room?! Now I am curious about what role she plays.

“Before you ask any questions, I work for the Aravis racing team in public relations, towards a driver and have been a die-hard Formula One fan since the ripe age of seven.” She answered my question before I had even the chance to think about what I would ask.

“How did you know I was even going to ask??”

She flashes me a wicked smile.

Oh my god. She can read minds. No, that is a stupid theory. But maybe I am right.

You never know.

We entered the section soon after the security guard approached us and oh my lord.

The club outside alone was packed.

And when people say VIP, they mean only special people or more like rich people will be there.

All those two hundred people - just a hard guess - must be smoking rich because it was packed with drunk people and waiters serving the already drunk enough rich bastards with even more champagne than they could take.

It's all for the money.

They don't care if you end up puking your guts out by the end of the night. As long as they get their tip, they are satisfied.

And now is my moment to de-shine. One with the invisible cloak and just stay in my own space where I like it.

Wrong.

"Harper!" I hear someone shout as they lay across the sofa. He had blond hair and the most defined jawline I have ever seen.

Oh, my lord.

Why do Formula One drivers have to be so...magnifying??

And gorgeous.

I hate it.

"Seems like some already have their eyes out for you. Worst of all, your brother's rival *slash* enemy."

I widened my eyes at her as she told me that piece of information.

I already know how he is.

Arden Fane. Three-time world champion and the manwhore of the grid.

Not going for him. It's not the fact that he is a player that makes me say no, it's the fact that he is currently out of the world – or he is being his usual asshole self, and yeah...

Yet I am stupid and follow Alex who pushes his legs off the sofa.

He curses under his breath.

“This isn't your place to crash. It's girls' time, move the fuck away.”

“And you are who, my mum?”

“I might as well be because someone needs to teach you discipline.” She curses at him. He mocks her in a high-pitched voice before he gets a smack at the back of his head by Alex.

I laugh at them. “You two are friendly with one another.”

“He is an asshole. Don't bother becoming his friend.” he leans in closer and covers her mouth as she whispers in my ear. “He fucks friendships. Literally.”

I don't need a dictionary to know what that means.

“Okay let's talk.” She says as soon as we sit down.

“About...what?” I ask her, confused.

“Do you think I should just ignore that he cheated on me, or is revenge better served sweetly?”

“It depends.” I look at her with a terrified look. “What is your plan?”

“Total his car.”

I choke on the drink that I dragged with me from the bar. “Please tell me this is a joke.”

“Oh, don't worry darling.” She plays it off. I let out a breath of relief. “I have a few tricks up my sleeves to make it look like an accident.”

I press my lips into a thin line, not sure what to say.

“Never mind. I'll come up with something else.”

“Or you can just leave him be?”

She taps my cheek twice in a sarcastic way. “Oh, honey. I once had another ex who cheated and as revenge, I asked the girl out on the same night he had a date with her. He was left hanging. Poor bastard, I suppose.”

Spawn of Satan. That is official.

And one thing I should remember is never to cheat on Alex. *Roger that, brain.*

Not that I could date her, she is way out of my league. But I would if I could.

“As I was saying,” she continues.

She nods her head to Arden who is now sitting in front of us on the single-seat sofa. “Arden Fane. your brother’s rival and enemy.”

“Wait, how do you know Nate is my brother?”

“First, the looks. Second, I know your name and face thanks to your novel.”

“You read my novel?”

“Of course, I have. I love good porn.” She winks at me.

This is the first time someone who is ‘friendly’ with my brother knows me because of my novel and not because I am his sister. It gives me a sense of pride and accomplishment.

“Moving on, angel. Stay away from Arden unless you want to lose your ability to walk and your sanity.”

“How would you know?”

“Rumours?” she answers in an innocent tone.

She points towards the Spaniard at the tennis table. “Marco Garcia. Formula Two rookie champion and his first year in Formula One. Impressive driver and driver for McAli. Alongside your brother.”

Her finger travels along to the person opposite Marco, competing in a tennis battle with him.

“Liam,” I whisper. I met him in Abu Dhabi.

He was the only one to know that I was not Nate’s girlfriend.

The conversations I had with people who thought I was, were awkward.

“Yes. Do you know him?” she stares at me, excited to know how I know him.

“Just met him last year. Nothing more.” Lie. I knew so much more than I am admitting.

“Aravis Formula One driver, the golden boy on the grid and one of the most impressive drivers.” knew that.

“Won the Formula Three and Two championships in his rookie years and won the sixth race in his rookie year in Formula One with the pole position.”

Surprisingly, I knew those two.

Call me a stalker or obsessed but I call it crush-at-first sight.

Who wouldn’t fall for him?

Perfect face, perfect body.

Ocean blue eyes.

And the sweetest person on social media.

To sum up Alex’s speech: he lost his mother at the age of fifteen due to cancer and still managed to take part in racing and won the race in Formula Four in Imola - Italy.

“I don’t think I need to introduce you to your brother, right?”

“No, but I can introduce you to him,” I suggest.

“I’d rather not but thank you for the suggestion. If you want to know more about the drivers on the grid. Hit me up. I know everything. Even about your brother.” She holds out her hand, signaling me to give her my phone. “Sadly,” she mumbles under her breath. I unlock my phone and hand it over

to her. She types in her phone number and saves herself as “chick I got alcohol from.” I laugh at her.

“Since we are both traveling, we might as well be friends and hang out when I am not working.”

Ha. I just made a friend, while traveling, which means I will not rot in the hotel, waiting for Nate.



Chapter Four
LAUREN

Arden tried flirting with me.

I walk out of the private VIP room without saying another word to him.

No buddy. I am immune to the F1 Charm the drivers have.

Probably.

Most definitely.

I scan the room for my brother. It is almost three AM and most people have already left. The only ones here were the bartenders, cleaning up the bar, and some other people.

No signs of my brother. I lost sight of him and ended up in a deep talk with Alex about how many guys and gals she shagged. The weirdest conversation I have ever had. But kind of interesting.

My eyes wander around the empty room.

Nope. No Nate.

Only Liam.

Wait, wasn't he just in the room with me?

He takes his head out of the ice bath he had it in, gasping for air.

I walk over to him. “What the hell are you doing?” I scold him, laughing in between the sentence.

He got his head out of the bowl and went to a second dive before I came over.

He gets his head out of the bowl and catches deep breaths before opening his eyes to look at me. “Hey there, Butterfly. Didn’t see you coming.”

Butterfly? Interesting nickname.

I stare at him in utter confusion. What did this help with?

Before I can ask a question, he groans in frustration and dips his face back into the bowl. I stare at him confused and just wait for him to finish his business or whatever that is.

“Okay, what the hell are you doing?” I asked him as soon as he was back to earth with his mind. This- whatever it was needs an explanation.

“This is something I saw on the internet the other day.” He states.

“For what?” I ask him, curious, and sit down on the stool next to him. “To summon your non-existing brain?”

Mic Drop.

I’m just kidding.

This might have been the worst thing I have ever said.

He lets out a laugh as he dries his face with a handcloth that the bartender gave him.

His golden-brown hair is damp from the water and droplets are running down his face, along his sharp jawline.

Why is he so *gorgeous*?

I scream to myself in my head.

Let’s not let the intrusive thoughts get out, shall we?

He has a beard that is closely trimmed to his face and ocean-blue eyes.

My worst weakness.

The sight of him made a weird feeling appear in my lower stomach. *Butterflies*.

He drops the cloth on the table and turns to me, so we are face to face.

God no.

He has strong hands with a ring on his index and a little finger. I also noticed that he had a lot of bracelets on.

Fashion icon, nonetheless. Must have his perks of having a fashion designer as a sister.

He looks hot as fuck in his outfit. White button-up a few buttons open, getting a magnificent view of his chest. The shirt was perfectly tailored to his toned arms and chest. Like tailor-made.

A smile grows on my face as he stares at me. His eyes travel from my face to my body, checking me out. I felt the weird feeling in my stomach get stronger. The lump in my throat starts to build up.

“Seriously,” I tell him, trying not to sound like I am out of breath. Because I feel like I am.

What?

He smiles as he rolls his tongue against his cheek and his cheeks turn light pink like he is embarrassed to admit to what he was doing.

Way to make a girl go crazy.

He leans against the counter with his head against his bicep, his gaze still on me. “I saw that apparently, ice water helps with headaches, so I was trying it out.” he laughs as he explains it to me.

Why the hell am I smiling so much? Stop it, brain.

“So far not true. It needs time to kick in.”

“You do know it’s for hangovers, not fresh-out-of-alcohol-zone?”

“Yep, I am starting to see that.” He groans in frustration and sits up straighter on his stool, now resting his head against the palm of his hand.

“You have really pretty eyes.” He states. I look away as the smile on my face grows even more and the blood rushes to my cheeks turning them cherry-red.

The best compliment a person can get is about their eyes or the way they smell.

Correct me if I am wrong.

“Look at her, I made her blush.”

“Shut it.” I turn back around to look at him, seeing him smile as big as me. “I am not blushing. Just had something in my eye.” I lie.

“It’s okay to admit that I make you nervous and blush. I make myself blush all the time.”

“Oh, get over yourself. You are not all that.” Lie. He is all that.

Have you seen him?

Broad shoulders, a six-pack - I saw his Instagram, not stalking - the most defined jawline combined with a beard and those eyes that make me go feral.

He puts his hands up in defence and shrugs his shoulders.

“How the hell do you look so put together? I saw you take like three shots with Alex earlier,” he asked me as he looked like he was sick.

“High alcohol tolerance.”

I went to parties in high school. Maybe too many and yeah.

I like challenges.

“Lucky you. Wait how the hell do you know Alex?”

“She just came up to me and offered me shots.”

“Sounds a lot like her.”

“Why do you know her?”

He lets out a dry laugh. “I had the ‘pleasure’ to get to know her for the last month as she is Arden’s PR and hangs around with the team 24/7..”

“You don’t like her?”

“I do, it’s just that sometimes she is a lot like me, and it’s freaking me out. She likes to talk a lot like I do and always challenges me around. Sounds like an urban copy of me.”

“She seems like a fun person to hang out with.”

“Oh, she is. Just a little twisted. Advice from a friend to another,” he scotches closer to me with his chair, our knees touching now. “Run if she had more than three drinks. She will start talking about her shags and I didn’t need to know all of that.”

“Well, my dear friend. You should have told me that sooner.”

“How the hell should I know she would spill her love life to a stranger?”

I laugh at him.

I hear someone approach us and turn to look in that direction.

“Ready?” Nate asked me as he looked more than ready to leave.

“Yep, let’s go.” Liam hops off his chair. Nate glares at him and gives him a confused look. “What?”

“I was asking my sister. Not you.”

“Ouch. I feel betrayed, mate. Did not expect that.”

“Oh, my word.” he curses under his breath. I laugh at their dynamic.

Liam is the sunshine and Nate is the Grump.

They perfectly execute the Grumpy x Sunshine trope.



Chapter Five
LIAM

“No offense, but you managed to get a woman to go out with you? Like on a date?” I ask him, keeping my voice low.

Arden isn't the kind of guy to ask women on a date. He is more of a casual guy. Reason number one they had to hire him a PR. His reputation. Doesn't care about it but is careful enough to not get fired or out of a contract

Not like he can.

As long as he gets his dick somewhere, then he is satisfied enough. Always saying that relationships are a waste of time and then goes on a date.

Motherfucker.

“Yes. What's so surprising about that?” He acts confused. I can name a list with twenty-two bullet points on why this is weird.

And he would still question it.

“Liam, I am trying to do my job and trying to keep your reputation the way it is, so please bear with me and answer the question. Shut it and pay attention to what I am saying, or I swear to God you won’t have your second kidney tomorrow.” I hear Alex’s accent cling to my ear.

We are filming an interview for the official Aravis YouTube channel and Alex happens to be stuck with us doing this since she is our – well Arden’s because he gets into a lot of shit - public relation specialist and has to make sure we don’t say stupid shit on any of the videos on YouTube but is originally only hired and paid for Arden’s side.

She loves us, don’t worry.

“Okay, lady, no need to threaten me.” I put my hands up in defence. I like my kidneys very much. “Not like you’ll go through with it,” I whisper to myself.

“*Hmm.*”

“What kind of *hmm* was that? What- what was that?!” I stutter at her.

One lesson I learned.

Never underestimate Alex’s threats, I learned it the hard way.

We don’t talk about that...

I have to live with that for the next two years.

Her contract is for the next two years...

We’ll see if I survived by then.

“Dude, just stop talking.” Arden hit me on my arm, laughing his arse off at my attempt to get myself out of the “situation”.

“Okay, you all know what this game is about?”

“No, I didn’t listen.” Arden just signed away his life.

“Okay, fine. Let me explain again. Listen before you lose a kidney.” She threatens him, sits down between us, and

explains the game. I raise my hands and want to start complaining. She shushes me and points a finger at me.

How the hell did he survive?

I- She threatens me and he- How?!

I guess it is true when people say that God has favorites.

I guess Alex is into blondes.

“I’m not into blondes.” She states as she flips through her papers and scribbles something on the board she is holding. I am guessing she is writing down how well we behaved this afternoon.

And how the hell doesn’t he understand? Either he answers a question from a fan, or he tells us a secret based on the category. Easy peasy.

Stupid idiot.



I still have two weeks until the next race in Saudi Arabia. It’s one of my favorite circuits.

In general street circuits are one of the best ones. In my opinion at least. But Nate is the king of the streets and the only driver on the grid at the moment with four championships on his back.

I decided to travel back to Italy during the break to be with my father. He still struggles daily with Mum’s death.

We all do but we all deal differently with it.

Someone needs to look after him now and then. Since my sister is traveling as well, walking runways, and designing for her clothing brand, he is pretty much alone during the weekends.

I place my suitcase near the door and close it. I hear the heavy footsteps walk up to me.

“Liam. Oh, figlio mio!” He hugs me tightly in his arms. Papa always seems happy when I or Sof come back home to him.

I wrap my arm around him, feeling safe in his embrace.

“Why are you back so early?” he asks me, his Italian accent clinging to his voice as we break away from the hug. His English does get better from time to time.

You can describe my father as a beer dad. He doesn't drink, he hates that stuff, but he looks like he has a beer belly. His grey hair is always combed and slicked back with water that dries after some time. He always wears his glasses at the tip of his nose and always complains that he can't find them if he puts them on his head.

“I told you; I have a week break. The team let me spend that time that I have with you instead of killing me with training.”

“Quanto sei dolce, figliolo.”

I smile at him.

It was already past lunch when I arrived, so I decided to start with the cooking when I found out that he hadn't had lunch already.

“Tua sorella torna domani da New York.”

“Veramente?”

“Sì, finisce la settimana della moda. Attualmente è sull'aereo, in realtà”

“Well, that's awesome.”

After some time, we'll be together as a family. I haven't seen my sister since New Year's.

I already have a feeling she will annoy the hell out of me with her contemporary designs. But I'll happily listen to her.

She has listened to me all those years while I talked about how I want to become a Formula One champion.

I poured myself a glass of water while I waited for the pasta to cook when I heard my phone vibrate on the kitchen counter next to the stove.

I gulp down the water.

I reach for my phone and see a new text.

Lauren.

We exchanged numbers in the car as we drove back from the party to the hotel.

The way a single text of hers makes a weird feeling in my stomach appear and my heart beats faster.

I told you; something is wrong with me when I am around her.

Crush-at-first sight.

We became instant friends, thanks to Alex and Nate and now we text. A lot.

And I love it.

Lauren: how the hell did you get to Italy if I have your freaking ID??

Oh my god. I forgot that I lent her my ID because she was curious about how I looked in the photo.

Liam: I'm surprised you haven't lost it yet. *Laughing emoji*

Lauren: Ha-ha. Very funny. *Annoyed emoji*

I laugh at her text. I feel the smile on my face growing.

“La tua nuova ragazza?” I heard Papa ask me as he is smiling at me, teasing me about how I am freaking blushing over a text.

“No,” I answer him, confused myself.

I have no idea why.

Lauren: what the hell am I supposed to do with it?? I'll lose it.

Liam: please don't. I still need it.

Lauren: I wonder what your face would look like cut in half *smirk face emoji*

Liam: Don't you dare.

Lauren: Oh, I dare. *Smirk emoji*

Lauren: Relax. As long as I don't lose it... it's safe with me *wink emoji*

Panic rises in me as I hear the water spill from the pot where the pasta was.

Shit.

I place my phone on the counter where I was leaning against, opposite the stove, and move the pot from the stove, watching as the water goes down.

I need to stop distracting myself. I'll burn the apartment down one day.



I hate when the week goes by faster than a Golden race car goes.

Literally.

It feels like I landed yesterday in Italy – my home where my father was and boom, five days later I am in the car from Milan to Emilia Romagna for testing and then the next destination is Baku.

Maybe you can't tell but I am excited as hell.

Also, we will be filming new videos for the Aravis Formula One team YouTube account where we do the weirdest challenges. Last year we did too many ice bucket challenges.

I was surprised when I didn't end up sick.

I stepped into the car and drifted to sleep as soon as we hit the road – me and my personal trainer. I would rather spend my time sleeping than dying from boredom in a car since my trainer isn't a talk-active person.

But I couldn't sleep today.

I might or might have not been texting Lauren the whole few hours he drove the car and then he forced me to switch.

While on the phone with Lauren were talking about the weirdest things to the most logical and back to the dumbest topics ever.

I don't think I have ever smiled that much at my phone than I have the past week since we started texting.

I was kicking with my feet in the air like I was some five-year-old.

Oh, the thrill I have texting with her is something I never had.

And I hope to God the thrill never ends.



On the track, I get into my racing suit and make my way to the box. I position myself in the cockpit and get comfortable in the car. While I get help with my belts - my engineer doesn't think I am reliable enough to do it myself – nor can I.

I put on my gloves while my car is being prepared for the session.

I wait for the signal.

As soon as I get the yes, I slowly drive out of the pitlane and finish the outlap. I press on to the throttle as soon as I reach the start and finish line and race down the lane, making a few rounds at the Emilia Romagna Region on the track and home of Aravis.

The adrenaline that comes with racing is the best part of sitting in the car.

I made it to the final turn, through the finish line, marking possibly my best time on the track ever.

I drive the car into the pits, waiting for the team to wheel me back in.

I take the steering wheel out of the car, undo my seatbelts, and get out of the cockpit.

The sweat clings onto my back, the fireproof suits bringing the heat to my body. As soon as I removed my helmet and placed it down, I unzipped my suit and let it hang halfway on my torso, letting my upper body cool down. I took off my white fireproof T-shirt and changed it to a regular one.

I made my way to my team principal Max Weber who was checking out some data on how I performed during the race.

“You were fast,” he acknowledges. “Use that kind of motivation on race day. Not testing.”

I raise my hands in defence.

I am.

What is his problem sometimes?

I get it. You want to win the championships.

Don't you think I do too?

After I promised it to my mother.

“I'll try my best. I promise.”

“I know, son. I know.” he turned his chair so that I wouldn't be talking to his back anymore. Please turn back around. “But sometimes your best isn't enough, Liam. You know that.”

Wow.

Add that to the list of why I am such a disappointment to you, Max.

And stop calling me son.

But sometimes your best isn't enough, Liam.

I get it. I know that even if I give Max everything, it will never be enough.

But I can still try. I just need to believe in myself.

Like my mother always said: *As soon as you lose faith in yourself, it's game over.*

Always be your number one believer and everything will work out in your favor.

That's one of the many 'lessons' my mother taught me.

“Be back here at ten. We'll do another test tomorrow and then you are free until we have to be in Baku.” He tapped me

on my shoulders and went back to his data, analyzing everything.

Max Weber can be a real asshole sometimes, like a real big fat asshole.

But he was the first person to believe in me, that's why he took me in, in his team.

But day by day, he is making me believe it was a mistake letting him get close to me.



I walk out of my suit, in my new clothes, and drive back to my apartment.

But sometimes your best isn't enough, Liam.

Sometimes the words Max Weber says to me to 'motivate' me play over and over again in my head, like a train that can't seem to have an end or a start, so it keeps driving the same path in a circle.

It's an endless circle in my head.

I unlock my door and throw my bag on the sofa and also myself. I just lay there for what felt like an hour, my thoughts all gathering for the second tea party of the day.

But sometimes your best isn't enough, Liam.

But sometimes your best isn't enough, Liam.

But sometimes your best isn't enough, Liam.

But sometimes your best isn't enough, Liam.

That's the only thing that runs through my head.

God, why am I so goddamn stupid?

I can't seem to do a thing right nowadays.

What's wrong with me?

I take the pillow that I was laying my head on and just lay face down on the mattress of the sofa, wanting to suffocate myself with it.

Might as well disappear if I can't manage to do anything right by anyone.

Would be better for everyone.

Even for myself.



Hours pass by and I wake up from the unknown nap into which I had fallen.

Yet I still felt as empty as I did before.

I guess nothing changed.

I lay still on the sofa, not feeling like getting up to even drink water or do anything.

I just lay there, staring up at the ceiling, now my mind is empty.

The silence consumes me, and the voices slowly get louder the longer I stare up.

Please stop. I have had enough of them.

I gather myself and force myself to get up.

If I want the voices to stay quiet, I need to busy myself with something.

Anything really.

My phone vibrates in the back pocket of my jeans. I fish it out of there.

My phone was exploding with like twenty messages.

Lauren was spamming my phone.

Lauren: Liam?

Lauren: LIAM

Lauren: Are you ignoring me?

Lauren: I have an important question.

Lauren: please? *Praying emoji*

Lauren: ARE YOU DEAD??

Lauren: OH MY GOD

Lauren: Do you want your ID in one piece!?!??

Lauren: never mind. I have my answer.

Lauren: but thanks for the help, I guess.

And just like that...

The voices in my head shut off and it was on silent mode.

Liam: Are you trying to explode my phone or something like that??

Lauren: thank God you're alive. I was about to send an ambulance to your apartment.

Liam: you don't even know where I live. *Laughing emoji*

Lauren: never underestimate a girl's stalking skills. *Wink emoji*

Liam: So now you're a stalker. I see. *Smirk emoji*

Lauren: *shrug emoji*

I laugh at her response. I love the way that I only know her - like really know her - for like two weeks and yet she is one of the people who can help me escape my thoughts.

I hear my phone ring and pick it up when I see the name of my sister flash through the screen.

Or more like the nickname I gave her.

The devil in Prada.

She has a weird one for me too.

It's how our siblinghood works.

We just tolerate but still love each other.

I press the phone to my ear and speak up.

What's up?"

"Did you steal my Harry Potter cards or were joking?" she shouts through the phone.

I press my lips into a thin line.

Well, shit.

I forgot to take them out of the bag when I said I'd take them with me.

Ups.

"Please don't kill-"

"I will murder you," she shouts over the phone again. My poor, poor eardrums. "Those were limited edition ones."

“I’m sorry!” now I feel guilty, how did I forget them? “I promise to bring them back with all the pieces attached.”

“You better.” she slurs over the phone. “Arsehole.”
“I’m sorry. You stole my car model and hid it.”

“And I gave it back!” Okay, she has a point.

“Okay, okay.” I defend myself. “I won’t cause them any harm.”

She lets out a frustrated breath. I felt the goosebumps raise my arm.

Did I just feel her breath on my neck because what the hell...

“I’m sorry.” I apologize.

To be honest I am freaking scared that she’ll come to Italy to personally strangle me instead of the anger that lingers in my air.

“You’re lucky you are in Italy. Otherwise, I would have strangled you with my bare hands.”
And I trust you when you say that sis.

Believe me. Younger but scares the hell out of me.

“Lose the cards, you lose your life, brother. Cut the cards and I’ll chop off your head, either way, you’re dead. Got it?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Good.”

We stayed in an awkward silence for a few seconds before I decided to open my mouth again. “Anyways. How are you doing sis?” I said with much enthusiasm in my tone.

Just trying to lighten up the mode.

“Good.” She answers. “Until I realized my cards were missing.”

“Oh, move on.”

“Goodbye, Liam.” She hung up the phone as I was about to protest.

Sofia can be scary sometimes.

Like skin peeling, ghost screaming, goosebumps scary.



I walk into the hotel room and first take off my shoes then place my luggage on the floor next to the door and make sure it is locked.

I finally arrived in Jeddah. And after that hour-long flight, I just want to sleep.

And luckily it was eight pm. Which meant I could just do nothing until training tomorrow.

I drop my almost-dead body against the mattress. My eyes slowly got heavy, and I was about to fall asleep when I heard my phone ring.

I groan in frustration and bury my head against the pillow to cancel the noises from the phone. I reached for my jogger’s pocket when I realized that it wasn’t going to stop until I picked it up. I hum in annoyance at the other person on the line as I put the phone to my ear.

I didn’t care who it was on the other line, I just wanted to get it over with.

“Liam!” A sweet voice announces from the other line. One I recognized in a heartbeat. “It’s Lauren. I have been trying to reach you for a while now.”

“Sorry. My flight got delayed and I just arrived in my hotel room.”

“Oh, that sounds horrible.”

“Just a little jet lagged but nothing I can’t work with.”

“Well, I was actually calling to ask you if you wanted to go out to dinner with us.” she offers me. “It’s on Nate so I would take the chance to make his wallet suffer.” she lets out one of those sweet laughs she always does.

One thing I noticed about Lauren is that, even if she is not much of a talkative person, she is a great listener.

She is like a light. While she shines bright, she would rather stay still and listen than talk.

“I think I’ll pass. As much as I would love to strip Nate from his money,” we both laugh at my answer. “I am way too tired to even consider getting up from the bed here. They are surprisingly comfortable.”

“Well, if you change your mind, we’ll leave in about half an hour. You can meet us at the lobby.”

“We’ll see.”

“Okay bye.” and hung up.

What kind of an idiot am I?

She just invited me to dinner, and I declined.

I have the opportunity to strip Nate from his money. I should use that chance if my eyes won’t keep falling asleep.

Just go to dinner.



“I see you came out alive from the club and all limbs attached.” I sarcastically say to Arden as he walks into the training room. “Good, you’ll need them.”

He let out a mocking laugh and sat down on the stool next to me. “Never going clubbing ever again.” He groans in

frustration, leaning his arms against his knees and his head on top.

“That’s the worst lie I have ever heard you say. It’s even worse than when you said that you’ll win. Both didn’t happen.” He glares at me with a threatening look.

I laugh at his expression.

“I guess the drinking game against Lauren wasn’t such a good idea.” he throws me one of his classic poker-face glares.

Arden might be the toughest nut to crack.

Never smiles. And always has a poker face on.

More specifically he is now pissed because Lauren beat him at a drinking game, which made him lose five hundred euros. She beat only for 250 but he doubled the stakes, thinking he could outdo Lauren in a small tequila game. He fell off so gracefully from his stand when he couldn’t hold himself up anymore. It was so worth it to skip the sleep.

And I warned him not to raise the stakes. She also raised the stakes later for his gold Rolex which he is now at a loss too.

“So, five hundred euros and your Rolex?” I tease him, trying to crack him.

He didn’t even give me a second glance before he shoved me off the chair.

How many times am I going to fall off of chairs?

“What was that for?” I ask him in a high-pitched voice - that unintentionally came out high-pitched.

“You were getting on my nerves, Calvetti.”

“Well, at least I didn’t lose five hundred euros to Lauren while being so confi-” and back was I off the chair as he shoved me once again after I managed to get up from the floor.

“Okay once is enough.”

He raises an eyebrow at me, still keeping his poker face. How the hell does he do that? “Let’s just work out before you come up with an idea to rip off my throat.” I get up from the floor, wiping off any kind of dust that could be attached to me.

“I’m pretty sure they cheated.”

“Oh, so you can talk.”

I once again only receive an angry remark from his face. “I don’t think they did.”

“Whose side are you on?”

“The girls. Because if I were on your side, I’d be on the loser’s side. Think smart, buddy.” I told him. I made my way to the bench and caught a glance when he flipped me off with his back towards me.

Lovely.



Press conference.

It's either a driver's worst nightmare or their favorite thing in the world.

And for me, it's the worst nightmare.

But at least I have Nate with me. We always gossip and judge and talk a lot during these conferences.

We mostly judge the people in the crowd.

“Apparently one of the journalists slept with a team principal.” He whispers to me. I widen my eyes at him. He just told me the best gossip I have ever heard, almost choking on my water.

“Who?” I ask him.

He shrugs his shoulders. "I have no idea. All I know is that."

"No, I mean which principal?"

"I think it was Golden Racing, but I have no idea."

"Doesn't he have a wife?"

"They are getting a divorce."

"Didn't they get married two years ago?"

He shrugs his shoulders.

How the hell does he get all this gossip from? What kind of magic source does he enter in Google to find these?

I giggled silently when a reporter disturbed our gossip session.

"Liam," she calls out my name.

I turn my head in her direction, trying to suppress my laugh. I cover my mouth with the back of my hand, acting like I am fidgeting with my lips.

"Lately there has been this rumor going around that with your contract ending next year with Aravis Formula One racing, McAli has offered you to race for them in 2025." I shoot her a confused face, not sure what the hell she is talking about.

I got a new contract?

Hurray, I guess.

"Can you confirm or deny?"

"Well, that's new. When did you say I got that contract offer?"

"A very reliable source."

Reliable source my arse.

I laugh at him. "No- no. when, not where."

She was completely still.

I gave her a knowing look that said something like “That is the answer.” She goes on to another question that doesn’t concern me.

“I think we have our answer. Doesn’t seem like it was a good one.” Nate tells me, referring to the journalist and team principal rumor.

I hold back my laugh, feeling the tears in my eyes build.

Unable to hold it back anymore, I laugh out loud, tears falling down my cheeks.

“He is crying.” I heard James Berkley - driver for Golden Racing - say as he was pointing at me and laughing.

“Oh, my god.” I felt the tears spilling from my eyes. “Ahhhh” I groaned as I leaned back in the chair.

The uncontrollable laughing made me fall backward from the chair, landing on my arse.

This conference was just chaos on my side.

I stay on the floor, my head buried on my knees, trying to come down from my high.

“Are you okay? Oh my god.” James asks me, laughing between his sentences.

“I think I broke my chair.”

I did break my chair.

And made a fool of myself and looked like a child who was either crying because he couldn’t have the toy he wanted or like another child who liked to overdo it when it was laughing.

“You think, or did you?” Nate questions my statement.

“I did.”



Chapter Eight

LAUREN

I walk into the McAli motorhome and notice my brother talking to his team principal alongside Marco Garcia about some plan for the next race and all that kind of racing stuff that I sometimes have no idea what they mean because I don't pay attention when my brother talks. He finishes up his conversation and bids goodbye to all of the people in the garage as he sees me standing there waiting for him. He runs the small way from around his car to me and pulls me into a tight hug like we haven't seen each other for years even though I saw him right before the race.

He lets go of me and waits for me to say something.

Ugh, you can say he lives for the applause and validation in his racing. "Congratulations," I tell him in an annoyed voice. He flashed me a small smile and nodded in approval. "You're so annoying," I mumble under my breath.

"Aha and remind me who again had the brilliant idea for you to spend time with me."

"Not you. It was Mum."

"It was me. Stop lying."

I mock him in an annoyed tone. I am not feeling well today since I have the worst neck pain and so everything that stands

in my way will annoy me. Including a person called Nate Elias Harper.

I can include myself because I seem to get on my nerves all the time. Whether it's something physical or emotional.

Sometimes when I am here at the paddock the kind of questions run in my head.

Why am I even here if I won't talk enough for people to be interested in me? Living in my brother's shadow can be so depressing sometimes.

It makes me feel like furniture that gets people in the way, but they would feel bad if they cast me aside.

It's desolation. An empty feeling.

"Have you met Marco yet?"

I nod my head left and right, telling - signaling him a no.

The Spanish rookie heard his name being mentioned and came sprinting to us.

"Marco, meet my sister, Lauren."

"Helloooo." he greets me with much enthusiasm. He seems genuine and humble. I noticed that he was fidgeting a lot with his hands like he couldn't stay still thanks to his ADHD. He stretches out his hand. "I'm Marco. Happy to finally meet the famous Lauren Harper."

Of course, he knows who I am.

"Oh, how sweet, he talks about." I sarcastically comment as I shake Marco's hand, his firm grip feeling warm.

Before I could pull away my hand from his grasp, he leaned down and lightly pressed a kiss on my knuckles. His Spanish-ness does not turn me on.

At all.

He has warm hands, but I don't feel the same electrifying feeling as I do with Liam. He just feels... mundane.

Which sounds stupid but it does make sense. I am certain that Liam took notice of my reaction every time he touched me, sending a current of energy up my arm, that made me completely lose my mind, but I have also noticed how his skin turns flaming hot on the spots I touch him and it satisfies me enough to know that his body reacts the same as me when we touch or even look in each other's eyes for longer than we should.

Over the past couple of weeks, he and I have started texting. A lot.

We exchanged numbers the night we went to dinner in Baku and stripped Nate from his money and Alex had me test my alcohol tolerance against Arden, which I won.

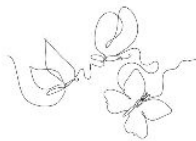
Wait, no.

That was after.

He snatched my phone out of my hand in Bahrain and typed in his number.

I hate the fact that a smile always creeps up my face every time I see his name pop up on my screen. His messages make me feel the kind of joy a child feels when they just got handed a lollipop at the doctor's office.

It's disgusting and kind of cute.



I wake up to a loud banging on the door, which sounded a lot like Hulk was trying to break through my door.

Nate is out for practice - racing around the track before we leave for London once again - so who comes banging on my hotel door at nine am?

I force myself out of bed and stumble out of the bed in my Pinocchio PJs, half asleep.

I like my pajamas being comfy.

And they happen to be extremely comfortable.

I swing open the door, seeing a certain brunette standing in front of me.

“Alex, the flight will not take off for another day, what the hell are you doing here?” I complain.

She is ditching her flight with Arden and Liam so that we can spend some girl time together on the plane since she decided - on short notice - that she wants to see England.

What better way to spend a two-week break than with a friend, showing her around London and gossiping? She has the best gossip to tell since she is practically involved in the paddock group.

“I want to spend some time with my best friend and since we will be traveling together, I thought we could take the day to explore before we leave,” she explained to me as she made her way into my hotel room.

I can't with her.

Not anymore.

“Alex, it's bloody nine am,” I complain to her.

“Peace offering.” She holds up a coffee cup. “It's a salted caramel latte macchiato with a hint of cinnamon.”

She remembered my order.

That's not creepy.

And coffee is coffee, so I am not going to think about it long enough and accept it.

“I accept your very well thought peace offering...” I start, and she squirms in excitement before I point my finger in the air and cut her excitement short. “Under one condition.”

She stares at me with the hope that the condition has nothing to do with her life. “I will be staying in bed until ten

and don't even think about inviting Liam." She is the only one that knows about my crush on Liam.

I think you can call it a crush. At least that's what she calls it.

"Those are two."

I raise my eyebrow at her.

"Yeah, whatever you say. I need a time-out from him anyway. He can be annoying with his talk about..."

I nod my head slowly at her, telling her to continue her sentence.

About whom?

"His car, duh." I stare at her with a blank face, not sure if I should trust her. But I decided to just do it.

"Then it's settled." I nod and crawl back under my blanket as I place my coffee on the nightstand. I passed out again as soon as my head hit the pillow and I almost fell into a deep sleep I hoped that I wouldn't wake up from.

But then it hit me.

I opened my eyes in a swift move and turned to head to look at Alex sitting on her phone next to me on the bed.

"Why the hell is your suitcase here??"

My eyes wander from her suitcase to me, to the suitcase, and back to me.

"Oh, I'm spending the night with you."

Not even a 'Hey can I spend the night.' She just brought her suitcase and stated that she would be staying.

That simple and easy answer.

Since I was still half awake, I just decided to ignore her. It's an 'an hour later me' problem.



Chapter Nine LAUREN

Alex might be one of the most interesting people ever.

We have been walking around London for like two hours already and yet she is still full of energy.

I had booked our tickets to the Victoria and Albert Museum near Cromwell Road.

I didn't expect Alex to be an artist or ancient history geek. She kept telling me all about the paintings that she knew and was interested in.

You can tell me that she and I mesh together. But also, at the same time we don't.

While she loves talking, I would much rather listen to her rant about anything.

I never really was an enthusiastic fan of talking anyway.

She loves anything red while I stick to neutral colours.

While she adores the band Chase Atlantic, I like heart-breaking songs from Gracie Abrams.

The only thing we both agree on is Taylor Swift and the fact that she is our top artist.

Her favorite album is Reputation, and I stick with folklore. That album is way too underrated.

I am the quiet one. If you want to sum it up.

The one who listens rather than talks, who likes her space and quiet time and would rather be at home either drafting her book or reading one.

I heard my phone beep in my hand as we were walking the streets.

“Uhh is it Liam?” Alex teases me. She never stops, maybe I shouldn't have told her.

“It's probably Nate.”

I look down at my phone.

Damn it, Liam.

Liam: how is London?

“You're blushing.” she squeals in excitement. I realized too late that I was blushing to hide it from her that it indeed was Liam who texted me.

I shush her, reminding her that we are still in public.

“Call him.”

“What?”

She lets out an annoyed sound and clicks something on my phone. The next thing is I hear the tone on the other line.

“Nooo.” I let out a gasp in disbelief.

She did not just do that.

The other line picked up, and I heard Liam’s deep voice. “Missed me that much, Butterfly?” he lets out a deep laugh.

Alex silently squeals next to me, mouthing me in a harsh silent tone to answer him.

I look at her confused, demanding her to tell me what to say.

“Lauren?” He called after me. I have been silently arguing with Alex, keeping him in line.

“Hey,” I call out awkwardly. “What’s up?”

Alex looks at me with a disappointed face and hits her forehead with her palm in disbelief.

I can't handle stress that well, Alex.

She keeps mouthing nonsense that I don’t understand, and makes weird moves with her hands, trying to tell me what to say.

“Nothing much. Just having some team meetings, which Alex should be here for but I told them that she is sick. Make sure she doesn’t post on social media today.” he answers my question.

I look at Alex as she snatches her phone from her pocket and deletes the posts she made today.

“Uhm, cool.”

“What’s up with you?” he asks me, sort of mocking me.

“Just chillin’.”

Be chill, Lauren. Relax.

Is it appropriate to say just chillin' or does it make me sound like I am uninterested in this conversation?

“Is Alex getting on your nerves or something? You sound...” he pauses. “Weird.”

“Peaches,” I call out as it looks like Alex was shoving me a peach. “I’m doing peaches. Which means great.”

Why the hell did I just say that?

His laugh vibrates through the phone.

Ugh, his laugh is like a lullaby that helps me sleep at night.

I hear talking on Liam’s line. “Sorry, Butterfly. I have to leave. Max is not in a good mood today.”

“Oh, okay, bye.”

And then his line went dead.

“Peaches?” Alex shouts at me, not believing what I said.

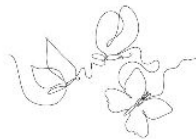
“I’m sorry. I was nervous.”

“I get it, crush and all, but seriously you need to improve your communication skills.”

“Alex?” I call after her. It didn’t come to mind that we are in the middle of London. People are staring at us as if we are crazy. “We are still in public.”

“Okay and?”

“Let’s just go.”



What’s up?

What the hell is wrong with me?

I turn to the other side, trying to find an advantageous position to sleep.

Why can't I just be like Alex?

She is free and always knows what to say.

I am a total mess when it comes to talking to people.

Why am I like this?

Why is it that I can't have a normal conversation without feeling like my heart will collide from my chest because of how scared I am of what I am going to say?

Why can't anxiety leave me alone when I don't need it? Why is it so hard to be one of them?

Every time I sit together with the group at dinner, I always ask myself why I am like a piece of a puzzle that doesn't fit.

Why can't I like the same things as them? While they all knew and talked about the cars and what they were built on, I just sat there, talking to myself in my mind.

Why the hell am I like this?

I don't understand them.

And they don't understand me.

Why did I think it would be a clever idea to be with my brother when I have a completely different mind than them?

What do I need to change about myself for them to notice me instead of treating me like a ghost?

Treat me like I am an obstacle that can be ignored because I am not important.

What do I need to know to be a little less miserable while I travel?

I feel the ache in my heart intensify and become even stronger.

I just lay here, now staring at the ceiling. I feel tears build up and sting my eyes.

The hot tears slowly travel down from the corners of my eyes.

The numb feeling in me made the tears even more. They keep coming and never end. I turn to my right side, clamping the pillow to my chest and hugging it, needing the support that I can get as I let the tears consume and flow freely, blurring my vision.

I just want to be like one of them.

What is so wrong about me that I can't do the same things as them?

Every time I try to talk there is just this voice at the back of my head, telling me that I will embarrass myself if I say what I want to say.

Or sometimes it will even say that I am not enough and that I should just stop trying.

I want to talk, but people are used to me being the one to listen so I never bothered to change that fact because I am scared they will end up ignoring me.

People always see me as the girl who would rather listen than talk and I am starting to think the same as them because I have no idea how to properly use the voice I was given so I silence myself and that way, I won't say reckless stuff that would make me feel like I am stupid.

I just want to be like them.

Only that.



She is stuck in my head.

The image of her, her dirty blond hair that she always leaves tucked behind her ears.

Her plump lips look so kissable that I had a vision of them wrapped around my cock as I pounded into her mouth, claiming it as mine.

Her petite figure and sun-kissed skinny legs would fit perfectly around my waist.

And best of all I can't get her sweet laugh out of my head. The one she always gives me when I make a remark about myself, and she is just over the fact of how much of an ego I have. When I crack a joke or two or when I tickle her at the bar, trying to help her get over her headache.

Maybe tickles aren't the best idea, but laughing is the best medicine.

Her laugh is *my* best medicine.

And I have to make it through another two days before she returns from England and makes it to Albert Park alongside Alex - the spawn of Satan or Satan herself and Nate - one of the best drivers I know.

My idol.

I always joke about how I am friends with my idol.

It's true.

He threatened me multiple times to end our friendship if I didn't stop. He never broke off our friendship. That's how much he loves me.

I still remember when I started Formula Three and I met Nate for the first time, and I told him he was my idol. Back then he had won his first race.

Ten years later he is still in the sport, and we are best friends.

It's weird how the universe works.

"You can leave."

Thank God the meeting was over. I couldn't take another second in a room with a furious Max.

"Except you Liam."

Damn it.

I turned back around as I was on my way out of the door. I halt in front of him. "What's up, Max?"

Act cool Liam, Be cool.

He keeps scribbling on his paper, filling out some files. "You're distracted." He points out.

No shit, Sherlock. How couldn't I be?

But I decided to not let him know and get under my skin. He always is like that.

People would say he can see right through a person, but I would say he is manipulative.

“I’m not,” I tell him straight up, both of us knowing damn well that it was a lie.

He hums, his gaze never leaving the paper, and keeps writing something.

“You do know that your contract with us ends next year.” He finally looks up at me, his pitch-black hair pushed back with gel. He twirls around in his chair, leaning against the chair with his hands intertwined against his stomach and his elbows on the armrests.

“And if you can’t prove this and next year that you are valuable on our team...” he gestures with his hands left and right. “Then we can’t extend your contract. You’re out then. For good.”

Way to make me feel like a total failure. And for the second time this season alone.

“Yes, I do know that.”

“Good. Time to think about what you are doing wrong and not get distracted.” He gets up, gathers all of his files in a folder, and puts them on a stack beside the desk. “It’s your future.”

Really? Thank you for letting me know.

He walks to the door and waits for me to walk out. He closes it as soon as we are both out and goes his way.

Fucker.



Max wants serious, I’ll give him serious.

After practice, we had a little break before it got to qualifying.

I zip up my suit and get my helmet on. I walk into the garage and get into my car. I position myself in the cockpit of my Aravis AR13 and make sure it is comfortable.

I put on my gloves as the mechanics make sure the car is drive-ready and my engineer buckles up my seat belts.

“Okay, radio check.”

“Loud and clear.” I hear my engineer on the radio. He likes to give me a small pep talk before every race. Not the kind where I feel like shit about myself at the end, but the kind that helps me motivate myself into giving my best on the tracks.

“Okay, Liam. I know you don’t want to talk about it, but I heard what he said.”

God, no. if he heard, God knows who else did.

“All I am trying to say is just ignore him, okay.”

“Yeah, copy. Whatever.”

“Okay.” I never tried to start a fight with my engineer since he has been with me through thick and thin. Ever since I got to the team, but sometimes when you don’t feel like talking nice, then nothing can change that.

I would say that my time in Q1 and Q2 was good. Now I just have to make sure I stay on top and make the lap worth it.

I drive out of the pitlane exit and finish the out lap and as soon as I get the go at the start and finish line, I press down on the throttle, I press down on the throttle harder and go down to the straight line before I make it to the first turn. I drive further and make it through sector one. The anger from Max’s words fuels me and makes the adrenaline in me rise as I make it to the last two turns and race through the straight path, through the finish line. I didn’t think much of my time before I heard my engineer shout through the radio.

“1.16.996, Liam, you are a monster. You just raced the fastest lap on this track. You topped Nate Harper’s record by 0.553 seconds. My god. That lap was brilliant.”

I broke Nate's record.

Me?

And Nate?

I drive into the pits and place it by the P1 spot.

I turned it off and took the steering wheel and the seatbelts off.

I push myself out of the car by pulling myself up by the halo.

I jumped out of the car, and into my team's arms as they were screaming and shouting, excited about my record and the pole position I just secured for tomorrow.

I feel myself levitating in my body, not being able to express the excitement and feeling I am going through at this moment.

It is weird and a sense of accomplishment washes through me.

I just topped Nate's lap record.



"You are crazy." I hear a voice call behind me as I finish packing my bag, the crowd of people outside my suite slowly starting to die down. "Broke my brother's record."

I turn around and see a sweet Lauren standing there in her black tight dress that had a cut on the side and knee-high black boots.

She was wearing one of her prettiest smiles. The same one she always gives me when I talk to her or when she looks up at the podium and her gaze happens to be on me and not her brother.

Jesus Christ. She is mesmerizing.

A blinding beauty. If you look at her for too long, you lose yourself in her. *Like a labyrinth.*

And God help me, the feeling of being lost in her felt better than my pole win today.

“It was easy. Next time tell your brother to achieve a harder record to break.”

She laughs at my comment, still standing at the door, with her hands before her as she fidgets with her nails.

“I’ll make sure he gets the message.”

I give her a warm smile that she returns as blood rushes into my cheeks, coloring them maroon.

I’m acting like a teenager with a crush.

Oh, I am *fucked*.

“No but seriously. Congrats on your record. Let’s see who might break it next.”

“Let’s say that thirty-ish years from now one of our kids breaks it. No one before.” I answer her, not thinking about my answer before I shoot it out.

Well, that’s awkward.

“You know in thirty-ish years when we are dusty and old and your kids or mine become racing drivers.” I will try to explain to her.

Make the awkwardness go away. Why did I say that?

“That sounds like an interesting dream and one can hope that in thirty years we are still alive.”

“Oh please, I’ll be looking smoking hot and called the DILF on track.”

“I was waiting for you to make a comment. Why am I not surprised?”

“It’s now expected that I make a comment.”

“It would be weird if you didn’t.”

“Super weird.”

A lock of her hair spilled down her face as her eyes crinkled at the corners.

If she were mine, I would treat her like a queen.

One that she is in my world.



Chapter Eleven
LAUREN

I hate and love race weekends.

I love the thrill of watching the cars go and the smile that appears on my brother's face when he wins.

But I hate reporters who don't know the concept of boundaries.

I stay away from the crowd with Alex.

We still had an hour before the race started, reporters were just getting ready for their grid walk here in Albert Park.

“Do you think that Liam meant it differently when he said our kids?”

“*Definitely.*”

After my talk with Liam yesterday I ran to Alex and told her. She is the one who loves digging into conversations.

Oh, and she dug far into this one.

“He tried saving himself in this by saying yours and his ones, but I am sure he meant your kids together because otherwise, we would have defined it differently.”

I let out a frustrated breath, not sure if I should believe my intuition or my best friend.

And then I saw him there and felt my heartbeat pick up and skip a few beats at the same time.

He is standing there in his scarlet red t-shirt and dark blue jeans, leaning against the box as he listens to his engineer.

Fans would say he is beautiful, but I think gorgeous describes his looks better.

“Stare too much and he’ll know.” she sings the last word as she looks through her notes, dragging me away from my thoughts as I was admiring him.

“What?”

“You heard me.” she playfully winks at me.

I roll my eyes at her.

I turn my eyes back at Liam now seeing him smile with the biggest smile on his face as he hugs a woman who looks about his height. She was wearing a blue blazer with matching blue pants and her brown hair went all the way down her back. I couldn’t see her face, but the fact that he smiled so much with her at that brief moment made me...

Jealous?

“Who is that?”

“Who?”

“The woman with Liam.”

Alex finally looks at the woman I mean, not sure what to say. “Maybe a friend.”

“A friend like me or a friend?” I asked her to define it for me. “She is pretty.”

She is.

I don’t get it.

Why am I upset about something that isn’t mine?

“She is.” Alex agreed with me. “But she doesn’t have an amazing arse like my best friend,” she comments as she gave my arse a light smack, making me laugh out loud.

My eyes never leave Liam and the girl. She turns around and I finally see her face.

My eyes widen at the realization of who that is.

“Oh god, that’s his sister.”

Sofia Calveti. Supermodel and fashion designer of her brand called Calveti Couture.

I heard a certain Spanish brunette break out in laughter beside me. “You know I thought I was the jealous type. You couldn’t even recognize his sister.”

“Oh, shut it.”

“Oh, my god.” She drops down, leaning against her knees as she keeps laughing at me.

“I didn’t recognize her. She dyed her hair.”

“You didn’t recognize his sister.”

I hate Alex.

She let out a deep breath as she came down from her high. “You done?”

“No.” And laughs again.

Why is she like this?

I get it. I made a mistake.

A stupid one, nonetheless.

But... everybody makes mistakes.

“Goodbye Alex.”

“No wait.” She stops me by grabbing ‘me by my arm. “I’m sorry, okay.”

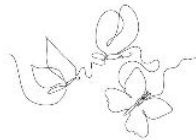
“Are you?”

She presses her lips to a thin line, trying to stay serious.
“Definitely.”

Yeah, I don’t believe her one bit.

“You don’t believe me.”

“Not even a little bit.”



“What’s wrong with her?” Liam asked as I invited him over to keep me company while Alex took a nap. I don’t think that’s such a good idea considering we have to be up early tomorrow. Let’s hope she will sleep for fourteen hours straight. If not, I’ll suffocate her with a pillow and then she will have her forever sleep.

Like sleeping beauty. Minus the paedophilia.

If I see a guy even step foot next to her, I will go full-on karate mode even if I never have done karate.

“Do you mean in general or just now?”

“Both.”

I smile at his response as I close the door slowly.

“She had one too many margaritas for lunch,” I whisper in a low tone as we make it into the living room of the hotel apartment, we were staying in. It might have been one of the best hotels I ever was at. “Or dinner. Both.”

“Why am I here exactly?”

I plop myself onto the sofa and stretch out my legs as they were sore and hurting so bad from walking around the paddock with a half-drunk Alex Howard with me.

“Why do you think so?” I looked over my shoulder at him as he was standing against the door frame with a teasing smile on my face.

He points at me with his finger. “I will not babysit.” He protests.

“Relax. I needed company. It gets lonely sometimes. Nate has been gone since this morning, hiding somewhere until our flight tomorrow and you were the last person, I could think of wanting to annoy.”

I didn’t technically lie. Nate is busy, just not hiding.

“I feel honored.”

He let out a sarcastic laugh as he sat down on the sofa next to me. He leaned forward with his elbows propped on his knees making him look *fuckin’ hot*.

Not going to deny it, even though I should, for the sake of my sanity and my ovaries.

“Congrats on your win by the way.”

“Thank you.” he nods at me with a boyish grin on his face as he turns back around.

I lean my elbow against the cushion of the sofa with my head on top of my hand.

Complete silence wanders around the room.

You could even hear the rustle of the bedsheets as Alex moved around.

“This is not an ideal hang-out date.” he interrupts the silence as he looks over his shoulder at me, a wicked grin growing on his face.

The devil has many faces.

Gorgeous happens to be one of them.

His royal blue eyes shine toward me. His messy brown hair is pushed back, but a few strands are sticking out, making him look even more perfect than usual.

“I had a better play date than this in kindergarten. You are kind of boring to hang out with.” I tell him, trying to lighten the mood.

“Really?” he jumps up as he gets up on his feet. “Then let’s change that. I can’t see myself losing against a kindergarten play date.” Liam lets out a hoarse laugh, his dimples shining through. His smile is so beautiful.

I take his hand that he held out to me, our laughs filling the room. Our hands make me feel a source of adrenaline racing through my body.

One I have never felt with anyone else. Only with him.

“What do you have in mind?” I raise my eyebrow at him, innocently challenging him.

He looks me deep in the eyes, making a weird feeling appear in the pit of my stomach and my breathing stops. He takes his phone out of his pocket and puts on music.

This Love by Taylor Swift is playing...

(Taylor’s version of course.)

“Taylor’s version, I see.”

“Duh, it is criminal to listen to the stolen version if there is Taylor’s version.”

A guy who listens to Taylor Swift and knows what Taylor’s version means.

Oh my god.

“Die-hard Swiftie?”

“Always.”

He takes my hand in his and places his free one on my hip.

“If I step on your toes then I am not sorry. I have never done this.”

“Well, we better pray that my toes make it out alive out of this apartment.”

I pull my hand out of his and lightly hit his head. He laughs at me.

“I’ll just teach you, okay? You are a smart one. I’m sure you’ll get it fast.”

“I’m book smart, not ‘street’ smart.”

“Doesn’t matter, you’ll still be smarter than the whole grid combined. They happen to not be smart. Like at all.”

“Says you?”

He gasps audibly at my comment. “Ouch, that hurt.”

“Don’t insult my brother.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Ma’am? Am I that old to you?”

“Nope, just being respectful.”

I suspiciously nod at him. “Shall we?” He asks me, referring to the dance.

He squeezes my hand as he starts explaining to me how to dance.

When he moves his right foot at the front I go back with my left and the same with my other leg and backward.

We do that while we move in a circle at the same time.

“Awesome. You’re doing it.” he hypes me up as we keep going as the song ‘Hey Stephen’ plays. We all know by whom.

We stop dancing and untangle each other.

“Is this playlist just Taylor Swift songs?”

“Let’s see. Taylor, Taylor:..” he keeps calling out her name as he scrolls through his playlist. “Pretty much.”

“Love it.”

“Who doesn’t.”

“Someone needs to get this man tickets to the Eras tour.”

“I wish. Sadly, traveling too much and have no international dates. I could fly to America - for Taylor Swift always - but Max is extra grumpy nowadays and I don’t need to piss him off.”

“Next time. Sorry about Max.”

“It’s okay. He is just being problematic, like I know him.”

We stand there as he scrolls through his phone. I study his features, being completely caught in him. Completely caught up in the way his soft hair fell on his forehead his blue eyes focused on the screen. He is so close to me that it is driving me crazy, and it was not the good kind of crazy.

The kind of crazy where I would jump his bones.

I wonder if the rumors are true about the so-called sex god.

“Yes, they are,” he says out of nowhere as he is smiling at his phone.

“Pardon me.”

He looks up at me with a neutral expression on his face. “The rumors?” he points out. “Believe me. They are true, Butterfly.”

Oh, my lord.

I said those words out loud.

I want to disappear.

Immediately.

I stutter over my words, not sure what to say after he caught me in cold blood in my thoughts.

I feel my cheeks get hotter and redder by the moment as embarrassment washed over me.

How do I explain myself?

Easy. I don't. Just be confident and act like that was okay...

I press my lips into a thin line as I hum a song that just was in my mind and slowly walk away.

I can't.

“Okay, now it's just awkward between us..”

He looked at me with a sympathetic look and brushed it off. “Only if you act awkward, Butterfly, then it would be..”

“What do you mean?”

“In my life experience, a situation is never awkward, only if you say it is awkward then it would just be that.”

“Really?”

He nods as he puts his phone away. “And the name isn't a huge thing. It's only mentioned on the weird side of social media, where you happen to be so, tell me, Butterfly. Are you a secret stalker?”

“No....” I awkwardly laugh, and just as Liam said, I am being awkward as hell.

“You sure about that?”

I nod at him, trying to smile through the pain of this situation. “Did you seriously give yourself that nickname?”

“Hey, that nickname happens to be amazing.”

“In what way?”

“A lot of ladies happen to listen to the names.”

Oh.

So, he does have someone. Like a hook-up.

How stupid am I to think Liam is different from the other drivers?

“Doesn’t it bother you?” I ask him. “That some girls only use you for sex because of the nickname?”

“Not really. Since I am mostly the ‘golden boy’ on the grid.”

I love how carefree he is.

Why can’t I do that?

Why can’t I just like Liam accept the ‘bad’ nickname given and only listen to the good ones I am given?

But no, I have to be complicated.

I want to be like him. Carefree of what people say about me and move on if they say something bad.



Chapter Twelve
LIAM

I mull over the conversation with Nate and his sister as I eat my lunch on the plane, not wanting to disturb their sibling bonding time.

After I spent the evening with her in the hotel room, we had to hop on the next plane to our next destination in Monte Carlo, Monaco.

Since we have a charity gala to attend there, we thought it would be a good idea to travel there together and maybe stay there together for a week since now it's a three-week break until Azerbaijan, Baku.

Rude or not, I did eavesdrop on their conversation.

Not exactly eavesdrop.

I sit literally in between them, so that's fun. Nate was asking her if she had started coming up with ideas for her book.

"Well, I have a few ideas on what the book could be about, but none are official yet."

"That's good, Lauri. Will I be able to read this book?"

"No." she shoots at him.

“Rude.”

“Love you too.”

I smile at their conversation. It reminds me a lot of me and Sofia back when we both didn't travel this much and had time to spend together.

“You have been quiet Liam,” Nate remarked about my silence.

Something was off with Lauren when she apologized for the nickname. And I haven't been able to get the devastated look on her face away from my mind.

“I'm good,” I told him. “Just thinking.

“Congratulations on your win and breaking my record this weekend. I'm not sure if I congratulated you yet.”

“You did. But thank you.”

Lauren comes back from wherever she is and sits back down in her seat.

But before she sat down, she put her hand on my shoulder as a kind of gesture of saying ‘Hey, I'm back to making you lose your mind.’

She is wearing sweatpants with a matching hoodie and for most of the flight, she was sitting in her little corner, writing in her notebook, and listening to music, screaming out the lyrics now and then.

“You know what I find kind of funny?” She asks us, looking up from her iPad as if we were all kind of just doing our thing.

“You two drive for rival teams but somehow are best friends.”

I never thought of it that way.

“I am his emotional support system, and he is my side chick,” Nate answers her question. “It's that easy.”

“I- You are not my emotional support system,” I complain to him.

I am a big boy; I can handle my own emotions. I don’t need him. The majority of the time.

He looks at me with one eyebrow raised.

I opened my mouth to complain and turned my head towards Lauren, who was laughing and filming on her phone.

“Two against one, that’s not fair.”

“Wrong.” I hear Alex shout from the corner as she is taking a nap and working on her notes and stuff she needs to represent to Max when we are in Baku. “Three against one.” she reminds me as she was filming the scene from afar.

How nice of them.

“Suck it, buttercup” Nate tease me with the nickname.

I just cross my arms over my chest in annoyance and lean against my chair.

Lauren stops filming and sounds like she is out of breath from laughing too much.

“Don’t you dare post that!”

“I won’t.” She continued laughing, looking like she was tearing up. “I don’t even have a public account.”

“Send it to me. I want to post it.” Nate chimes in.

“Alex?” Lauren calls out to her.

Alex gave a thumbs up and shouted, “Already have it.”

“Don’t you dare?” I get up from my leaning position and point my finger at him.

“Oh, I dare.”

Lauren just laughs away at me and him fighting. Her laugh is so angelic that I don’t even care that I am making a fool out of me right now.

Long story short.

Both Nate and Alex posted that video and now people on the internet are turning it into a meme.

Amazing.



“What’s that?” Lauren asks me curiously as she moves the fabric of my white dress shirt aside on my wrist, revealing the tattoo that I had there. The feeling of her fingers on my skin made it prickle, like the start of fireworks. If she doesn’t move her hand away soon, the fireworks might as well explode. Her touch on my skin feels like a time-ticking bomb motion.

“It’s a tattoo.”

“I can see that.” She laughs at me. “But what does it represent?”

“It’s a butterfly. My sister and I got the same one in honor of our mother.” I confess to her.

I never really tell anyone what the tattoo resembles or why I have it. I guess after eleven years I still am not ready to talk about her passing.

“Oh...” her mood changes as I mentioned to my mum. “Why a butterfly?”

I stutter over my words, not sure if I should tell her. My mum’s things always had meanings. Birds represented a loved one she lost. Like she would paint a bird that matches them, lions were a sign of strength and braveness.

And then there are butterflies.

“Just her favorite.”

She gave me a heart-warming smile and went back to slurping on her mocktail.

I hate the fact that I am attracted to her, and I hate the fact that she is making it so damn hard to move on.

No woman has ever had such power, like the power she has over me and it's a mind twist.

"I'm bored," Alex announces as we are enjoying the warming sun, outside a restaurant.

"When are you not?" Nate complains about her.

"When you are not around." She curses at him and leans back in her seat as she lets out a frustrated sigh.

Those two fights are more than me and my sister do.

I look to my left at Lauren. She was rolling her eyes at Nate and Alex for being so petty and not just giving up their stupid fight.

They hate each other for no reason.

Nate says he doesn't like her because she could easily get Lauren into something dangerous, and Alex hates him because he simply exists.

"Okay, I have an idea," Lauren announces. "How about we play a little game? Two truths and a lie. Simple right?"

"Might have to explain it to your brother more specifically. You know, slow brain processes and all that."

Nate gives her an annoyed face and flips her off.

She sarcastically smiles at him.

"Since you like talking so much, why don't you start, Alex?" Nate encouraged her.

"I'm down." She starts. "Let's start simple. I'm Spanish. I love strawberries. And I have a sister."

"You don't have a sister?" I question my answer, she just shrugs her shoulders. For Alex, you can see that she is Spanish. Lightly tanned skin, brown hair, and fierce as fuck, and doesn't take shit from anyone.

"You never mentioned a sister."

“Wroonng. And I did mention my sister. Once.”

“WHAT?!” Lauren shouts at her, almost choking on her drink. People at the restaurant turn their faces to us. “Yeah, okay, I’ll stop shouting, sorry.”

“You have a sister?” Nate raises his eyebrow at her as he answers the answer.

“Yeah, we just ehm..” she stops her talking for a second, looking down at her hands and fidgeting with her fingers. “We just grew apart. Don’t have contact with her anymore.”

“I’m so sorry, Alex.”

“Don’t pity me, please. It was a long time ago the last time I saw her, so she is long gone to me.”

I don’t pity her, I just can’t imagine being in the same situation as her and losing my sister, as she said long ago and she is only twenty-four so it must have happened when she was a teenager.

“FYI, it’s the strawberries. I’m deadly allergic.” She points out.

“Can’t be. I saw you eat strawberries once when we were at a bar.” Lauren says.

“I was just trying one. Good thing I had my Epi-pen with me.”

“You could have died.” Nate exaggerates, slowly growing furious at Alex’s curiosity.

“Yeah. I know. Guess curiosity got the best of me.”

Nate leans on his seat and massages his forehead, not pleased by Alex’s answer at all.

“Okay, maybe my idea wasn’t such a good one.”

“No, please continue. Your brother is overreacting. Like always.” Lauren playfully rolls her eyes at her, smiling at Alex calling her brother overdramatic.

He can sometimes overreact but not in this situation.

“Okay.” She breathes out and turns her head to my side, catching me glancing at her. “You want to do the honors, Calvetti. Or shall I?” Lauren asks me.

“By all means. You start.”

She nods at me. “Okay, what to start with.” She looks up, trying to think of something. I take the moment to admire her beauty. Lauren’s features shine out like the sun.

Even if dark clouds would be there, she would still shine the brightest.

“Okay..., easy ones. I...” she drags down the I. “I can’t dance, I like to play the piano and my favorite color is green.”

This is considered easy mode because I am the one who had to teach her to dance a few days ago.

“Easy.” Nate started.

“You don’t get to talk. This goes out to these two.”

Nate raises his hands at her, ready to defend and start an argument. “You don’t dance,” I state. She nods at me, satisfied with my answer.

I think so.

“Alex?”

“I agree with Liam.”

“That’s true. I told you that was an easy one.”

“That was an unfair play, just saying,” Nate complains.

“No, it wasn’t, now shush,” Alex complains to him.

Lauren and I laugh at their pettiness.

We stayed at the cafe for a while, continuing with the game.

Arguments happened there and then but went away seconds later.

“What is it like being a meme, Liam?” Alex asks me, getting on my nerves with the question. She is doing it on

purpose. She always is.

She loves getting on people's nerves. It's her specialty.

I give a mocking laugh and roll my eyes at her.

Both Nate AND Alex posted the video. He is on his Instagram and Alex is on the OFFICIAL Aravis Instagram.

Double viral.

“Oh, come on. We all know you secretly love the attention you get from the video.”

“I never said I didn't.”

“Oh, my god.” Lauren gasps as she rises from her chair, which she is leaning against with her eyes plastered on her phone.

Someone has been doing some un-wishful things and now rumors are going around about her.

“Explain it!” Lauren shot at Alex as she showed her what was on her phone screen.

“That's photoshopped.”

“That's not what the media thinks.”

“Fuck the media.” She curses out a little too loud. “They love drama. Just ignore it.”

“How can I?”

Alex reaches over to Lauren and snatches her phone from her and swipes up, deleting the tab that was open and handing her phone back. “See? This easy.”

“Unbelievable,” Lauren mumbles under her breath and buries herself back into her phone, trying to find the article that she had.



Chapter Thirteen
LAUREN

Was it a stupid idea to fly to Monaco to accompany my brother to a gala?

Definitely.

The crowds of people are making me nervous and sweat beads run down my neck, making my freshly styled hair stick to my neck like gel.

I rub my hands against my thighs, trying to keep them from sweating.

I hate anxiety sweat.

It's the worst.

If I am being quite honest, social anxiety and the fear of social media weren't something I was that afraid of.

I had to deal with social anxiety my whole life, but it was never this bad.

Well, not until almost half of Nate's private life was published. Nasty rumours were made up and cameras were following him everywhere. I was afraid that people might create some rumors about me when I published my first novel.

Famous or just known on the internet, social media brings down a person to the point they don't want to even step foot outside their homes.

Ever since my travels started, I started going out of my comfort zone more and more, but sometimes there is a limit to where my comfort is being disturbed.

One time in Melbourne we were stopped in the streets by their fans, asking for photos of their favorite drivers.

I excluded myself from the photos and was the photographer for them. I didn't mind really.

It made me feel okay.

But multiple people then started asking me for photos on the streets when I was alone getting food or something.

I didn't mind that either until they called me Nate's sister.

Yeah...

An exciting moment for me, I guess. I am known for my brother. Hiding still in his shadows as he is the amazing racing driver.

It made me feel as little as a rice kernel and like I needed Nate to make my name known.

It made my self-esteem go way lower than it already is.

And another thing that makes me anxious.

Gala's.

Rich people pull out their wallets and act like they are better just because they have money.

They don't make me anxious.

Just mad.

I looked out into the distance, completely ignoring Alex as she babbled about something. Just get through the night and everything will be okay.

You know it is useless to panic now.

They might think you are pathetic.

So, just suck it up, Lauren. It's only a Gala.

"Lauren," Alex calls out as she puts a hand on my shoulder with a concerned look on her face. "Are you okay, sweetie?"

"Yeah, yeah I am fine." I nod at her, feeling like my lungs are trapped in a small cage, cutting my air short.

I take a deep breath and let out a harsh breather, trying to calm down my nerves.

Just count down from one hundred.

97...

94...

91...

It feels like the room started to go quiet and a small beeping around runs through my ear. Like a broken flute that keeps playing in my ears and I can't unhear it.

And I am able to hear the beating of my own heart.

"You don't look fine."

Alex, I am fine. Just need to learn how to control my nerves in huge crowds.” I can myself stutter over my words, trying not to let anxiety get the worst of me.

Not tonight.

Please not tonight.

“Okay, bathroom. Now.” Alex pulls me up by my arm and slowly shows me the way to the bathroom.

“Alex. Really I am okay.” I reasoned with her as she sat with me on the bathroom floor and I started to calm down.

Huh. It’s quite cozy here.

Dim lights with instrumental music played over the speakers.

It was fancy in her too.

It had a gold sink. Ha-ha.

A gold sink. People here in Monaco do love to throw money out the window.

“You look like just cried over a really good book.”

I laugh at her comment as I wipe away the tears that fell down my cheek. Trying not to smudge my makeup. “Want to talk about what happened?”

“I just panicked. I don’t know. It’s really nothing.” I mumble the words, feeling a little embarrassed about the fact that I had a panic attack because of a crowd of people.

A crowd of people. How weird can I be?

I thought therapy helped me with these kinds of things. I thought therapy would fix me.

You can say I am too damaged to be fixed.

It’s like I am seventeen again and my ‘friend’ told me to get a grip on myself because I embarrassed her in front of her crush.

She moves from her spot in front of me to beside me.

“It’s not nothing, Lauren. Always talk to me okay.”
I nod at her. She leans her head on my shoulder and I lean mine on top of hers.

“How is it going with Liam?” she teases me, trying to distract me and lighten the mood.

I groan in frustration. “He said I am a ‘friend’,” I tell her, toning the word friend in a mocking tone.

“He said what?”

“Forget him.”

“No way. That twat just friend-zoned you.”

“Your friend is right.” I hear a voice talk from a toilet cabinet.

She is leaning against the door frame in a tight black suit dress that perfectly captures her boobs.

Damn.

“If he friend-zoned you, you better leave it.” She walks to the sink and washes her hands. As soon as she finishes drying them, she leans against the counter.

“I’m Gisela. Nice to meet you.”

I put my hand up in the air, trying to wave at her a little.
“Lauren. And this is Alex.”

“I know who you both are. Alex Howard, Public relations specialist and works in her first year for the Aravis Racing team. Very impressive how fast you made it into the sports industry.”

“Are you a stalker?” Alex hisses at her, kind of disturbed.

“Lauren Harper. New York time Bestselling author of your romance novel called ‘Never Again,’ but most people call you Nate Harper’s little sister. Kind of sad if you ask me.”

Okay, now I am freaking out. And ouch didn’t need to point out the little sister thing.

“I’m Gisela. Die-hard Formula One fan, and my father is the team principal of the Golden Racing team. And I kind of heard Nate talk to Marco about you.” she reasons, feeling relieved that she is some kind of stalker.

“Oh, he talks about me. How sweet.” Alex chimes in, making a gagging noise.

“Not you, his sister.”

Oh shit. I do not want to be here when it escalates.

“He talks really high about you actually. He says that you are the reason he didn’t retire yet. By traveling with him this season you gave him a good reason to continue racing with his head up.”

I feel my heart burst at that information.

Nate does this still for me.

“Gisela? Is that Brazilian?” I asked her, as I found her name interesting.

“German.”

“I don’t like her,” Alex whispers in my ear like Gisela isn’t standing in front of us.

She is beautiful. Lightly tan skin and the most beautiful brown hair that she wore to mid-length.

To her outfit, she wore matching black heels, and a black Calvin Klein bag was hanging over her shoulder.

One more person I can spend time with, so I am not bored after Alex leaves because she has a ton of work to do with Liam and Arden.

I mean come on.

Liam is a troublemaker and never thinks before he shoots something out of his mouth.

And Arden the fucker who can’t seem to stay away from relationship dramas.

Or more like one-night stand dramas.

A lot of work

“Mind if I sit with you?”

“Not at all. Sit.” I point to the empty place next to me.

She sits down next to me and Alex scowls at me.

“Isn’t it a better idea to be out there and not in here?” I ask Gisela.

“Probably. But my father has been getting on my nerves. I need a break from him.”

“Why am I just finding out that you are his daughter? You seem sweet.” Alex describes Gisela, a hint of sarcasm hiding in her tone. “How do you survive him? No offense, but your father is a dirtbag.”

“Alex!”

“I just live with it. That doesn’t mean that I will survive, and I don’t attend Grand Prix enough for him to annoy me to death. Thank God.” I press my lips into a thin line, surprised Gisela answered Alex’s inane question.

“Interesting.”



Where the hell is everyone? I have been stuck with Ben Barlen for half an hour without a rescue.

I'm not sure I can survive another second of him talking about his turtles.

Cute and all but doesn't he have something else in life to talk about? How he needs to grow out his hair because he looks like he is in his forties instead of his twenties.

My phone rings.

I excuse myself from him, silently thanking whoever decided to call me at this brilliant moment.

"Thank you, you amazing human for getting me out of my misery."

"Good." I hear the other line say. "Now help me out of my misery."

"What kind of trouble did Alex get you in this time?" I ask Lauren, knowing damn well, whenever Alex is around, she is the trouble.

“Why are you attacking Alex?”

“Where do you need help?” I changed the subject.

“At the women’s bathroom...” I was about to protest before she cut me off. “And before you say no. We just need you to help us unlock the door. We are locked in the bathroom.”

“How?”

“I have no idea.”

Unbelievable.

“Okay, I will be there in a minute.”

I hang up the phone and stuff it back in my pocket.

My eyes wander around the crowded room, trying to find a straightforward way to the bathrooms.

Guess I have to squeeze through the crowds.

I took the straight lane out of the crowd to the side of the room where the crowds got a little less and made my way to her bathroom all the way around the room. I took a left turn and saw the women’s bathroom closed, but nothing suspicious about it.

I walked towards it and wiggled the handle, but the door didn’t budge a little.

“Liam?” Lauren calls out, sounding unsure if it was me.

“Yep. What happened to the door?”

I call out hearing a muffled sound, not understanding what she is talking about.

“What?”

“We have no idea what happened.” She starts talking in a loud tone. “We wanted to leave and couldn’t get it to open.”

“Strange.”

“I know right.”

“Liam, I swear to god if you don’t get us out of here in a minimum of a minute, I will strangle you.” Alex curses at me from the other side. “It’s getting claustrophobic in here.”

“Chill down your nerves, Satan. I will get you out.”

I am here to help, and she is the one threatening me.

“Call me Satan one more time and you’ll never see daylight again.”

“Way to get a ticket out of a difficult situation.”

I continue wiggling the handle, trying to find a solution. “Does anyone have a hairpin? Maybe try opening the with one.”

“Gisel- “I hear a name being called out. There is another one there?”

I hear clicking on the lock.

“Didn’t work. The hairpin broke.”

Fantastic technic, I guess.

“Any ideas from your side?”

“Nope. We tried everything possible.”

“I’ll try Nate.” I reach for my phone when she holds me off.

“Don’t bother. He isn’t here. He left not ten minutes ago.”

“Why did he leave?”

“Wasn’t feeling good.”

“Great.”

“Tell me about it.” She chuckles and laughs at the situation she got herself into.

“How the hell are you so calm?!” I flinch at the sudden time change in Alex’s voice.

She needs to calm down.

“Why stress over something we can’t change at the moment?” I hear an unfamiliar voice tell her.

“Who is in there with you? Which poor human did you drag in there with you?”

I hear Lauren laugh at my comment.

“Gisela.” She tells me her name. Wait, isn’t that Henry’s daughter? “And she got herself in this situation, we didn’t drag her.”

“Listen to your girlfriend.” She shouts to me through the door.

I wish.

The other side went completely silent.

“Did someone die?”

“Nope. All limbs and brains are attached.” Lauren answers.

“Wouldn’t want a crime scene in there.”

“Who does?”

“Can’t you just break through the door?” The unfamiliar calm voice of Gisela’s asked me.

“No way in hell,” I tell her. “The bathrooms are small, and I don’t want anyone hurt.”

“Then go get security.”

“None here. Don’t you think I looked out for one?”

“In a gala, where there is money and alcohol and whatnot - and there is no security. What is wrong with this place.”

“I’ll call Arden,” I announce.

I take my phone from my pocket and dial his number, sending me straight to voicemail. I tried again, but this time the line rang on the other side.

With the last ounce of hope, I wait for him to pick up only for it to go to voicemail.

What is it with everyone here and their phones?

If you have one, use it.

“We already tried him.”

“Could have told me sooner.”

“Sorry.” Lauren apologizes in a small tone behind the locked door.

“I will break through that door soon.”

“Calm down, Alex. Liam is trying to help. Just be patient.” She informs Alex.

“How should I be calm, when I feel like a mouse in a claustrophobic cage in here with two other mice?”

“Don’t call me a mouse.” Gisela fires back at her, sounding kind of annoyed.

“Can you throw me a hairpin from under the door? I’ll try to see if it opens from here.”

They start mumbling something behind the door. I look down, seeing a hairpin slide on the floor.

I pick it up, bend it, and slowly start inserting it into the lock.

A few seconds pass and I keep turning the hairpin in the lock until I hear a click.

I stare at the door before I pull out the pin and turn the handle, the door finally opening.

“Thank God,” I whisper under my breath as Alex hurried out the door into the free path, dramatically praying.

Lauren slowly walks out of the door.

She looks like a princess in her long green dress that goes down to her ankles and is flowy from the waist down.

She looks at Alex and laughs. She comes closer and wraps her arms around my neck.

In a shocking moment from her affection, I wrap my arms around her waist.

“Thank God, at least someone knows how to use their phone.” She mumbles next to my ear, her comment making me laugh.

“You actually saved me from talking to Ben Barlen. I can’t take his voice anymore.” I tell her as soon as she retrieves her arms from me. I kept one of my arms around her waist.

A weird source of something traveling up my body, fuelling me with adrenaline.

What the hell?

“Understandable.” She laughs, her soft laughs echoing in my mind. “Wait. Isn’t Ben Barlen who keeps talking about his turtles?”

“Sadly.”

“Sanny, Nola and what was the last one?” She snaps her fingers, trying to get the name of the last turtle.

“Bany.”

“Yes. Bany. Weird names.”

“Tell me about it.”

“Once again. Thank you for your help.” She walks away. I drop my arm from her waist and stuff my hands in my front jeans’ pockets, standing there like I am the most awkward person ever.

Maybe it’s because I am but she doesn’t need to know that.

“Okay.” She announces as she claps with her hands. “Let’s go.”

“You’re leaving?”

“I mean it’s pretty late and...” she lets out a deep breath. “Alex has something planned for tomorrow.”

“Okay.” I let out a short laugh and gave her a quick last hug, considering I wanted and needed it.

“Come on, Freckles.” She calls her a joke and Alex returns her with a frustrated look.

She bid me a last goodbye, looking over her shoulder and waving at me.

My eyes never left her.

I watch her walk away until she is out of sight. I didn’t even notice I was smiling the whole time.

“You are an idiot.” Gisela cursed at me as she was standing next to me.

“Excuse you.” I don’t know nor does she know me, and she calls *me* an idiot.

“Friends? Really?”

I raise my eyebrow at her, confused about what she meant by the word friend.

“Do something before you mess it all up.” She leaves, walking towards the party. “My advice.”

Friend.

Does she mean Lauren?



“Ha ha!” Lauren shouts as she takes the last move. “Check mate, Calvetti. I won.” She happily dances in her seat.

“I hate chess. How are you so good at this?”

“I used to go to a chess club.” I raise my eyebrow at her in surprise.

“What? I was a nerd back then, minus the ‘no-friends’ and the clothes. I was hot back in high school and smart too. Which makes me even better.”

“You did have glasses.” Nate cuts in, laying lazily on the couch.

“Not anymore. I started using contact lenses at fifteen.”

“Wrong,” Nate calls her out on her wrong answer.

“Sixteen! Oh, my word.” She shouts at him. Nate let out a wicked smile. “Can you just not?”

“Not what? I didn’t do anything.” he raises his hands at her in defense as she looks at him like she is about to burst out in flames.

“Did you know Nate still has Pooh Bear from when he was five?”

“Lauren!”

“What, I didn’t do anything?”

“I didn’t do anything!” He tells her in a high-pitched voice, reflecting on her answer.

“True.” She answers him casually. “But I still felt like saying that.” She smiles at him sarcastically. Nate looks at her with a death glare and she just blows him a kiss.

In a sarcastic way.

“Watch out in your sleep.” he tells her jokingly to which she answers back with a sarcastic ‘I love you.’

The race in Baku wasn’t for another 2 weeks, which meant we had enough time to kill on my yacht here in Monaco.

Sunbathing and just enjoying the warm weather on our time off.

But currently, we are in my apartment because the beloved Alex couldn’t take the heat.

But yet she managed to convince Lauren not to spend the weeks in England.

Which I am happy about, so I cannot be mad at her for today.

“I am ordering food. What do you guys have in mind?” Lauren jumps up from her seat, standing in front of the living room table watching us with an eyebrow raised as she places her hands on her hips.

“Oh, I have an idea,” Nate tells her. “Cook.”

“What makes you think I will cook for...” she counts the people that were spread out on my sofa. “Six people.”

“Because you suggested it? And it’s way healthier and Marco can help you.”

“Ugh. No. Sounds cheap. No offense to your cooking though, Marco.” She points to him as he is reading his book.

He keeps his gaze on his books as he raises his hands at her. “None taken.”

“Great.” She claps her hands.

“If you don’t want to cook, I can just prepare a meal for us,” I suggested to her. “I need to improve my cooking skills, so what better way to do that than this?”

“Okay, great. Thanks.” She doesn’t even hesitate.

I let out a low laugh and grabbed my car keys from the living room table. “I’m off shopping,” I announce, rounding the table over to her. I point at her. “You are going to keep me company.” I grab her by her upper arm.

Act like this doesn’t affect you, Liam.

“What,” she shouts. “I don’t want to.”

“Autsch.”

“No offense to you, but when you said that you’ll cook, I didn’t expect to help.”

“Too bad. You are coming with me.”

She groans in frustration, I just ignore it, so it doesn’t get to my head.

We walk together, side by side until we reach my car. I open the passenger door and wait until she gets in to shut it and sprint to the driver’s side.

“I still don’t get why I have to come.”

“Because one,” I raise my finger in the air as I lean my elbow on the armrest and look her deep in the eyes as she raises her chin, challenging me. “I like your company.”

“Who doesn’t?” she laughs. I slightly turn my head and raise an eyebrow at her. “I’m sorry. Go on.”

“Second,” I hold up a second finger. “You are the one who wants to eat, so...”

“I still don’t get why I have to come with you.” I let out a frustrated sigh and dropped my hand.

“I’m going to pretend that it doesn’t hurt me.”

“No offense to you, but I was ready for my day nap.”

“Too bad. You are skipping it today.” I turn to the road and start the car.

She rolls her eyes at me, leans back in her chair, and looks out the window.

“You are a stubborn one.”

“Do whatever you want with that information.”

I hum.

The car revs as I press the button.

I speed out of the driveway and onto the streets.

“Can I have the aux?” she jumps up in the moment of silence we had. I reach for the cable and hold it for her to take.

She smiles at me and plunges her phone into the aux.

That godforsaken smile.

“What songs are you playing?”

“Gracie Abrams.”

“And that is who?” I ask her. Her name is familiar but I’m not sure I have heard of her.

She slowly turns her head with a gaping mouth, staring at me like I just committed a crime.

“You don’t know Gracie Abrams?”

“No?” I did not only question her but also myself.

“Where do you live? 1920?”

“I know Taylor Swift. Does that sound like behind the times for you?”

“Okay,” she takes a loud breather. “From the beginning. Gracie Abrams is like a child of Taylor Swift. Like Olivia Rodrigo.”

“Hmm.” I hum and nod at her, turning my head frequently from the road to her.

“Her songs are kind of sad but amazing.”

“Okay, play me a good one and I’ll rate it.”

“Are you up for the job, judge?”

“Always.” I watch as she blushes when I wink at her, looking down at her phone and smiling.

I smile and feel myself blush as I look ahead of the road.



“Wait, what are you making for dinner?” She asks as she pushes around the cart, leaning over it and putting in everything she finds.

“Are you just going to throw the whole store in that cart?” I ask her, pointing from the shelf to the cart.

“Yes.”

“Good to know.” I press my lips into a thin line. If she wants... broccoli chips and hazelnut milk, then so be it. “And to answer your question. I am making roasted alla Norma with rigatoni.”

“That sounds...” she looks at me with a confused face. “Healthy?”

“It is healthy and tastes awesome. Can’t make anything with too much fat. Strict drivers’ diet and shit.”

“Oh okay.”

I watch her in admiration as she scoots down the aisle, pushing the cart and jumping on it.

It’s like she is with no care in the world and just enjoys the moment of fun.

I have come to notice that Lauren struggles with social anxiety anytime we are out, so seeing her not care for a hot moment and just enjoy her time, makes me feel great because whenever she smiles and is happy, it is like the sun is shining.

She is like a girl who keeps herself locked up from the public because she feels scared of people finding out who she really is.

And she is experiencing daylight for the first time.

Real-life butterfly.

There is a reason I gave her that nickname, her beauty, and free spirit is one of them.

I walk down the aisle to her as she starts putting the groceries in the checkout lane.

“You don’t mind what I got for myself. I can pay for it.”

“Don’t you dare even think about it!”

“Alright chill, Calvetti.” God, I love the way my last name rolls off her tongue.

“Just next time. It’s on me.”

Over my dead body.



Chapter Sixteen
LAUREN

“So, wait wait wait. Gracie is an underground artist?”

“Yes.” I nod at him, as he repeats the information, I just told him.

“But this year she is opening for Taylor Swift. On the eras tours.”

“Correct.” I nod again. “Well, she is not underground anymore. Her Spotify profile blew up soon after Blondie posted about her.”

He parks the car in the driveway and shuts it off. I get out of the passenger seat and head over to the trunk to get the groceries. He comes back soon after and starts unloading the car with the rest of the groceries and carrying multiple bags into the apartment.

I grab the rest that was left and sprint into the apartment.

As soon as I lay out the bags on the kitchen island, I realized that no one was there anymore.

“Where is everybody?”

He shrugs his shoulders, clueless as me about the disappearance of our friends.

I hear screaming coming from upstairs and the next moment Alex comes running down with an angry, but smiley? Arden chasing her. She stops in her tracks, the blond American almost crashing into her as she realizes that we are watching them act like teenagers.

“He wanted to read my texts to my hook-up. Why would I let him?” she answers our unasked question, which I am pretty sure no one was going to ask.

“Why do you even have a hook-up?”

Why am I even asking this question?

“I need to blow off some steam now and then,” she answers casually with no care in the world like we are her most trusted friends.

“I didn’t need to know that.” Liam fake gags as he goes to the sink and pours himself a glass of water.

“See what you did! You traumatized him!” I point to Liam.

“Oh please. Like he doesn’t have a secret hook up no one knows about. Everyone does.”

Hearing Alex say those words might have just been the worst stab in the heart.

Why do I care?

I raise my chin high, acting like it didn't affect me. "I don't."

"I don't have one either," Liam says.

"Gosh, you people are lame," Alex says and walks away.

I am just going to pretend like this conversation never happened.

I turn back around after the shocking moment of what I just experienced. Liam was already packing out the groceries and getting started with the cooking.

"Mind if I keep you company?" I shoot him a big smile.

"Not at all."

I knock against the island. "Great, I'll go get the wine."

"No drinking." He stops me before I can even take a step out of his sight.

"Come on."

"Please." he looks at me with deceiving eyes. I can't say no to those. They are freaking compelling. He could tell me to get on my knees and I would bloody obey him with those forsaken blue eyes that I wish I could just pluck out of his skull so that they don't affect me anymore.

I watch him cook, fully concentrating on the cooking.

"What made you smile?" he asks me, not even looking away from the garlic he is chopping up. I didn't even realize I was smiling until he pointed it out.

"Nothing," I drop the smile, acting like this just happened.

Be chill, Lauren. "Absolutely nothing."

"Doesn't seem like it." he looks up, batting his eyelashes at me.

Never mind. I can't be chill.

I chuckle at him and just try to not blush like always.

I mentally scream at myself when he turns away to wash the cutting board in the sink.

Why is it that he has a massive effect on me that I don't need? He is my brother's best friend. And it's Liam.

The first friend I made when I got here. Don't want to ruin that because I like him.

Or have a crush on him.

But let's not forget the fact that he is smoking hot, so I don't blame myself for crushing on him, but you know.

“Who are you talking to?”

“What?”

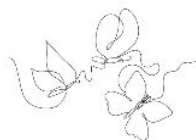
“The better question is...” he placed the knife down and leaned against the counter, staring at me with a big smile. “Who is the smoking hot guy?”

I said it out loud.

“Wha- wha- what.” I stare at him with widened eyes, not sure how to get out of this situation now.

I'm not sure if I even can. He will squeeze it out of me.

“Excuse me, I need to use the restroom.” I excuse myself and make my way to the restroom, trying to seem as cool as possible, like I was running away, even though I was but he doesn't need to know that.



I managed to run away and come back with bloody flushed cheeks and with the determination to just ignore his presence

but not him.

I have no idea if that makes sense but to me it does and that's all that matters.

"Whether you like it or not, we are going to Liam's yacht," Nate shouts at Alex as she tries to find another excuse to not leave the apartment tomorrow. "And you can stay here if you want. Not like anyone is going to miss you."

He yelped as I hit him on the back of his head and shot him an annoyed look.

"I want her there."

"That makes one of us." he rolls his eyes and massages his head where I hit him.

He is dramatic.

I didn't hit him that hard.

All six of us sit down at the huge dining table Liam had - I have no idea why he has such a huge one, he lives alone but that's beside the point.

But I believe the point of this lunch was to be together as friends and for them to leave their rivalries aside.

I think today was the first time at lunch or any get-together where I didn't sit in a corner and listen to the conversations, wishing to be involved.

I was in the conversation without even having to beg to be there.

I am not invisible to them, and I think that's what makes this trip better than I expected. And also makes me feel the most welcome in this friend group. I don't have to beg them to let me talk with them.

"You kissed Liam?" Alex whisper-screams to me.



Chapter Seventeen LAUREN

“Boom, get that Liam!” I shout as the ping pong hits the last red cup, naming me the winner.

I jump in a circle, celebrating my win.

He laughs at my enthusiasm.

I laugh as I slowly take the ball out of the red solo cup, making sure I don't touch the beer and hand it over to him. He reaches over to me, taking the cup, his cold rings lightly grazing my fingers and his touch making an electric source run through my body.

Damn your attraction to the wrong guy. Okay, maybe not the wrong guy but the wrong attraction.

I clap my hands in excitement as he chugs down the beer in one swing. He wipes the beer that runs down his face with the back of his hand, making me weak in the knees with that move. The white dress shirt he wore, was perfectly fitted to his formed abs. He left a few buttons open, giving me a small peek of his chest. The white dress shirt was paired with khaki pants that perfectly clung to his long legs. Makes me wonder all the time what they'll look like while-

“You should stop staring at me like that, otherwise I would get the feeling you want to have sex with me.” His rough voice

ran through my head, leaving me up day and night and disturbing me from my sex fantasy.

I scrunch up my nose, throwing sarcastic noises at him. "That's a sign of narcissism." I point out. "You should get it checked out, I heard it's dangerous. Deadly dangerous."

And deadly attractive.

He smirks and rolls his tongue against the inside of his cheek as a wicked grin spreads across his face. "Believe it or not, you can check out someone's arse without being attracted to them."

"So, you were staring at my arse?"

Great job Lauren. You just outed yourself and admitted to checking out his arse.

"So, what if I was?"

"Did you just admit to staring at my arse?" He asks, laughing. He is a little taller than me. I smile up at him, challenging him - sort of.

"Yes, I believe I did," I answer, now laughing as well. Liam chuckles, his eyes wandering over my body.

I bit my bottom lip and felt my smile fall and for some reason, I was blushing. *Again.*

I clear my throat, attempting to gather myself. I stare up at Liam, jutting my chin out. "What makes you think I want to have sex with you anyway?" I ask him, knowing damn well I would be down for sex with him at any given time.

"I think I got my answer." He winks at me as he left me alone and went outside to the garden in his big arse house.

Why do I always get myself in these kinds of situations with him?

And I still don't understand why he is so overdressed while I am here in a white bikini with a white scarf wrapped around my waist - for fashion reasons, *obviously.*

I make my way to the huge garden, seeing it completely empty except for Alex near the pool, sunbathing. We never made it to the yacht because apparently it needed some repairs and so we decided to stay put in the apartment.

I walked around trying to look for anyone who was in the mood to talk because I was getting bored over here.

Nate and the other guys are walking around the city, doing what they are doing. I don't want to know, and I think I am drunk, but just a little bit.

Like a tiny bit. As small as a rice kernel.

I let out a sudden scream when I felt a heavy body pull me down to the pool.

I swim up to the surface, taking in oxygen. "Liam, what the fuck!?" I hear Alex scream from her chair. "Are you okay, Lauren?"

I push my hair back to prevent the water from getting into my eyes. I point a thumbs up in the air, signaling to her that I am doing okay. I turn around seeing Liam swim there in his spot, shirtless, now seeing his defined chest. From my view, I can count an eight-pack.

Damn. Maybe not so wrong, Lauren.

Don't go the wrong way...

The voices in my head fight about whether it's a good thing or not to find this view so gut-wrenching hot. *Definitely a good thing.*

I shoot him an annoyed look and swim to the edge of the pool. I hear the water splash behind not thinking much of it all. I feel a warm hand wrap around my ankle and pull me down into the water. The oxygen to my lungs shortens.

I swim up to the surface again and inhale a deep breath. A few seconds later he comes up. He shakes his hair to get the water out and then runs his hand through them, pushing them back.

We just stay there. Frozen in our spots and just regulating our breaths and staring at each other like this will be the last time.

Fuck regulating my breaths and oxygen. I feel my heart race at his stare. My skin buzzes at the cool feeling of the water. Water droplets travel down from my skin into the water.

Warmth rushes to the pit of my stomach and spreads through me like fire.

His gaze follows the droplets as his eyes scan my body. The space between us felt like it didn't even exist.

With a swish move, I splash water on him. He growls in anticipation with a laugh. I smiled at him as the water war had started. "No, no, no!" I repeated as he swam over to me, and I tried to keep my distance. "No!" I let out a shriek as he wrapped his arms around my waist and lifted me lightly. He pulls me down with his whole weight under the water, we are tied together.

His arms keep a firm grip on my waist, making it feel like a ring of fire was wrapped around it. And this time, the need for air wasn't because I was underwater. His touch takes my breath away more than anyone or anything could.

And the splashing and dunking war went on for some time.

Surprisingly enough, I managed to dunk him into the water more than he could me. My time at the gym is paying off. Finally.

"I swear to god if you get water on me, I will drown you in the dead sea." Alex threatened us as the water from the pool was going everywhere.

"Don't be a baby. It's just water."

She flips us off, looking back into her magazine with her sunglasses on her head.

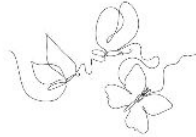
"I think she is angry." I whisper to him.

"You think?" I nod at him.

“The first one to dunk the other wins?”

I didn't even let him think of an answer before I draped my arms around his shoulder from behind and dunked him into the water.

I'm the winner.



“Don't you dare think about it!” I hear Alex screams at Liam.

We got out of the pool, and I made it my mission to sunbathe. So that is exactly what I did.

“Liam!” I hear Alex's high-pitched scream and the next thing I know, a bucket of freezing cold water hits me, wetting me from head to toe. Shivers ran along my whole body and the shock blinded me as I couldn't speak due to the cold.

“Ahh!” I scream out, pulling my sunglasses off my nose and seeing a laughing Liam run away with the bucket rolling on the floor that he just dumped on me.

“What the hell, Liam?!” I scream after him and make a run to catch him.



I should run the marathon because who knew I could run this fast?

But in the end, she still caught me, and well...

We were outside when she caught me and shoved me into the pool.

She is strong *as fuck*.

My girl is strong as hell, and I am her proud unknown boyfriend.

Little did she know. Or forgot. I have fast reflexes and drag her along with me.

I am fast and furious.

I watch her as she climbs out of the pool, the white bikini she was wearing clinging to her body, defining her curves and the top barely covering her chest.

The sight of her like that made the blood rush to my dick, and the shorts that I was wearing got tight.

Her wet blond hair ran down her back, and the water droplets slowly started traveling down her toned legs.

Once I had the fantasy about those same legs clinging to my shoulders as I devoured her, and she just screamed my name.

I watched her walk all the way to her seat before I turned back around and found Alex giving me a dirty look.

I stare at her in confusion.

She rolls her eyes at me and mouths “Are you stupid...?”

Did I see that correctly?

I climb out of the pool, walk over to her, and ask her what her fucking problem is.

She always has a problem no matter what I do.

It’s even worse with Nate.

He can’t even breathe.

She will insult and complain to him about his ‘loud’ breathing.

“You like her and get a fucked-up boner around her but won’t ask her out? Where are your manners?” She whisper-shouts at me, trying not to be too loud but still loud enough that there is a possibility that Lauren heard her.

“What?!” I shout, not realizing that my tone is a little too loud.

“What? Did you break a nail?” Lauren casually asks me.

Alex sputters out a laugh. “Nope, James Berkley just came out as gay.” She announces.

I was confused a little at first about why she was saying this. It’s just a small cover-up story.

“I thought he was married.”

“My exact thought.” I participate in the conversation.

“Weird, but congratulations to him,” Lauren mumbles under her breath. She lays back on her seat and scrolls through her phone.

I turn my head to Alex, giving her a “Are you serious?” look.

“He really did. I’m not joking.” She admits and shows on her phone the news gossip she found on the page called Paddock News and Gossip on Twitter.

“What?!” I shout once again. I didn’t expect that and the fact that she covered up our conversation so fast with the true news is just shocking to me.

“James is gay!”

Alex shouts out as she doesn’t realize Arden has sneaked up on us. She punched him on the shoulder, and he just laughed at her.

Wow, this is the first time Arden laughs.

Did he take drugs?

“And we are back and ready for battle.” I heard Nate shout as he made his way to us with all the others.

I turn my gaze to Lauren and give her a known smirk, telling her that it’s time to go back to the pool.

She looks at me with wide eyes. “No, I just finished drying myself.”

“We just got out of the pool.”

“I don’t care, let me be.”

“Come on, Lauren.” I plead with her. “It’ll be fun. We will crush them.” I walk over to her and hold out my hand for her to take.

She pushes my hand away and looks back down at her phone.

“Don’t make me do something you won’t like.”

“And that is?” *Wrong answer*. She shouldn’t have asked. Now I am determined to show her.

I pick her up bridal style and jump in the pool with her in my arms. She squeals and holds onto me tightly, like she is

afraid I might let her fall.

“Arsehole!” She shouts at me as she gets back from underwater and keeps splashing water at me. Every time I feel like I can breathe and see again, she splashes even more water on me. We were acting like children who just discovered how fun it is to play in the water.

“Okay, enough, please!” She stops and looks at me and raises an eyebrow in my direction.

Soon after Nate followed suit and jumped in.

“Can’t you jump in like a human?! Jesus,” Alex complains to him as the water splashes all the way over to her.

“Since it’s getting on your nerves, then no.”

She flips him off.

And they say I act like a child.

We swam around for a few minutes before we realized that we were missing one person for the chicken game.

Who doesn’t love to play chicken?

“Alex!” Lauren shouts out for her. “You want to join us?”

“Depends, who’s my partner?”

Lauren and I both turn to look at Nate. “No,” Alex answered quickly and went back to her business of reading her magazine.

“Please.” Lauren pleads with her.

“Who says I want her as my partner?” Nate complains.

“Shut up. Please.” Lauren hisses at him.

Lauren looked back to her friend and stared her down, her soft brown eyes narrowing as she stared at Alex before she finally gave in. “okay, fine,” Alex rolled her eyes. “But if I drown, I am coming for your entire bloodline,” she says as she wags her finger at all of us. Especially Nate.

“Helloooo?” Lauren shouts at her pointing to the obvious fact that she is Nate’s sister.

“If I say his entire bloodline, then you count. Sorry, sweetie.”

“Very nice words to hear from your best friend.”

“I’m always nice.”

That’s a lie. We all know that. She knows that. I know that. Everyone knows that.

“Anyways. Down you go, Calvetti.”

I smile at her and look at her with an eyebrow raised. “I wouldn’t mind, Butterfly.”

I wouldn’t mind one bit going down on her fucking body and cherishing it the way it should be.

She looks at me with wide eyes and mouths an ‘Oh my god. You are so dead.’

Then I will die a happy man between her legs.

She swims behind me, puts her hands on my shoulders, and dunks me under the water. I make a signature pirate goodbye sign before I close my eyes and go underwater. She places her legs on my shoulder and soon enough I get up again, with her sitting on my shoulders, my hands relaxing on her thighs.

I feel her breath hitch under my touch. “Let’s get this battle started. Losers own the winners anything they want.”

“Lauren, you bitch,” she calls that nice?

“I don’t have that kind of money to buy Liam the stupid watch he wants.” I can afford that myself, but like they say, gifts are always appreciated.

“That’s why you have Nate.” She points out. “Think smarter, not harder, Freckles.”

“Don’t call me that.”

“Can you stop bickering and let’s get started,” Nate complains to them, as Alex is positioned on his shoulders.

“Please.”

“Wait.” Alex holds us up. “Where is Arden?”



Chapter Nineteen
LAUREN

“Wait.” Alex holds us up. “Where is Arden?”

We stop for a moment. I prop my arm on Liam's head and turn to look around for the blond-haired American.

Wasn't he just here?

"Wait why are we looking for Arden?"

"Because he is our friend?" Alex points out to Nate, seeming worried about where he went. "Well, your friend. I am his babysitter and just lost the child I am supposed to look after."

"Lauren?" Liam calls out for me, He groans as I look down at him, realizing I was putting all my weight on his head.

"Sorry." I apologize and laugh. In a moment of not turning on my brain, I look down at him upside down and stroke his cheeks that turned red thanks to me.

What the hell is wrong with me?

I looked back up as soon as I realized what it must have looked like from Nate's and Alex's point of view. It looked like we were kissing, the spider man upside down kind of kissing.

Which if I think about it is bloody hot.

My god.

With rosy cheeks, I look towards Alex who is smirking at me and giving me the kind of look that says something like, "Are you sure just friends?"

Yes, Alexandra Howard – yes that's her full name. she hates it when people call her that- I am sure that we are just friends.

Nothing more.

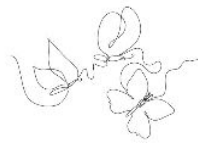
And hopefully nothing less.

One moment when Alex and I were doing a staring contest and talking with our eyes, we went to being pushed off their shoulders into the water.

Fuckers, while we were talking, they were planning a revenge plan for talking instead of playing chicken.

It sounds so funny saying we played chicken.

“I will drown you, Harper.”



Three weeks went by faster than a guy can hold when he is about to come.

No joking.

It feels like yesterday we were in the pool, but it has been almost two weeks since then.

And now we are in Baku, the guys getting ready for the media and all the kinds of interviews they must do.

That includes Alex.

She has been a wreck and completely out of her mind and in a different world for the past few days.

I have no idea what happened, she wouldn't tell me.

But I'll wait for her to tell me when she is ready.

“Have you seen Arden?” she asks me as she looks through her paper connects her earpiece incorrectly and gets ready for an interview with her manager at the paddock and for the conference.

The paddock can get bloody loud so this should help her block out some of the noises and listen to what her manager must tell her and get a clear message to Arden.

“No, sorry.”

She smiles at me.

She always does this.

For some reason, she loves it when I say sorry because she thinks my accent makes it even sweeter.

And I don't mind.

I used to get made fun of the way I said school or pronounced words and now when she smiles because she thinks my accent is cute, it makes me happy.

Sort of.

It sounds weird but that's just how it is.

“Okay, I need to leave, duty calls.” She gives a quick kiss on the cheeks and runs off.

It's a normal European thing apparently to kiss each other goodbye or hello. I learned that by spending time with Alex and Liam.

They greet almost everyone – mostly close ones like family and friends – on the cheek.

I think it's cute.

Thank you, Mum and I guess Nate for forcing – or convincing me to travel around the world and not just Paris.

I guess I do like it here on the paddock.

More than I expected.

Fuck.

Now I am not sure if it is a good thing or a bad one.

What if I fall even more in love with the motor world that I never want to stop accompanying my brother?

What if I want to travel again next year?

Will Nate still want that?

Will Alex be there?

Will I ever manage to write my next novel?

I haven't even started.

I only started with the breakdown of the characters and what plotline could be possible.

But other than that, I am hopeless.

What if I can't keep up my name as New York Bestselling author and I will only be known as Nate's little sister?

Seems like nothing would change.

People already only see me as Nate Harper's little sister.

The legend and youngest pole sitter there were in the formula.

Four-time world champion and one of the best drivers on the grid.

“Lauren!”

“Liam.” A fat smile grows on my face as he approaches and greets me with a hug.

That's new.

He wraps his arms around my neck and groans as he takes me in his arms. I wrap my arms around him.

The smell of his cologne invaded my nose and just straight up made me go crazy.

Fuck you heart for falling for him.

It's a bad thing enough that I might only be here this season.

“Don't you have media to do?” I release him from my arms. He leaves his arms hanging around my shoulders, standing now next to and closer. His proximity made me go feral.

“You know good hiding places here, right?”

I nod.

“Okay, hide me. Reporters have been getting on my last nerves and I can't take another one asking me about us.”

“Us?”

“You haven’t heard?”

“Heard what?”

“People believe that we are dating. Thanks to our friendly shopping trip in Monaco.”

You got to be shitting me.

“Are you serious?”

“Dead serious. Wait.” He reaches behind his back and grabs his phone from his back jeans pockets.

He scrolls through the phone and stops at the article where it shows.

Not just a friendly shopping trip but also, we kissed.

How haven’t I seen the photo?

Alex showed a completely different one.

“Those aren’t the clothes I wore when we went shopping though?”

“I know,” he agrees with me and puts his phone away. “That’s how stupid social media is. They can’t put simple one plus one together and this happens.”

Why do I kind of wish those photos were true and not edited?

So, I guess Liam only sees me as a friend.

Stupid of me to think that he would maybe have a crush on me.

“Just ignore them. If you don’t give in to them, they’ll get bored and leave you alone.”

He looks down at me with a puzzling and smiley look.

He stares deeply into my eyes like he was looking for something.

Maybe I am looking for something in his eyes too.

Maybe I am looking for the part that tells me he does like me more than a friend but knowing myself, I would run away if he told me he has a crush on me.

And I would never let myself see sunlight if someone told me they love me.

And to be true to my word, I don't believe those kinds of relationships like the ones in books don't exist.

They are a fictional world created by people.

Fictional equals made up in a creative mind,

Nowadays readers' and writers' expectations in love and life can't be excited by men in real life.

Our standards are so high we don't want to even believe that, that kind of love exists.



Sprint Race went great. Except for the fact that Arden crashed into the wall.

He had to fulfill his annual ‘crashing into the wall in Baku’ tradition.

He has been doing that since his debut here in Formula One and Formula Two.

And yet he managed to keep his contract with Aravis for eight years now.

His father Aiden Fane is a sponsor for the team, so I am pretty sure that he will be in Aravis until his retirement.

Lucky bastard.

“We did everything possible; I believe we did an amazing job at the tracks today, well except...” I laugh into the microphone at the thought of Arden making the same mistake

every year. “He had to take it out of his system. Better do it now than tomorrow when it actually matters.”

“You are currently leading the championship with seventeen points ahead of Nate Harper,”

“I am?”

Why did I not know that?

“Yes. Do you believe you can keep Nate behind you?”

Can I?

“I mean it will be tough, and in general this is a battle for the championship so there is no doubt that he will try to collect as many points as possible. I believe that we have the pace that we need to win and the car and like I mentioned it will be tough to battle with Nate because he is a Four-time world champion so we already know he has the talent and the mentality to win.”

“Thank you so much for answering our questions and we will move on to your teammate who is just making his way to us.”

I turn around seeing Arden in his element, making his way to me.

“Hey there mate.” He gives me a tap on my shoulder and then places his elbow on my shoulder, using me as his armrest.

He is never going to leave that habit.

I hate him for it.

“So happy to have you here with us Arden, how are you?”
The reporter moves on to him.

Arden and the reporter keep going with their conversation, leaving me alone roaming with my eyes around the paddock and getting lost in my mind.

I see Lauren walking through the paddock alongside her brother. He was explaining to her as she was laughing at him and listening to him.

God, she is beautiful.

And I messed up, destroyed every hope of us even dating in my head.

I may have said some things about the photoshopped kiss picture and kind of let it out on her. And I could see it on her face that some of those hurt her to hear from me.

That the picture look stupid? Stupid words.

That the picture will disappear into thin air, and no one will remember in a few days? Stupid.

I don't want to forget. And I do want to bring this picture to real life without needing a computer and stupid program to make it look like we were.

I guess I do mess up everything worth it to me.

First Lauren.

And then last year my championship.

Both lost because I just messed it up.

We haven't been texting or barely talking since Thursday. And it feels like a stab in the gut to know that she is trying to ignore me.

"Right?" Arden asks me, dragging me away from my daydream and my self-loathing.

"Yeah, yeah, of course."

"He didn't listen."

"Wha- Yes, I did."

"So, you agree to the fact that you pee in the cockpit?"

"What no. Do some really do that?"

"Apparently yes."

I am shocked. They just pee while they are driving.

That's...interesting.



Crew members work around the garage, fixing last-minute problems and checking to see that the car is in the best condition it can be.

I stay nearby, telling them about different issues I had at practice on Friday with my front left tire.

Sometimes I underestimate the time I actually spend in the pit garage and with the crew.

I see them more in my life than I see my sister. While she is busy traveling around the world and walking runways, I am driving a race car for a living.

I am two minutes older than her so that automatically makes me the better twin. Older superior twin, I call it.

And besides spending my time with the crew talking about strategies and testing new theories, I also spend my time at shit ton parties and daydreaming about myself and Lauren.

I saw my engineer approach me from the corner in his scarlet red Aravis T-shirt, paired with dark blue jeans and his headgear. “Amazing job this season, Liam. You think you can get us to the top three today too?”

“Motivated as always.” I stayed in the garage for another hour with more pre-race checks and killed an hour with that.

Which now leaves me thirty minutes to get into my suit and the car.

I head up to my suite, ready to hop into my race gear. My phone buzzes with a new message.

Butterfly: good luck for today, not that you need it, but we don’t want to grow that ego of yours anymore, do we??

Her message makes a smile break on my face.

I type in a message and put the phone back on the table and grab my suit gear.

I decided last night that I had had enough of her ignoring me, I just texted her, with the hope she would answer back.

And she did.

Let's just hope I don't spill any more stupid words out.

Like always.

Me: Feeding my ego with compliments before a race is always a good idea, Butterfly. It's what motivates me to win.

I zipped up my racing suit and was ready to leave as the time was going by fast and my engineer had been blowing up my phone, telling me to approach the box immediately.

My phone vibrates, making me smile once again.

Butterfly: Good to know you are not brain-dead from yesterday.

You can guess which person dragged us to a party during a race weekend and forced us to get hammered on the vodka shot she kept bringing and made us pay for them by the end of the night?

The one and only Alex.

Yeah, I don't like her.

I love her. Platonically.

We couldn't say no because, to be frank, we all were in a party mood, so we just didn't decline.

But we all put the fault on Alex this morning and complained to her when we were eating breakfast that she ‘forced’ us there.

What nice friends we are.

I ended up blacking out from the alcohol consumption.

Which evidently happens a lot in the past year because my alcohol consumption has gone up by like ninety percent.

I sometimes lose track of how many shots I chug down.

A mistake I always make.

Strangely enough, my shirt was on the bedroom floor when I woke up this morning and I just wanted to shoot myself with a nail gun from the headache I had.

Which I am, by the way, still not over. I had to take a billion Pepto Bismol to help get to the decent state that I am in right now and Lauren forced me to eat a lot of carbs because she is scared to let any of us drive with a hangover and cause a collision or even an accident.

Me: Please, even if you tried you could never get rid of me. I am just immortal to the point that not even alcohol can kill me.

Butterfly: You want to play smart with me, Calvetti.

Me: try me, Butterfly.

Butterfly: *send video footage*

No way, how drunk was I last night?

Apparently very if I said that.

I am never going to a party ever again when a Lauren with a camera is present.

Me: you are not posting that or sending it to anyone who can and will post it.

Butterfly: I find this video quite entertaining.

Me: I DON'T

Butterfly: relax, I'm teasing you.

Another text came through.

Butterfly: For now.

I feel betrayed.

And hurt.

I leave my suite and head back to the pit garage. It just took me ten minutes to get into my race suit.

I need to work on my time.

I situate myself in the cockpit, adjusting my neck brace and steering wheel as the crew waits for the yes and pull away the tire warmers and I drive out of the pit, positioning my car at P8.

Not my best one this season but it could be worse. Like a twentieth-place position. Just the thought gives me the heebie-jeebies.

There is a fair chance I can pass Nate - the leader of the race.

But that fucker is a goddamn good defender and drives like a maniac.

He thrives on the wins and the adrenaline.

Like every other driver on the grid.

We finish the formation lap, placing our cars at our official positions, waiting for the race to start.

Lights flash one at a time before they all shut off. My foot pushes against the throttle and my car speeds down the track before I rapidly approach the first turn.

Before I could register what happened, my car made contact with an orange one, which made me slide across the field into the wall.

“Dickhead. What a dickhead. He can’t drive that freaking tractor here and think he is conquering the world! What a stupid action.” I let out all the insults at the Brit Louis Burton who continued his race as his car was left undamaged, leaving me stranded in sector one corner two with a broken front wing and a puncture.

Have fun with your penalty, dickhead.

“You okay, Liam?”

“A fucking dickhead.” I curse back at the radio to my engineer apologizing right after so he doesn’t get the wrong message that I called him a dickhead.

I get out of my car and wait there with my hands on my hips, anger boiling inside me as this crash just cost me my lead in the championships and who knows how many other positions.

Fuck.

I waited next to my crashed car for the people to come pick up the car and for the drivers to slow down as a yellow flag was waved.

I situate myself at the end of the box as soon as I arrived, not wanting and being in the mood to talk to anyone at the

moment of my loss.

How can so much go wrong in just one weekend? I was doing perfect this whole season and one or two fucked up mistakes just cost me everything.

Everything I made possible for me this season can go to waste because there is no possibility I can or will overtake and make it past Nate now that he is back to leading the championships.

And I hope that the fucker Louis Burton gets a penalty for fucking pushing me off the tracks.

He deserves it.

And I am not the kind of person who thinks Karma can bite back but I sure hope that Karma bites his arse off.



Chapter Twenty One

LAUREN

You need to stop beating yourself up for what happened today.”

“I know it’s just-,” he took a deep breath as we were outside on a bench in a park.

He asked me if I wanted to accompany him on his walk and I couldn’t say no.

And I could hardly leave him alone.

Liam has this habit of beating himself up badly when he loses.

He does this all – he does all the wins for his mother and losing feels like disappointing her.

At least that is what he told me when we walked together.

“Baku is the place Nate and I met and since then we have been celebrating up on the podium together.”

“I know. I realized that he didn’t seem too happy with his win. He normally smiles when he is up there with you.”

He lets out a low laugh. “Good to know he isn’t celebrating without me.”

“Never. He loves you and that may seem weird, but he loves sharing the podium with you. But only if he wins.”

“Never expected less.”

He looked at me as he was leaning against his knees with his elbows.

I look away from him, as I close my eyes, letting the cool air of Baku evening consume me.

I love late-night walks.

It’s relaxing.

“You’re beautiful, you know that?” He breaks off the silence as the only thing we could hear were the birds crowing and the wind breezing.

I looked down at him as I heard his voice. I feel myself smile at his all of a sudden compliment and my cheeks added a little pink color to the smile.

“Thank you.” He nods. “You’re beautiful too, you know that?”

I meant it. He is beautiful.

Gorgeous even.

But compliments and words aren’t even to describe him.

He is indescribably gorgeous with his eyes that look like the evening moon shining in the blue water.

So blue yet also so grey.

“Of course, I am.”

“Unbelievable.” I laugh at his ego. “Why was I waiting for a thank you?”

“You have a good imagination, but why should I say thank you for something that is obvious?”

“It’s just how it is. You say thank you and move on or you will be thinking of the compliment the whole day like a bloody virus in your head.”

“Then I guess thank you and I’ll let the compliment follow me around like a bloody virus.”

“Stop saying bloody. It doesn’t match your accent.”

“Bloody hell no.”

“And now you are just mocking me.”

“Bloody no. I would never do that.”

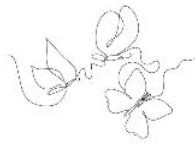
He is definitely mocking me. And using bloody wrongly.

What a *wanker*.

“Idiot,” I whispered under my breath as he was getting on my nerves.

It’s the same with Alex.

I don’t care that he is mocking me for my accent. I guess it’s just the way we connect.



Scratch that.

That’s stupid.

Can you start a book with “I lost myself into madness?”

No. That’s a dark romance kind of vibe. As much as I love reading it, I would never write one.

I rip out the piece of paper from my notebook and crumble it into a ball. I looked for my target and managed to hit the spot in one go. “Can you not?” Nate complained as I hit him with the paper ball right in the forehead. I mimic him with a high-pitched voice.

“What are you even doing on your phone?”

“How to get away with murder.” He deadpans.

What is wrong with him?

“You’re weird.”

“Says you.”

“You think you’re funny?”

“I believe I am hilarious.”

I roll my eyes, annoyed at him. I haven’t had my second cup of coffee today yet, so I am extra grumpy.

I tap my pen on my notebook.

Can you start a book without knowing the plot?

I scribble a doodle on the paper, trying to think of something, while my laptop is placed in front of me, blasting music to my earphones only to my right ear.

I take it out of my ear.

Either I am stupid, or I can really hear the ticking of the clock on the wall.

And the tipping from Nate’s phone.

Fuck the beginning.

Who is the main character?

Eyes?

Hair?

Personality?

Is she or he a bitch?

Or should I write a dystopian novel?

Nah, I am not that creative.

Moving on.

Smut?

Really important things you need to think through.

Storyline?

Names?

And most importantly: The title.

Or should it become a series?

Or should it stay a standalone?

I said to Nate that I already had the characters, which was a lie.

So, now I must think of them and what to write exactly in the new novel.

All kinds of important questions run through my mind, almost making my brain explode.

I need coffee.

I grab my keys and wallet and make my way out. I turn back around and wait at the door. “Nate, you want something from Starbucks?”

“Yeah, can you get me a black iced coffee and...” There is more?

“You know what? Never mind. Get it yourself.”

“Lauren!” He shouts after me.

“Toddles, brother.” I sing as I sprint out of the hotel. I make my way out from the lobby to the parking lot.

I get into the car, place my purse on the passenger seat, and make my way to the nearest Starbucks according to my navigation.

Miami is beautiful and it is my first time here but the weather is killing me. I am sweating my tits off here.

Over thirty degrees and it’s only one p.m.

I wait in line, tapping my fingers on the steering wheel while vibing to the music waiting for my turn.

“I’m an architect, I’m drawing up the plans. He’s so obsessed with me and boy, I understand...”

I sing loudly, screaming out Taylor Swift's lyrics from the top of my lungs. If anyone heard or saw me, well... at least you had a private concert.

Or not.

Depends on how awesome my singing was.

This weekend is probably going to be one of the most interesting ones.

After the disaster of last year of two red flags in the race on Sunday alone, I just hope that this year ends better with all cars making it to the finish line.

Especially Liam.

But Miami is probably the most crowded and expensive Grand Prix I have ever attended.

Influencers, celebrities, journalists, and Formula One fans all come together to just watch this Grand Prix.

When we went around the city earlier, we were held up by so many fans – not me, the drivers tough – asking for pictures.

It isn't as bad as in some other locations in Europe.

I made it to Starbucks, ordered my coffee, and ordered whatever Nate wanted, he blew up my phone with messages, basically screaming at me to get him whatever he wanted from his Santa wish list.

I am stupid.

The nearest Starbucks is literally eight minutes away and I chose to cook myself in the car in the hot sun.

But knowing myself I wouldn't have gone walking if I knew how close it was.

I am way too lazy to walk in the heat. And lazy in general.

I believe everyone has this figured out by now.

I make it back to the hotel and give Nate his weird black coffee and I think I got him a peanut croissant, but I can't quite remember.

“Thank you.”

“Did- did you just thank me?”

That’s a first.

He keeps himself silent for a second, sipping his coffee.
“No one will believe you if you tell them. And I’ll just deny it.”

I just ignore him and obviously, I text Alex about it.

And she did believe me.

The winner of Friend of the Year goes to her.

And to be frank, she wouldn’t have believed Nate anyway.

They hate each other like the villain hates the hero in a book.

To put it together, they like each other but would rather throw insults at one another than be nice. It an entertainment for all of us. Alex has some of the worst insults known to humankind.

“By the way, we are going out tonight.”

“But I have plans with Alex.”

“And those plans are what?”

“Dinner.”

“Yeah, with us.”

Well, now that he mentions it, she did say the others would join us, but I toned her out because... my mind was kind of occupied with someone else.

I zoned out. It happens.

“Is it fancy dinner or pizza dinner?”

“It’s Miami. Figure it out.”

Of course, it’s Miami but it really depends on what restaurant they choose to get to.

“Be nice, I got Starbucks.”

He just flashes me a sarcastic laugh followed by his signature eye roll.

You're welcome, by the way.



I walk up to the podium, thrilled as I stand on the first-place podium. Miami is my week.

After last year's disaster, I delivered the perfect performance this weekend.

P2 in FP1 through FP3 and a freaking pole and now the win all in one weekend.

What a weekend.

Last week I believed that all was well after my crash into the barriers on the first lap, but I guess not.

I'm still behind Nate in the championship leads but I decided to not give up my hope, at least not yet.

After all, this was all for Mum.

I listened to the national Italian anthem play in the background, my face lit up in anticipation.

I place my hand on my chest, looking to the blue sky, hoping that my mother hears me and hopefully is proud of me.

I have been doing this 'tradition' ever since Formula Three.

My mother once told me before she died that no matter where I am, she is always in my heart, so with this, it kind of feels like I have her around.

Like a warm hug from the sun.

I wait as they hand the trophies to Arden and Nate - who surprisingly only placed third, which made this week an Aravis one-two finish.

I thank the minister as he hands me the trophy and shakes his hand, as soon as I have it in my hand, I raise it in the air, the crew shouting in excitement.

This is the kind of feeling every driver chases when racing.

The feeling of accomplishment and pride.

The feeling of making your team, fans and most importantly yourself proud.

The feeling of keeping your promise to someone who might not be a part of your crazy journey.

This is for you mum.

Every win, tear, joy... anything and everything is for you.

To keep my promise of winning the championship with Aravis.

To make you proud and myself.

I shook Nate's hand who was on my left before I felt a cold liquor on my neck all the back to my back.

"Arden, you twat!" I laugh at him and shake the victory champagne all over the stage and on the people who were cheering down.

Nate was not leaving me alone, spraying the champagne on my neck until the end of it.

The sticky liquid made a weird feeling on my skin appear and I laughed at Nate as he broke into a laughing fit at the face I was making when I turned around to spray him.

"Mate," I call out to him as he never stopped attacking me with it.

We end our kindergarten session and step on the podium to take pictures together.

I tip my bottle over his head, letting the last of it drop on top of Nate.

"Fucker." He mumbles under his breath.

We all get off the stage.

I need to wash myself otherwise I will smell like alcohol for the next few weeks.

Nate swings his arm over my shoulder as we walk down.

"You did an amazing performance this weekend. I think you need a new nickname. King of Miami." He tells me.

"Definitely. Has a ring to it."

He gives me a light tap on my shoulder before he makes a turn to the McAli box.

I watch as Lauren hugs Nate as she is waiting by the box for him, smiling.

I admire their siblinghood.

Even if they fight, a lot. They still love each other.

It reminds me of me and Sofia.

Who - by the way, is here this weekend.

I made it to the box; Sofia threw her arms over my shoulders and threw herself onto me.

“You did amazing, oh my god!” She squeals in excitement, I twirl us around in a circle, happy to have my sister with me on this amazing weekend and have her witness this big win with me.

“If Mum could see that, she would be in tears.”

“Like you are right now?” I pointed out as I realized that she was tearing up a little.

“Yes!”

I laugh at her, unzipping my suit.

“I’ll be waiting outside. Don’t be too long.”

“Got it.”

She leaves the box. I made my way to my suite and got out of my suit that was sticking to my back.

All went into the suitcase that I had with me.

I changed into clean clothes and tried to scrub off as much of the champagne off my hair and body with the wet cloth that I had with me.

I closed the door and made my way outside where Sofia was waiting with the suitcase.

I turn at the corner as I hear laughter outside. I peek from the corner, seeing Sofia and Lauren engaging in a conversation.

They were almost the same height, only Soph was like two inches taller.

I think the big reason Sofia attended this weekend is that she has a fashion show on Tuesday and for Lauren’s birthday, she invited us. Luckily, it’s in New York.

Nate had a Birthday Week for Lauren planned there and we all are going there.

I had the idea for her to get us tickets for the front row and backstage.

Lauren is a fashion geek.

She may not seem like the kind of girl who sits down at a fashion show and admires models as they present their clothes, but she is.

Luckily, my sister happens to be the owner and founder of Calvetti Couture.

And it happens to be Lauren's favorite fashion brand.

According to what she told me.

"Liam," she calls out for me, as I approach them. "Why didn't you mention that your sister is here?"

"I didn't think you'd care."

"Are you kidding me?"

"Yes, I am kidding. I thought you knew."

"I didn't."

"Sorry, I'll let you know next time. Pinkie promise." She shakes her head at me as I hold up my pinkie to promise her.

"You never mentioned that your *girlfriend* is such an amazing person."

Oh no she did not.

I told her about my crush on Lauren and she is using it against me.

"Sofia."

"Girl - friend." She spells out. "A girl that is a friend."

I will murder her. She is doing that on purpose. She knows that I am scared to ruin what friendship I have with Lauren, so she is trying to hint at my crush on her.

"Anyways..." she continued as she rolled her eyes at me and turned back to Lauren. "It was nice meeting you, Lauren. Let's hope I see you around."

“You too,” Lauren tells my sister. We watch as she walks away. I told her that I needed a small talk with Lauren, so she was leaving us alone.

“Oh, my god. How the hell was I just so casual with Sofia Calvetti? What is wrong with me?” She squeals as she comes back to reality and realizes that she just had a casual conversation with her favorite fashion model and designer.

I laugh at her.

“What did you want to talk about?”

“What?”

“You said you wanted to talk?”

“I just said that so that she would leave.” I lie.

“You are a horrible human.”

“I just had to, okay?” I defend myself and raise my hands in defence.

Just ask her.

Do you want to attend the fashion show with me?

That easy.

Why can't I do that?

“We could have just talked later.”

“Well, if I have time to talk to you now, why not use that time.”

“Oh?”

She is surprised.

I love spending time with her, that's no secret. Everyone knows that.

Yet she is still surprised.

“You love spending time with me. Admit it.”

“I do,” I answer her answer honestly. “I really do, which is kind of fucked up.”

“Really? Why is that.”

“Because sometimes I wish I could just spend time with you. But your brother is always around which is kind of ruining my wishes.”

“I love spending time with you.”

“Oh?” Now I am the one surprised?

And we just stay here like that.

Her smiling at me, with a honey-kissed smile.

I smile back at her.

Her smile widens at my smile.

I feel myself turn red at her affection and just her existence.

God, she is beautiful.

“Okay, let’s go.” Going to murder him for interrupting whatever we just had.

I didn’t realize for the moment that we weren’t alone anymore and never looked away from her.

How is it possible to look away from her?

How can a caring and kind person like her look at me the way I look at her?

How can she look at someone like me who is just damaged goods like the way I look at her?

I watched her leave with her brother, taking a last glance back at me, smiling widely as she realized I never looked away.

I never will.

I never want to.



Chapter Twenty Three
LAUREN

New York City.

A place everyone wants to visit at least once in their life. As our amazing American songwriter, Taylor Swift would say.

Welcome to New York.

The city everybody wants to visit at least once in their lifetime.

Walking through the crowds and the huge city surrounded by billboards was just shining. Especially at night.

I have been here before but only for work and the longest I stayed here was three days, so this birthday trip that Nate planned will be the ultimate New York experience and I am here for it. I will enjoy this trip and not let anyone destroy it. Not even anxiety.

Fuck you anxiety. Dig a hole and never come out of it.

Nate just randomly came to me with the information that we were going to New York when we arrived at the hotel after the race in Miami.

“Can you already tell me where we are going?”

“I told you, to the club.”

I hate him.

I am thinking of the idea of murdering him.

I step out of the car, a huge building surrounded by city lights and beautiful other lanterns and leaves going around it like a small garden, but the inside was completely dark.

You could only hear the sounds of the music inside.

Loud enough to still go deaf because of it and having to scream when wanting to engage in a conversation with someone.

He wasn't kidding when he said we were going to a club.

This is much like one.

Drunk, drunk, drunk.

Everywhere you look you see someone drunk or about to be drunk.

“Okay, now close your eyes and I'll guide you.”

“I am not closing my eyes.”

I don't trust him that he won't accidentally lose me in the 'club'. He did that once; it can happen again.

“Fine, whatever.” He leads me through the crowd of people.

Thankfully it wasn't fully crowded, and you could still find a way out of the mess of people.

We halt in our steps at a golden-brown door with tinted windows. The inside was completely dark, with no soul to be seen or heard.

“Okay, now you do need to shut your bloody eyes.”

“Okay, relax brother. I will.” No need to worry about me but I am kind of scared to go in there. Doesn't look very heavenly in there.

Looks like a nightmare.

Nate leads me through the dark-looking room.

We walk and walk and walk. It felt like a maze and a never-ending walk.

Where the hell is the bringing me?

We take a sudden stop, I peak with my left eye, seeing a white wall.

“Okay, what the...” I was about to curse when I heard a bang in the background and people screaming.

I jump up with a scream, scared of the living hell.

My heart rate picks up and I most definitely just had a heart attack.

I turn around and see a swarm of people scream Happy Birthday with confetti flying in the air.

I press a hand against my chest as I laugh at the surprise party.

Alex, Arden, Marco (surprisingly), and some other people that I have seen and not seen in my life.

Even bloody Sofia Calvetti attended this birthday party.

My life is complete.

I can die happily now.

I die a happy woman who had her favorite fashion designer at her bloody birthday party.

“Happy birthday, blondie,” Alex screams as the crowd of people gets louder and music starts playing in the background.

She pulls me into a hug as she balances a cocktail glass with her hand that she hugs me with.

“My girl is twenty-two. You are getting old.”

I laugh at her comment about how I am getting old.

“You can’t talk, you are twenty-four yourself.”

“Touché. Are you calling me old?”

“Yes, Freckles. I am.” She groans as I call her that nickname.

She hates it.

I have no idea why, but I love teasing her with it.

It’s funny what can I say?

People came one by one, congratulating me on my birthday.

I didn’t listen to them.

Instead, my head was telling me to look for him.

To see if he is here.

I saw him appear in the crowd and my face lit up as I saw him walk toward me.

“Happy birthday, Butterfly.” He tells me with a smug smile on his face.

I wrap my arms around him, happy to have him here.

Lately after being apart for two days, my feelings for him have become stronger to the point I will not even deny it to anyone and not actively try to hide it from Alex every time she asks me what’s on my mind.

The simple answer: *Liam*.

That's what I always tell her.

And it will always be him who follows me in my worst nightmares and best dreams.

"Thank you," I mumble into his ear as I never want to leave his warm embrace.

The way he snakes his arms around my waist and lightly was touching my skin as my shirt was lightly lifted, made me skip a million heartbeats and my skin cripple with anxiety.

The scent of his cologne invades my nose, making me only smell him and not the alcohol that people were drinking, nor the vanilla perfume I was wearing – and overdosed myself with.

Just his scent that smelled like autumn and felt like a warm hug from heaven.

I let go of him, laughing awkwardly as we just stood there, not sure how to continue the conversation.

"I thought you already left for Italy," I confess to him.

And to be frank; that thought scared me.

The thought of him being a thousand miles away, while I party for my birthday.

Even if it shouldn't scare me.

"And miss your birthday?" he asked me as he leaned closer to me, my heart now skipping multiple beats at his proximity. "Never, Butterfly."

"Why is that?"

"I guess I like you. And our friendship." Way to stab a girl in the heart without an actual weapon.

I nod at him, not sure what to tell him.

The night went in a blur.

They sang me a happy birthday which made me feel uncomfortable to the level of hell.

I just know Nate did it on purpose just to get on my nerves.

I got presents-

HOLY COW.

I got backstage tickets to the next Calvetti Couture Fashion show that is in two days.

Bloody hell.

I got the bloody tickets.

And Sofia was the one who gave them to me.

Freaking Sofia.

I think I might have lost my voice halfway screaming my lungs out when I saw the tickets in my hands.

Hours passed, and the music and drinking started to get into my head due to the fact I just randomly sang out lyrics that were just wrong.

Alex has dragged me to the dance floor and even if I told her just ten minutes, we have been dancing for the past hour – or what felt like an hour.

A multitude of guys are dancing around us screaming and shouting to the lyrics of the song as Alex is just enjoying herself with her platonic best enemy – my brother.

I like him like this.

Carefree.

Sadly, we only see him like that when he is drunk.

Whenever Nate is drunk we call him Greg because of how carefree he is and doesn't care for his reputation of being a grump.

I will miss Greg after tonight.

I squeeze myself off the dance floor through the people.

My feet are killing me in these heels.

“Why aren’t you dancing? Liam comes walking towards me with a glass of water juggling in his hand.

He grabs me by my hands as he pulls me to him, our chests colliding with one another.

I feel myself trapped like a mouse in a cage which leads me to the floor again, me following him barefoot as I am taken off the torture devices.

He spins me around who knows how many times and keeps shouting the lyrics of the song that was in German.

It was a pop song, and a woman was singing it. I have no idea what she was saying but I liked it.

I like drunk Liam.

Normal Liam would stress around over the race that happened the previous weekend, but when he had at least one shot – he is as carefree as Alex.

I laugh at his energy as he dances around while juggling his drink in his hand, making sure not to spill it on anyone.

The rest of the night went in a blur.

Thankfully I decided to cut down on my shots and drinking and am not drunk tonight.

At least not as much as Alex who is a shot away from blacking out.

You can say she takes the motto ‘*tomorrow is not today’s worry*’ a little too seriously.

I ordered an Uber for all five of us and made our way back to the hotel we all were staying in.

I bid them all a good night as we all went to our separate rooms.



Chapter Twenty Four
LAUREN

Whatever is keeping up currently – go away.

Let me sleep in peace.

I need my beauty sleep and I can't do that if I am awake as an owl at night.

The ticking of the clock on the wall and the cars on the street are the only sounds from the outside world.

And in the inside world aka my brain, where Fearless is playing repeatedly.

I love it.

But I need to sleep.

I turn around trying to find a more comfortable position to sleep.

I stare out my window. The city light shone through the tinted windows.

They shine like stars in the night sky.

I hear my phone vibrate on my nightstand and catches my attention immediately.

I snatch it from the table. The light from the phone almost blinded me as I was lying in the dark for the past half an hour.

I smile.

Liam: Mind accompanying me on a walk?

Liam: I will be waiting outside.

Not asking.

Cool, I guess.

Liam: Ten minutes.

I didn't obey his order because he told me to.

No.

I am in need of a walk.

Maybe it will tire me out and then I can sleep peacefully.

I throw on a pair of sweatpants and a cropped long-sleeve shirt.

I put on my trainers, grabbed the hotel keys and my phone, and made my way outside.

Just like he said he was waiting in front of the lobby.

“Hey, we are matching.” I enlighten the mood.

He was also wearing a pair of grey sweatpants and a white shirt.

He laughs at my comment as starts walking away with his hands stuffed away in his pants pockets, his bicep flexing.

Damn...

We walk through the silent city, me stopping then and now to admire the buildings.

I have been to New York before, but only for a short time, so I never really had the time to look around the city.

I didn't want to disturb whatever was going through his head.

I just know he has something on his mind because normally he would start a conversation right away.

But when something is bothering him, he is as quiet as a mouse.

“Please talk.” He interrupts the silence. “I hate the fact now that I may have woken you up and now we don't talk.”

“Oh please, I wasn't sleeping. I was wide awake when you sent me the message.”

He led me to a park, slowly into the dark but still enough lights were shining as I could see his silhouette in the dim light.

The sharp point of his jawline and his Adam's apple were showing as he looked around at our surroundings.

We walk further away from the hotel and round a corner.

We take a stop at the beautiful park and sit down on the bench.

“I know you might find this weird...” he starts as he grabs something from his pants pockets.

It's a box.

“I wanted to give it to you earlier, but I didn’t want everyone to give me weird looks.” He slowly opened the red velvet box that had golden designs on it with the note written Calvetti Couture on top of it.

I felt myself stop breathing as I saw what was inside the box.

“What the hell, Liam?!” I shout at him as I see the necklace with different symbols lying in the box.

”What the hell? But that is a limited edition. How did you get it?”

“I think you are forgetting the fact that my sister designed this. I just needed to blackmail her a little and she got me it.”

I lightly hit him on the arm.

Un-fucking-believable.

“I am kidding. She was thinking of restocking it for the Autumn season and you got the first one.”

This present is a limited edition from Sofia’s jewels collection from this winter collection that ended not a half year ago.

I have been dying to get it, but it was sold out as soon as I entered the website.

It’s a silver necklace with diamond little symbols that represent something different.

A heart: Always love with your full heart even if the last hurt.

A rainbow: Love yourself first.

A butterfly: Someone whom you loved who passed away.

And multiple others.

I have been talking about this necklace for months now and...

He bloody got it.

For me.

What an idiot.

“Liam. I don’t think I can accept this.”

“Why not?”

“Have you seen the price? Way too expensive for a gift.”

“But I want you to have it. And I don’t earn money to let it rot in my bank account. Where is the fun in that?”

“Liam...”

He got up and took the necklace from the box and tucked the red box back into his pocket.

He motions for me to stand up.

I did.

I turn around, my back now facing his front.

I feel my anxiety grow as he places the necklace on me. I move my hair aside, waiting for him to finish clipping the necklace at the back.

He placed his hands on my shoulders, I felt my breath hitch at his touch on me.

I slowly let go of my hair, turning to him.

He is now closer than ever.

His blue eyes were piercing through me as sparks flew around us, the tension between us so strong, you can feel it in the air.

The feeling of electricity traveling through me reappears like always when I am around him.

He got closer.

So, close you could count our breaths as one. I felt my head get dizzy as the eye contact; he was holding on to me was getting too much.

His chest rises as he takes a deep breath.

It's like we were both out of breath and suffocating from our tension.

I felt the world around me stopped working. I take him in, all of him.

From his brown hair that looked like they were freshly washed to his blue eyes that stood out, to his plum pink lips that I felt an urge to touch with my fingers.

And the feeling on my fingertips didn't end with wanting to touch his lips.

I wanted to run my fingers over his sharp jaw that looked like it could cut ice, his cheekbones that turn pink when it's cold outside, or when I accidentally told him he has a pretty face once.

He slowly closed the gap between us even more and I felt a weird feeling swarming in the pit of my stomach.

My heart raced even faster than it was already. I felt myself feeling stuck in a cage.

It was weird feeling so *warm*.

In that cage.

I felt my cheeks burn up as his thumb caressed my skin, traveling from my cheek down to my neck.

I lick my dry lips.

His lips were now inches away from mine.

I could see his face so clearly now.

And then I did something I didn't expect myself to do.

I kissed him.



Chapter Twenty Five
LIAM

I lean down to get a better angle of her as she opens her mouth, gaining me access to her.

Our tongues fight for dominance.

I feel my head spin in a circle as she lets out a low moan my kisses start to travel down to her neck, sucking on her sweet spot.

I tangled my fingers into her hair, caressing her neck as I continued the job.

She tastes amazing.

And looks fucking amazing with that twenty-five-thousand-dollar necklace wrapped around her neck.

I feel her place her hand on my chest. To balance herself as her legs were starting to give up.

“Lauren...” I slowly whispered into her ear as I pressed sensual kisses all over her neck.

I look back up and smash my lips back on top of hers, not getting enough of her awesome taste and the way she fights for the lead.

Our tongues dance in our mouths.

My hand slowly travels down to her waist, behind her back as I pull her in closer to me, our chests now practically glued together.

Kissing, biting, pulling.

I keep my firm grip on her waist, deepening the kiss not leaving her or even myself a second to breathe.

I feel a smile cripple up on her face.

I smile against her lips, feeling the blood rush to my dick.

She cups both of my cheeks with her hands, feeling the cold of her hands on my face.

I pull away from her, my leaning my forehead against hers, breathing heavily, watching her, and seeing her chest rise up and down in an uneven rhythm.

I cup her shin between my index and thumb, tempting her to look at me.

She lets out a deep breath and smiles.

I wish we never had to leave this moment.



Chapter Twenty Six
LAUREN

I wait in the box for the race to start.

The drivers are just getting ready for the race and are doing their formation lap.

A few minutes pass before they are all placed on the grid in their positions.

“Okay, Nate radio check.” I hear the team principal ask Nate for the headphones.

“Radio check.”

“Loud and clear.”

“Let’s get this circus started!” Nate shouts.

One by one the red light illuminated until all of them went out and the race started.

Funny enough a silver car with the number 34 crashed into a wall and he didn’t even manage to make it to the finish line. I heard the team talk about that crash but decided to pay more attention to who he was.

Oh, wait.

That’s James Berkley.

All hail.

I think his team hates him now for coming out. Poor him.

I just want to hug him.

But I can’t.

But I want to.

In a fast motion, the first cars finished the first lap. For now, no car position has changed except well... James.

This meant Liam is now at P10 after his qualifying didn’t go as planned.

At his home race...

I have been ignoring him.

For the past almost two weeks.

After that what happened at the park?

I couldn’t bring myself to talk around him anymore because all I could think about was his lips on me and the way his hands felt like a firework erupting on my skin.

I keep an eye on the red car with the number twenty-two, making sure I don’t get caught cheering when he overtakes the rookie himself, Marco Garcia.

He is racing with anger fulling him to the end.

I saw the pre-race conference.

I have never seen Liam this down and angry at the same time.

Like he just went through the worst betrayal.

Well, maybe he did.

I just ignored him with no further info after he escorted me to my hotel room.

I hope so badly he doesn't do anything stupid and make a crash.

I really hope because losing now would not only mean DNF'ing in his home race but also bumping down to third in the championships.

My anxiety rises and the nerves in the box get tenser.

He was doing good.

Like always.

But he is playing a mad game.

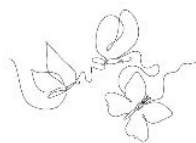
One that can cost him everything.

Please be careful.

Mumbling starts at the box as they were talking about how Liam was catching up to Nate who was second, with Arden Fane leading the race.

Now in P4 and twenty laps left for the Italian Grand Prix.

Nate pits and changes to the normal soft ones as he has been abusing his hard tires for the last forty-two laps, letting Liam gain position now in P3 as Nate comes out of the pits behind him for a second.



The Italian Anthem blasts again for the second time today while Liam stands on top of the podium, looking up in the air with his hand on his chest as he chants something, pride written all over his face.

He may have driven like an idiot today, but he did phenomenal work.

There were one or too many moments where I was shitting myself, thinking he will cause an accident.

The anthem finishes playing, and all the Aravis team members and fans roar, screaming, and chanting his name while holding up the Italian and Aravis flags.

The Aravis flag was red with a black lion with a crown on its head.

I feel myself smile bigger than ever at his victory.

Liam is the last one to get his trophy as he holds it up in the air, seeing him smile again for the first time in a week.

A honey-glazed smile covers his face, his dimples now showing more than ever.

He looks directly at me, seeing his smile slowly fade as his eyes pierce through me.

The image of his smile fading felt like a stab to the heart.

Like a thousand needles aimed for it.

Death by a thousand needles.

He nodded at me, smiling.

He came down off the stage as soon as the celebration ended.

He is back on track.

Liam Matteo Calveti is back on the lead of the championships and is here to the big fight.

I only know his middle name because I once “accidentally” stole his ID.

It was an accident.



Liam

I hate conferences.

I hate, hate, *HATE* them.

“My question to Nate-.”

Again?

I have been sitting here, boring myself to death, listening to these journalists shoot questions at Nate even though I won.

But at least now I have time to think for myself after I have been sort of a mess the last week.

Seeing her stand there as she was smiling at me made me rethink everything that happened in New York.

The necklace – she still wears it.

And she still is ignoring me like nothing ever happened.

But I can't.

And I don't want to.

Kissing her felt like the world stopped moving.

The world was empty, and it was just us with no one around.

No text.

No nothing.

After New York, she made it her mission to ignore me.



“No, you cheated,” Alex shouts over the stadium as we are filming a video for the Aravis YouTube channel and Arden challenges Alex to a duel.

“How can you cheat at Jenga?” Arden shouts back at her, the brown-haired Satan bursts out laughing as Arden had a voice crack when he said Jenga. “Stop laughing.”

She sat down on the floor, still laughing, and looked like she was crying and choking on her breaths.

“What is wrong with her?” he questions me, genuinely confused.

“Why are you asking me? You are the one who had to spend a month with her..”

He hums, watching as she calms down from her high, and wipes away her tears.

“Okay,” she clapped as she jumped up. “Let’s continue this game.”



Chapter Twenty Seven
LIAM

“Try to pick up the pace a little at corner ten.” I hear my engineer suggest and sort of command to me through the radio.

“You’re having a laugh. I am in Monaco. One move and I am gone.”

It’s Monaco.

Overtaking is almost impossible.

If you start first there is a chance that you win the race but other than that it is impossible to win on this street circuit.

“Copy. Understood.”

I want to laugh, but it is impossible since I am in the car, driving for the qualifying now.

I finished sector three with a purple, but not the best time.

“That’s P3. We are starting P3 tomorrow. Good job, Liam.”

Not bad for the fact that this is Monaco.

Not bad.

“Who is starting P2 and from pole?”

“Nate is starting from pole with Arden in second.”

I am not surprised that Nate got pole.

King of the streets.

That’s what they call him.

Everyone knows that Nate and I are best friends, but on the track, we act like or more like we are rivals since we are both currently battling for the championship this year.

Emotional support rivals, they call us.

I love that nickname.

And to think that Nate is my emotional support rival is just WOAHHHH.

If I told my fifteen-year-old self that I was friends with my idol, they would laugh at me.

But I don’t judge them.

After all, I would be laughing at myself.

I parked the car at the P3 stand and got out as soon as I turned it off.

As soon as I got out, Nate came by my side.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, why wouldn’t I be?”

“I don’t know, you don’t seem very happy with my win.”
He is being sarcastic.

Fucker.

“Arsehole.” I laughed at him as he was bragging about his pole position for this weekend.

He taps at my helmet as he goes away.

I shake my head at him walking away.

I unclick my helmet, take it off, pull the balaclava, and ruffle out my hair as they were completely pressed down.

Even if I didn't get pole, still need to make sure I look awesome.

I place my helmet down and put on the cap.

I looked around, trying to find her.

Even if she doesn't talk to me, she still acknowledges me.

I find her talking to Nate, smiling as her brother got the third pole position this season alone.

I stay there, glued to the ground as I watch her engage in a conversation with her brother.

She looks- No she *is* incomparable.

Too beautiful you might say.

I did not know someone could be this beautiful.

She has these features that just catch someone's eyes as soon as they take a look at her.

She might believe people don't notice her because she likes to hide in her books. After all, she prefers the world that she creates.

But I noticed her.

I notice everything about her.

The way she scrunches her nose when she adores something.

The way she would rather listen than talk but still wants to be involved in the conversation.

The fact that she puts like three packs of sugar in her coffee.

Which I believe is mental.

But she also puts milk in her tea, as if this isn't already weird enough.

The way her accent rolls off her tongue and that she loves when I adore how she says certain words.

The way she loves to go on late-night walks but is scared she will annoy someone, so she never asks someone to join her.

That is one of the reasons I always invite her to my walks.

She thinks she is invisible to everyone.

But to me, she is the only thing I see when we are in a crowded room.

The only woman I notice.

She turns around, noticing me staring at her.

She gave a small smile and waved at me.

God, I want her so badly.



There are two things I can't tolerate.

One: Max.

Two: Also Max.

So, I don't get why he has to attend our dinner plans that we had planned.

And by us, I mean the drivers plus Lauren and Alex.

No other team principal is here except for him.

Why is he here?

The whole table was quiet.

No one dared to talk around Max.

Expect for Alex who kept whispering to Lauren or Arden who were sitting by her side.

I felt my phone vibrate in my hand, a message popping up from the group chat named:

‘Alex’s bitches.’

You can tell who made the group and everyone is just too lazy to change the name.

Arden: Who the hell invited him?

Nate: Not me.

Liam: Nor me. He hates me.

Three dots appear, and all of the members in the group typing on their phones.

Liam: my mistake. He wants to throw me off the team. He can’t tolerate me.

Alex: Do I look like I would invite him when I am the one who says the most unhinged and rude things about him?

Lauren: I don’t even care enough for him to invite him.

Marco: I don't even know him and from what I have heard from Alex, he isn't a nice guy. No reason for me to invite him.

Lauren: He wants to what?

Alex: LIAM!

Nate: he wants to throw you off the team?

Arden: Finally, some peace in the team.

Liam: *middle finger emoji*

Marco: my time to shine.

I can become an Aravis driver.

Liam: Don't even think about it.

Marco: too late.

Nate: And then I will have some peace if he is gone.

Lauren: you two are so mean.

Alex: It's their nature.

Nate: And yours.

Alex: I am not mean.

Nate: yeah, yeah...

Arden: lie.

Lauren: Alex...

Alex: I AM NOT. I just am very honest and state facts all the time.

“All on their phones,” Max speaks up and all of us look up from our phones and pack it away.

Awkward...

“Why is no one talking? Marco, you love to talk.”

He points at him.

“I have run out of topics to talk about.”

“Liam?”

“Not in the mood to talk.”

“Alex?”

“Why are you throwing it at me?”

“You talk all the time at the office.”

She hums and decides to ignore him further like she always does in the office.

“Lauren.”

She looks at him with a surprised look on her face, like she didn't expect him to talk to her.

She looks around, not sure what to say anymore.

“Why don’t we just have a silent dinner together?”

“No, maybe Lauren has a topic she would like to talk about.”

“I’m sure she would prefer the silence.” I shot back at Max as he was stepping over Lauren’s boundaries.

I know her.

When she doesn’t want to talk, you should not force her because she will just be nervous the whole conversation.

“And maybe tell us what has been on her *mind*.”

Now I get his motive.

He has complained about me being distracted and wants to press it out of Lauren for her to talk and admit out to Nate.

“I-,” she starts, looking at me for some sort of getaway, not knowing what to say. “Nothing much. Just work.”

“Really?”

“Yeah...”

“No, guy? Specifically, a friend.”

She looks at me. “Yeah...” and hides her glares as she tips down the last of her water.

“What is your mission, Max?” Alex asks him, curious about his weird questions. “Why those specifically, why this question?”

“Can’t I be curious about my best driver’s girlfriend?”

He did not just say that.

I choke on my water, feeling the liquid come out of my nose.

That’s disgusting.

“What is he talking about?” Nate asks as he stares at me with a mad expression on his face.

Or maybe it's just his natural expression.

I can't tell.

He has a pretty damn good poker face.

“So, they don't know about New York?”

“What happened in New York?” Alex pitches in before Nate can ask that question.

“Who is the necklace from Lauren?” he hops to the next question, completely ignoring Alex's question.

Lauren looks down at her necklace and then covers it with her hand, fidgeting around with it as she gets nervous.

“A friend.”

“Which friend?”

“What is up with the questions?” Nate chimes in, growing mad at Max's questioning.

“Liam.” She admits and looks at me.

I give her a comforting smile, telling her that she does not need to answer any more questions from him.

“I didn't know Liam was just a friend.”

“Why wouldn't I be?” I answered his question, seeing that she was starting to get uncomfortable with his questions.

“Of course, you would be. I just thought you were more than friends.”

“I need to use the restroom,” Lauren announced as she got up and went away.

I take one last look at Max, who has pride written all over his face.

I will deal with him later.

I get up from my seat and follow her outside.



Chapter Twenty-Eight
LAUREN

Max knows.

He knows and is trying to ruin my friendship and Nate's friendship with Liam.

He wants to destroy everything and leave him with nothing.

Too bad I will never stop being Liam's friend.

Neither will Nate.

But the whole situation still made goosebumps rise on my skin and just nervous.

All the kinds of questions he kept throwing at me and making me confess who bought me the necklace. Nate knows now. I never really told him who got me the necklace, only said a friend to not make the situation suspicious.

“Lauren!” I hear Liam call out for me.

I looked over at the entrance of the hotel, hoping he would see me from the corner as I needed to sit down but there were no places to sit, so I was just sitting on one sidewalk.

“You okay?”

“Just needed to get away from his questions. Haven’t figured out how to handle that kind of pressure yet.”

Have to figure it out sooner or later.

If Max knows it’s a matter of time before...

Oh no, mind don’t go there.

“I’m sorry about Max.” he came closer and took a seat next to me.

“You weren’t joking when he said he is an arse.”

“Nope.”

“He wants to throw you off the team?”

“Not exactly. But he did threaten me, saying and I quote: “And if you can’t prove this and next year that you are valuable on our team, then we can’t extend your contract. You’re out then. For good.”, He mocks Max in a high-pitched voice. “Like whom the hell is he to tell me that? He will retire way before my contract ends. I will make sure of it.”

I laugh as he shares his thoughts on Max’s threat, making me feel a lot better.

I missed talking to him, but I had this weird awkward feeling after the kiss and guilt that I did not want to feel, so I ignored him.

Which ended up making me feel even worse, I didn't want to lose a friend by making a mistake, so I felt like it was better to lose a friend by staying silent.

"I can bet on that," I whisper to him.

He laughs at me.

The dimples of his will be the death of me every time he shows me a smile.

"I'm sorry," I tell him. "I guess I was scared and decided to ignore you will make the guilt inside me go away."

"Did it?"

I shake my head. "It only made me feel worse."

I hate the fact that I am like this.

To think that I can't hold friendships because of how problematic my mind goes every time I mess up.

"I do like you, Liam."

And why am I telling him this?

Someone stop me.

"But I am scared."

"Why is that?"

"I guess I like you, but I like you too much to also lose you as a friend. You understand what I mean?"

"I do. And I feel the same."

"You do?"

"Yeah, I was scared as shit when you ignored me. The only thought of mine was, 'Well shit I just lost one of my best friends because of my stupidity'."

"It truly was my stupidity."

"True, I don't know why I am putting this on me." He talks fast as he looks at me like the night in New York.

I tilt my head slightly, smiling at him and his comment.

I know sarcastic comments when I hear them.
I guess me and Liam are kind of the same.

“Do you think you can...”

“What? Kiss you? Absolutely.”

I laugh at him, feeling the butterflies in my stomach go crazy and my heart race pick up.

“No...”

“Bummer.”

“Just promise me that you’ll always stay my friend. Even if I do stupid shit that might make you question me?”

He lets out a deep breath. “I don’t know...” he answers with a sarcastic accent, shrugging his shoulder.

I lightly tap his arms with my elbow.

“Depending on what shit you pull.”

“The worst kind.”

“Then always. I always pull the most stupid stunts.” I laugh at him, feeling my anxiety slowly calm down and the fear of almost losing my friend decreases. “There is nothing that can make me hate you, which is fucked up if you ask me.”

“Really fucked up,” I comment.

I let the warm spring air blow away all the remaining stress on me.

I love nature and I love late-night walking.

I lean my head against his shoulder, almost being able to hear the beating of his heart as its pace picks up.

I smile to myself at the thought of making him nervous.

I hate myself for it.

But your girl can only ignore him for so long.

Two weeks...

Or was it three?

“Does that mean you will accept my invitation to a date?”

I look up at him, not sure what to say.

Is a date a good idea or will it be my downfall and I will break my own rule?

‘Immune to the F1 drivers’ charm.’

Funny how I believed that I would be able to keep that promise to myself.

“Depends. Where are you thinking?”

“Paris.”

“What?” I laugh at his silly idea.

“Joking. It’s a surprise. All you have to do is accept it. Will you?”

“Do you promise that I will not die by the end of it? I once had a surprise date, and we went skydiving. I almost had a heart attack. Never again.”

I didn’t technically have a heart attack, but I did have a panic attack while we were in the air.

“I promise I will never harm you.”



Chapter Twenty Nine
LAUREN

Me.

And Liam.

On a date.

Well not yet.

But on Saturday after he is done with qualification on the Barcelona-Catalunya circuit.

It's the Spanish Grand Prix.

It's one of my favorite tracks and the weekend became even better.

The date is like two days away and I do not lie when I say that I haven't been in a better mood since he asked me.

"God, you've been so smiley and happy since Wednesday. It's disgusting." Nate complains. "Why are you so happy?"

I look at him with a confused face, acting like I don't know what he is talking about. "Me?? Smiley?? What kind of drugs are you on, brother?"

"None. Are you on some? Did Arden bribe you to take some or something?"

"Poor Arden. Always blaming him." If there is alcohol, he blames Alex, if there are drugs in the game, he blames Arden, even if he doesn't take any.

He just needs a reason to not like Arden.

These two are worse than Nate and Alex themselves.

He shrugs his shoulders at me. "Have you talked to Mum and Dad lately??" He changes the subject.

"Uhm...No. Mum said they are kind of busy at the moment. So, she isn't answering the phone. Nor is Dad."

"Weird. They are never too busy for their kids..."

I let out a mischievous laugh, acting like I was texting, trying not to act suspicious, even if I didn't do anything. "I wonder why."

"Eww, no, please. Childhood trauma is coming back." He covers his ears, not wanting me to tell the story.

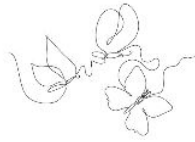
"I didn't even say anything."

I didn't have to. We both know what "childhood trauma" I am talking about.

"Bla bla bla bla bla." He shouts around, with his ear covered. He acts like such a child sometimes, It's unbearable.

He lived out the so-called 'childhood trauma when he was twelve and couldn't look at Mum and Dad the same every time they even shared the smallest kiss.

It's hilarious.



Qualifying.

Was.

Awesome.

And I am saying that by the fact that I just watched it, and it was so much fun.

Marco and James Berkley both hit the same time, fighting for the podium.

Not surprising, since both are talented but very interesting to watch.

We still have 30 seconds before Q3 starts and determine if either or neither of them gets pole for tomorrow.

Which in my opinion will be the most interesting battle of the season.

But the most interesting battle will be tomorrow when Liam has to work up from P14.

Qualifying didn't go well from his side.

So, I have been at the Aravis Motorhome ever since he got out of his car, comforting and sort of talking to him, trying to press out of him, what he has planned for tonight because if I am being honest,

I am scared.

Liam is a very adventurous person and I would not be surprised if his planned date would be taking me out on the tracks for a hot lap because, to be honest, I want to try that out but I am scared as hell.

“Please?” I plead to him, intertwining my fingers in his as his arms are swung over my shoulder.

Max being jealous kept throwing weird looks at us.

After that dinner, I just decided to ignore his intense stares and his comments.

“No, I am not telling you. Although it’s sort of two dates. I can tell you one of them.”

Two?

Awesome.

“Tell me, now.”

“How do you feel taking a hot lap around the track?”
“I knew it!” I shout and point my finger at him.

“Autsch, that hit my drum.” He laughs.

“Sorry.”

“It’s okay, Butterfly.”

“Can I drive?” I look up smiling at him, hoping that will get me the advantage that I need to get to drive for the hot lap.

He laughs – which didn’t sound like a laugh. “No.”

“What?”

He shakes his head. “Way too dangerous. I don’t want to die yet.”

I gasp at him and playfully hit him.

“You’re such a wanker. I would never kill you.”

“No, but your brother would.”

“Why would Nate kill you?”

“AUSTRIA 2019.”

“Yeah, well it was an accident.”

It was not an accident. Nate had it out for him after he accidentally smashed a hole in his car the previous race.

He can be a pain in the arse.

“No, it wasn’t and you know that. He had it out for me.”

“Well, you did punch a hole in his car.”

“Accidentally.”

“Okay, keep your voice down. Jeez.” I shushed him as he was starting to get louder.

We keep quiet for the rest of the ten minutes and watch the rest of the qualifying from the Aravis motorhome.

“Can I please drive?”

“No.”

I roll my eyes at him.

I will convince him. Watch me.



The paddock is swarmed with photographers, journalists, influencers, fans, and many more people.

Aravis Racing team decided to host a charity at the paddock to help raise money for cancer-sick children here in Barcelona.

All the funds will be collected through live TV, while also giving the people a show to watch as we drivers take multiple hot laps around the tracks while we have to answer questions in there and try not to crash into a wall.

“Woah.” She admires the posters that were hung up that we let some kids paint on with the wording:

“Want to become an F1 driver?”

Experience a day in a race car with your two favorite racers, while they answer hot questions.”

I see her smirk and turns to look at me. “What kind of questions?”

Oh god.

“Any you want to know.”

“Really? Well, I will be taking advantage of that.”

I laugh at her comment and we walk forward, now being seen live on TV, I can already feel the headlines that will be published later on but let that be a problem for later.

“And we are here, on the Barcelona-Catalunya circuit here in Spain, we were already here yesterday for the practice sessions and today we also witnessed the interesting qualifying. And now we are here with Aravis driver Liam Calveti and he brought a guest who seems to be Lauren Harper.” The reporter comes to us. “How are you both doing on this beautiful evening.”

“We are doing awesome. Can’t wait to hit the track.” I answer for both of us.

“That’s awesome to hear. I am not going to hold you off for any longer. Have fun at the race. We will be seeing everything from inside the car.”

Thank God.

I guide us to the near stand and pick up two helmets for the both of us.

She snatched the keys from the stand it was lying on, refusing to hand them to me.

“Please let me drive.” She pleads with me.

I would rather live another year to win and I would rather be alive to see her.

I try to get the keys back from her.

Didn't go as planned.

"How about a compromise?" I suggest her.

"I'm listening."

"I drive the first round on the track, to help you warm up the tires a little and then we will switch. Is that better for you?"

She presses her lips into a thin line and thinks about my great solution.

"Think faster, Lauren." I urge her as the crowd's excitement rose as much as their screams to see the cars on track.

"Fine." And smacks the keys at my hand palm. I flash her one of my well-known smirks.

I open the passenger seat for her and bow as a gesture. She shakes her head at me and laughs. "You're weird."

"Only with you."

She scrunches up her nose and lets out a sarcastic noise. "Weirdly enough." She mumbles under her breath and steps into the car.

I slam the car door shut. "Can I play music?"

"You want to play DJ?"

"Why not?"

"Let's do the music later, shall we?"

She agrees and buckles herself up and fastens the helmet on her head. "Okay, now I am scared."

I laugh at her, mockingly.

The car revved to life as I turned it on.

"Okay, can we go slow?"

I dramatically turn my head towards her with a mischievous smirk on my face. She stops her heavy breathing and looks at me for a second before she realizes what she said.

“Pervert.”

“You started it.”

She rolls her eyes at me and I press the throttle without any warning to her.

“No, no, no, no, nooooo.” She screams out repeatedly, gripping my arm for dear life. “Liam, I will murder you!”

“Want to know a small fact?”

“No,” she answers fearfully and just keeps her eyes on the road as she is scared I might drive us into the wall.

“We are currently driving at 160 km/h.”

“Are you trying to give me a heart attack with that information?”

I look over at her as we drive down the straight lane. As if she feels my eyes on her, she looks at me. “Eyes on the road. Good gracious God.” She points towards the road. The tires screech as I break and we hit the first curb.

I am having way too much fun.

“Questions. Ask questions.” I ordered her. She scrambles with the notebook she had on her lap, which she got handed before we hit the road.

“Have you ever driven a race car for a movie?” She shouted out the questions and screams as we were close to the wall as we turned.

“I wish but no.”

“Oh, my god.” She mumbles under her breath.

“But to be honest with you...”

“No, I don’t want to hear a confession of yours right now.”

“I am more scared to drive this car than my F1 car.” I give her the confession anyway, just to the adrenaline that was already high enough, to the maximum level.

“Are you joking?” Her voice cracks. I laugh at her as she stresses out. “Don’t tell me that.”

“I am. Just letting you know.” We hit another curb and her grip tightens on my forearm.

“I am sorry if I am hurting you.”

“All good, Butterfly. All good.”

Another scream erupts from her mouth.

“Bloody hell.”

“Relax. This is an easy track.” It is. Thankfully the lanes aren’t as small as in Monaco and there aren’t that many curbs where I need to brake at.

“Need I remind you of what happened earlier?”

I laugh at her. “It can happen.”

“You crashed into the wall and damaged your entire front wing. How can you just say it happened.”

“You want to do a donut?” I asked her out of nowhere, trying to change the subject as we were getting closer to the finish line.

“Yes...” she chokes out the word, almost unable to hear her.

Her knuckles turn white as she holds on to the handlebars of the car. The death contraption – according to her – continues as we pass the empty bleachers in a blur. I turn a few knobs on the center control, seeing her eyes widen at me.

I listen to the robotic voice, sending adrenaline spikes through my body.

Traction Control Disabled.

She screams out the word “no.” rapidly as fast as she can as my hands turn the wheel. The car drifts across the pavement before we are spinning donuts. A cloud of smoke swirls around the car from the rubber burning and the tires squeal against the road. “I think I just died and came back to life.

That was awesome.” She squeals in excitement, her chest rising up and down slowly as she comes down from her adrenaline.

“You want to try it out.” I encourage her, flashing her the car keys.

“No way in hell.”



Chapter Thirty One

LAUREN

That was the best and yet the most terrifying first date I have ever been at. I'll take skydiving out of the list of "scariest first dates." Nothing can top the adrenaline and fear that you have at the same time when you are in a racing car that goes 300 kilometres per hour. But sadly, didn't take advantage of the questions as I was planning to.

Was too busy trying to control my heart rate-

Other than that, loved the experience and would do it again – in another lifetime. Not in this one.

"Well, that was a fun ride." He clamps his head on the steering wheel. We made it to the end and he had turned off the car. We are just now sitting here, me trying to collect my nerves and thoughts while he is just patiently waiting.

“You call death fun?”

“It’s the adrenaline that makes this experience feel like death. And in my opinion, that’s awesome.”

I laugh at him, adjusting the camera that was placed in front of us, which I unfortunately kicked and the whole ride was filmed at a forty-five-degree angle.

“This helmet is irritating my ears,” I complain as I try to adjust the brick - aka the helmet – on my head so that it doesn’t smash down my ears like a dough.

“Yeah, they are kind of annoying.”

“Shouldn’t we step out?” I asked him as the camera crew was waiting outside the car, thankfully a few meters away.

He grabs my hand that was lying on my thigh, gives it a light squeeze, and flashes me a soft smile. “Let’s go.”

I step out of the car, already mentally preparing myself for the questioning.

“Well, from what we saw, you had fun in there, Lauren.”

I shake my head.

“You did not?”

“It’s like a death wish to drive in one of those cars. It’s fun, maybe...” I waver between my words. “It is fun if you have a death wish and are an adventure freak. Not me, stay safe though if you think of stepping a foot in there.” I turn around pointing at the car, as I am being dramatic about this once-in-a-lifetime – and it will stay at once – experience.

“We’ll reconsider your advice on that. And the fans seem to be pretty happy to see Liam thriving in his relationship with you. How did you guys meet?”

Relationship??

Cute that people think we are dating.

But we’re not.

Yet.

“Nate and I have been friends for a while and we met last year at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix when Nate finally had the balls to introduce me to her.”

Ha-ha, I remember that day.

Wait, *what?*

Did he just unintentionally confirm our *relationship*?

That isn't even a relationship.

Bloody hell...

“You seem to be smiling when he mentioned Abu Dhabi. Why?”

Ugh, these questions.

No wonder Nate hates conferences.

“He was the first person who did not confuse me as Nate's girlfriend and I just find it funny.”

Why am I telling her that?

I am starting to sound like Nate because he sometimes – more like most of the time – just shoots stuff out of his mouth that he doesn't mean to share.

Another flaw of mine, I guess.

I love to overshare sometimes and it can get me into trouble one day.

I just know it.

I look up at Liam, seeing him smile down at me. I lean my head against his chest.

He places a soft kiss on the crown of my head and wraps around me, warming me with his scent, the strong smell of his cologne invading my brain, making me lose my mind over him, again.



“I am not getting on this moped. Forget it.”

“Come on. This is not the MotoGP. Just a relaxing ride around to get to our destination. And it doesn’t even go that fast,”

He reasons with me, trying to get me on the moped.

I will not step on.

They are unsafe.

And would much rather walk to our destination.

“Why can’t we just walk?”

“Because it’s like a twenty minutes’ drive. Calculate how long the walk would be.”

“An hour minimum,” I argue with him.

“Nice try, I am not walking. Come on.” he holds up the helmet for me to take. “Please.”

“That’s all I needed to hear.” And snatch it out of his hands. He chuckles, rolling his tongue on the inside of his mouth, slightly looking at me.

I smirk at him, fastening the helmet on me and motioning him to hop on the moped. “Hop on, princess.”

He looks at me with a disapproving look for the nickname and hops on the moped. “Well, that was easy.”

He lets out a sarcastic hum. “You’re funny.”

“I know I am.” I leaned my elbow against his shoulder, using him as my armrest and my legs were kind of starting to get tired.

“We two are so much alike, I swear to God.”

“Do not ever say that again.”

“Why?”

“Because I am not crazy.”

“What- and you think I am?”

“Yes.” I balance myself on his shoulders and hop onto the moped. “You are,” I whisper in his ear, just to get on his nerves.

He chuckles, slowly guiding my hands that we on his shoulder to his waist and securing them at the front, telling me to hold onto him.

I could feel his bicep through the t-shirt he was wearing and *HOLY SHIT*.

I don't know if I miss-felt but I felt an eight-pack.

Wait- he *does* have an eight-pack.

I saw it before, but feeling it is way better than just admiring it with your eyes.

I lean my head against his shoulder, seeing the view from his perspective as we drive by the beach, the warm breeze air blowing away my hair and sending light goosebumps over my skin. I close my eyes, enjoying the ride and just the moment because who would have thought that I would be going on a date with Liam?

Not me.

“I don't know what's worse. These helmets or the one from before.” I complain as I take off the helmet and my hair just feels like they were frizzed up from it. “Both are pressing my ears to my skull. Annoying if you ask me. And I still don't get why we couldn't just walk. I could have avoided the fact that I now need to freshen up my hair a little or I will look like I just got electrocuted.”

He just smiles.

“What?”

“You're pretty,”

I feel a smile cripple on my face and my cheeks heat up from his simple compliment. “Thank you,” I tell him, smiling like an idiot.

He holds out his hand for me to take and I reach for it intertwining our fingers as we walk a short five minutes and he keeps telling me weird jokes.

He halts in his steps and I look forward.

A date on the beach. I love the idea.

I gasped as soon as I saw the setup.

Candles were everywhere and a small picnic blanket was spread on the sand with food, beverages, and even a cake.

“When did you have time to bake?”

That was the only thing that came to mind.

“I wanted to but didn’t have time so I asked Marco to make it for us. He was kind of weirded out by my request but no worries. He wasn’t suspicious.”

It’s the thought that counts.

And Marco outdid himself with the decoration.

The white frosting base was covered with all sorts of decorations and edible butterflies were stuck into it that made the cake look like an outburst of them.

I think the butterflies in my stomach just had an outburst.

I get impatient so I spring up, take Liam’s hand in mine, and lead us to the blanket.

“How did you plan this on such short notice?”

He shrugs his shoulders. “I had help.”

“Right. The reason you asked Marco to make the cake and the F1 charity. I get it.”

“Let’s just pretend that for one night I am just Liam and you are just...” he takes a deep breather, his chest rising up and slowly falling like he is finding it hard to breathe. “And you are just Lauren. Always just Lauren.”

He pours the chill champagne that was in a bucket of ice into the glass while flashing me a mischievous smirk of his

that I happen to see way too often in my dreams than I intend to.

Don't blame a girl for her dreams.

And we did exactly what he suggested.

Talked all about our favorite films, colors, animals, and all that kind of stuff. I found out that Liam once had a Hamster but his dad accidentally killed it with a vacuum cleaner.

And I told him that I wanted to adopt a puppy. Especially a Yorkshire Terrier. They are just adorable.

And our talks continue with our favorite cities that we visited and places that are way too underrated but we still like to gatekeep for us because of just how beautiful they are.

"How about we play a game?" he asks me as we ran out of topics to talk about. "A secret for a secret?"

"Not my kind of game," I tell him.

"Why not, if I may ask?" he mimics the last sentence in a weird accent that is supposed to be British but he sounds like a broken robot.

"Because in my opinion, secrets should stay unrevealed, so that the public won't find them out."

"Is that why you stay away from most public *things*?" he asks me and I laugh as he is struggling to find a word other than things.

"Yes."

"Okay fine, then just tell me how you decided to become an author."

"I got into writing when I was twelve and tried to write a novel, but never did because I never knew where to start. But as soon as I started college, I applied for agencies and soon after I sent out my first copy, I got multiple offers and published it in my second year and graduated early and did three years of college instead of four. But ever since I did all that, I got an author burnout. I haven't written a paragraph

longer than five hundred words for God knows how long. “ I explained to him as he asked me how I got the huge book deal of mine of the book getting translated into fifteen languages and having like four different editions by four different publishers. “It’s humbling really. I was expecting to have drafted my third book by now. Just makes me feel like I am a failure at the career I choose on my own.”

“You’re not a failure. You are just new to this job. I think it’s perfectly okay to not always to perfect.”

“Easy for you to say, you...” the words spill out of me and I stop them before I keep saying them.

I press my lips into a thin line, stopping them from saying more.

He shoots me a smirk, knowing damn well what I was about to say.

“Go on, finish your sentence.”

I cover my face with my hands out of embarrassment and lay down on the blanket all the way.

I am stupid.

“No,” I murmur under my hands. I slightly pull them down, peaking at him, seeing a smug smile on his face.

He is perfect. I will not deny that to myself.

He lets out a rough laugh, slowly moving my hands away from my face, now closer than ever.

Woah, when did he get this close?

I feel my lungs tighten as he scoots closer, towering over me now with his body. His hand travels to the nape of my neck, he tugs in it and smashes his lips on mine.

At first, it was a slight kiss before he darted out his tongue, invading my mouth, licking, kissing, and biting my lips. I pull myself up a little, trying to take some of the control, but he stops and groans against my lips. His kiss is now the complete opposite of firm and gentle.

It's rough.

He kisses me like a madman searching for his sanity.

It's out of control.

I slowly pull away, trying to catch my breath in between his kisses.

I can barely breathe from the sensation of his skin against mine and his lips against mine. It's maddening.

Making me go crazy and my head spinning in a circle.

My hands travel to his hair, tangling in his hair. I finally find the strength to pull myself up with his help and situate myself on his lap, me now on top of him and more in control than before.

His demanding kisses never stop.

His hands are everywhere.

In my hair.

On my neck.

On my skin.

Everywhere.

He takes everything from me.

My sanity.

Everything.

I feel a smile cripple on his lips.

Our kiss was never broken away. I push my jacket off my shoulders and throw it to the side, irritated and hot from it or the tension or both.

I cup his face with my hands and he keeps his hands on my thighs close to the end of my shorts that I had on.

I pull away from him, my leaning my forehead against his, breathing heavily, watching him and seeing his chest rise up and down in an uneven rhythm.

He picks up one of his hands from my thigh, gently cups my chin, and places my lips on top of his again.

But this time the kiss started gently, but soon enough he said screw gentle soon again after.

He devours me with his tongue. Nipping and biting at my lips.

We fight for dominance once again as his hands travel back to my thigh, now on the inside of my pants.

I am making one of the most reckless decisions of my life and yet I can't seem to stop myself from wanting him.

Needing him.

I lift my hips, feeling a bulge against my thigh. He grunts in frustration, yet never leaves my lips or his hands leave my body. It's like he is attached to me.

Everything between us screams fire.

He ignites a fire in me I didn't even know you could ignite. I pull away from him, standing up on my feet and making a run for it.

"What are you doing?" Liam calls out for me, smiling as his hair looks like a complete mess.

"It's not like we have every day to take a walk on the beach, Calvetti. Care to join me?"

He didn't take a second to think and got up, chasing me around the beach.

I make sure he doesn't catch me, adrenaline spiking up in me as we run on the sand along the beach as he is trying to catch me. I stop, trying to catch my breath, giving him the advantage to catch up to me.

He kneels, wraps his arms around my legs, and swings me over his shoulder. I scream in anticipation, feeling slightly lightheaded being upside down but my oh my... His arse is a nice view.

“Put me down, Liam!” I shout at him.

He ignores me and slowly takes a turn. I laugh the whole time he carries me around the beach, twirling me around in a circle while my cheeks feel like they are hurting from laughing so much. Soon he is out of breath and carries me back to our spot. He carefully goes down on his knees, releasing me on my feet. I look down at him as he bats his eyelashes at me, looking up at me with lust, and *hunger*.

His finger moves along the waistband of my trousers as he presses light kisses underneath my blouse, feeling myself in need of breath. He continues his kisses along my stomach, his finger moving closer to the zipper of my pants. I dig my fingernails into his shoulders, not being able to hold back the small moan that erupts from my lips and my head falls back.

I stopped him as he reached for the zipper. “Wait, no.” he looks up at me, wetting his lips. “How about we pack this up and leave, *hmm?*” I ask him, hearing myself made me realize how fucked up he got me because I practically choked out those words.

“And here I thought I came up with the great ideas.”

“Well, you are not the only great thinker here. I happen to be very creative.”

He lets out a low laugh and breathes out shakingly.

Ha!

I make him nervous.

I call it a successful mission.

He places light kisses up my body, gently caresses my nape, and slams his lips to mine. “Let’s blow this popsicle stand.”

We packed everything as fast as possible and loaded everything into the car nearby that Liam said was his, but I have no idea if we just left the stuff at a random car or not.



Chapter Thirty Two
LAUREN

The kiss gets more intense the moment we step into his hotel room. Saying that he is driving me crazy is an understatement.

If losing my mind feels like this, then God help me he can do whatever the fuck he wants because losing my mind has never felt this good.

He devours me as if I am his last chance at survival.

His body is all over me.

His strong-toned legs are between my trembling ones as he presses me against the wall.

His chest flattened against my aching breasts and made me lose my breath.

Goodbye, sanity. And goodbye walking because I just know this will not end gently.

His hands were all over my hair, face, my cheeks.

He is all over me.

Invading himself into my skin like a virus.

He dips his head down, trailing wet kisses down to my ear all the way to my neck, sucking and kissing my sweet spot, and the jacket that was in my hands moments ago falls onto the ground with a thud.

I feel my own eyes roll at the back of my head as I feel his tongue run along my neck. He places both of his hands under my arse and lifts me, I wrap my arms around his neck, squealing as he moves us away from the wall, the back of my knees hitting the bedpost but still not enough to make me fall on top of it.

He stops his action on my neck, looking down at me as he towers over me, hunger displayed on his face. “You sure about this?”

“I wouldn’t have suggested coming here if I didn’t want this, now would I?” I tell him, batting my eyelashes at him.

My hands run along his chest, checking out the different muscles. He doesn’t leave his exploring to anything; his hands roam all over me. Cupping my breasts, the fabric of my loose blouse and the bra brush against my nipples, wishing this damn barrier would just already leave.

I push my body into his, frantic for more.

Rough fingers find the top of my blouse, I gasp as I hear it rip and drag it down my arms and throw it on the floor.

“Liam, you ripped my blouse.”

“I’ll buy you thousands of these if you want me to.”

He never stops his actions and finds the buttons of my trousers, slowly dragging the zipper down, and letting them fall to the ground with a thud.

The only barrier from me is now gone, leaving me with only my thong and a bra. Good thing I decided to wear matching ones.

His mouth finds mine again, the nipping, biting, and sucking sensations drive me mad to the end. His touch does weird things to me that I can't even begin to explain.

Aroused doesn't even begin to describe the feeling inside me and the burning of my core as he keeps his actions going.

My hands travel to the hem of his shirt. I pull away from him, pulling the shirt over his head, the tips of my fingers burning as they touch his skin.

A fire ignites in them.

He keeps his hands threaded in my hair, I admire his beautifully toned chest with my eyes and hands.

"I think you're beautiful," I tell him, looking up at him.

Why did I say that? No idea.

He hums. "I think you are gorgeous. Breath-taking even."

I smile at his cheesy compliment, feeling my cheeks heat up. I lightly stand up on my tiptoes, sealing his words with a kiss.

He didn't rush into the kiss this time; his kiss was gentle and sweet.

A rush of electricity ran over my spine.

He slowly let me down onto the bed, crawling on top of me, making sure not to crush me with his weight over me.

He breaks our kiss, trailing them down my body, his hands roaming all around my waist and playing around with the waistband of my thong. He presses sensual kisses down to my breasts, sucking on the flesh. I let out a soft moan as he keeps sucking on my flesh, gasping when his fingers find my core under the underwear. A tingling sensation creeps up my spine as he parts me with his fingers, tracing them up and down my wet folds.

“You’re dripping wet, Butterfly.” He plunges two fingers inside my pussy, slowly pumping in a rhythm. The combination of his fingers pumping in and out of me and the sucking on my breasts. It’s a relentless torture of what he is doing to me.

But the best kind I would say.

He knows what he is doing.

Hell, the rumors are true of him being a sex god and we haven’t even gotten to the best part.

“Liam…” I moan his name, feeling a knot build up on the lower of my stomach and regretting my word as soon as he stopped his actions and retrieved his fingers from me. I looked confused at him, not sure what he was doing and why the bloody hell he stopped when I was *this* close.

“Sit up.” He commands me in a rough tone. I look confused him, obey nonetheless to his order. “Get on the bed, on your hands and knees.” I look at him with a shocked expression on my face and turned on at the same time by his commands.

I do as I say, getting on my hands and knees on the bed, my knees hitting the softness of the mattress.

I hear a rustle of his belt and then a thud as his pants hit the ground and the ripping of a foil. Next thing I know he is behind me, the mattress going down as he positions himself. I didn’t even bother looking back at him because I knew I wouldn’t be able to hold myself up any longer if I did. I felt a cold sensation on my neck, he was trailing his fingers along my spine, his cool rings touching my skin. I feel myself choke on the oxygen, not being able to breathe from his proximity and the touch of his fingers. He unclasps my bra, leaving it hanging down my arms. I step out of it with my hands and throw it somewhere in the room.

“What do you say about a little game, *hmm?*” his deep voice clings around the air. I take a deep breath, trying not to sound breathless at his effect on me.

“Like what? Rock, paper, scissors. Loser’s weeping?”

His throat rumbles as he chuckles at my comment. “Something like that.” His fingers trace my thong, moving it aside and placing the tip of his cock at my entrance. “But instead of weeping, the loser will be screaming my name.” Liam gives me no warning before he drives himself inside me with a thrust.

I feel my eyes water at the feeling of him stretching me, filling me with his cock. The hotel bed is perfect for these kinds of situations.

He reads my body as if he knows it by heart, reaching to my breasts, pinching, and massaging my nipples to a sharp point that they start to hurt and pulse with pleasure as he relentlessly pounds into me from behind.

I just know that Liam will destroy the last two brain cells I have left so why not just live it as long as possible?

I press my hand against my mouth, trying to muffle my screams and yet better hold them in.

“You’ll get used to it. I promise.” He rasps in my ear, loud enough for me to hear. It’s like he knew I would go to death by the feeling of him inside.

“Holy shit.” The words unintentionally leave my mouth and I drop my head on top of the pillow, my wobbly arms giving up on holding me up.

He keeps whispering the most unholy words to me while fucking me relentlessly. The innocence that I know about Liam is completely gone.

I grab the sheets and wrap my fist around them, desperate for something to hold myself as he pounds into me harshly, not stopping his actions for me to get used to him.

An unbidden yelp erupts as he hits the spot that made my back bow.

Liam lightly fisted my hair and slowly tugged my head up until I was half upright, making sure he didn’t hurt me while

doing so.

How sweet. I guess-

“Don’t make a sound. People are sleeping.” He commands me in a deep voice, slowly untangling his hair on my hair, and guiding it around my throat. The feeling of his warm hand and cold rings at the same time sends a mere electricity source of pleasure through my spine, slightly moaning and wanting to hold on to this feeling.

And I suppose he wasn’t wrong when he said people are sleeping. They are. It’s like what 9 p.m. and most of them here are the drivers who are trying to get a good night’s sleep before the race.

And then there is Liam.

Fucking me thoroughly with no sort of remorse.

I feel the knot in my stomach get tighter and my moans get louder as he hits my G-spot repeatedly. He fucks me harder and deeper, as I clench around his cock, desperate for a release.

He releases my throat, his hands guiding between us, his fingers finding my clit, rubbing it, making my body pulse with pleasure. I feel my body vibrate, my release closing in, the uncomfortable feeling of him stretching me to my limits long gone. I arched my back, unable to hold in my moans as his movements became rougher and more eager as he was helping me find the release.

“Oh. My. God.” And I combust, my moans echoing around the room, suddenly careless about who is and who is not in the hotel.

The smell of sweat and sex lingers around the room as try to control my breathing and my body’s response to everything.

He drives his cock out of me and turns me around, now laying on my back.

“Tired yet, Butterfly?”

I shake my head.

“Good, because we are far from done.” He whispers in my ear, hooking his fingers around my thong and pulling it down my legs, positioning himself between my legs.

He devours me like a hungry man, catching every last drop, lapping my core over and over again.

I come down from my high, regulating my breath slowly. I watch Liam rise from between my legs, watching him with hungry eyes as he wipes my arousal from the corner of his lips and sucks on the pad of his thumb.

Holy. Fuck.

“You are so perfect.” I felt my eyes shot open and I laughed at his compliment. “Your heart, your mind, your eyes. Everything.” He keeps his compliments coming, leaning down and pressing his lips onto mine, kissing me softly. I wrap my legs around his waist.

He wraps his arms around my waist and turns us around, me now on top of him. He leans against the headboard and I prop up my hand against the headboard, holding onto it for support, never breaking off the kiss. I reach with my free hand between us, taking his dick in my hand and slowly sinking on it, gasping for air between the kiss, still not used to his size.

He didn't dare to do anything and left control of the whole situation in my hands.

I glide my hips up and down his cock, the knot building up in my stomach again as he hits the G-spot.

“*Atta girl*. Just like that. Show me how desperate you are for my cock.” He whispers to me, using his free hand to move my hair to the back of my ear so that he has a better view of my face. His eyes bore into me and I slowly rose before pushing down again. “Oh shit.”

“Lauren.” His voice strains as his fingers dig into my hips. A tingling sensation runs up my spine as I continue to ride

him, finding the perfect rhythm to make the orgasm slowly arrive.

“Fuck-” I curse, the energy in my body leaving as I don’t have the stamina to keep up with him. “I can’t-“

“You’ve got more in you. I have enough stamina to fuck those out of you, but not until you give me what I want.”

Everything fades as the pleasure hits me inside, building up confidence in me to get Liam to his high and end.

Time stands still, every emotion washing over me trying to keep myself from not just giving up and increasing my control on Liam, whose eyes remain half open, his lids heavy from lust.

Who doesn’t love the expression on a guy’s face when you have him at your mercy?

It’s delicious.

His fingers sink into my hipbones, signaling to me that he is close. I feel his dick twitch inside me as he lifts his hip, digging deeper into me, finding my release. The sensation sends heat through my veins, my body pulsing with heat and need, hearing the beating of my heart in my ears at the same pace as my breaths.

I wrap my arms around his neck, leaning my head against his shoulder, our naked bodies pressing against each other and both of us slowly coming down from out high, he isn’t moving except his hands as he reaches for my left hand and intertwines our hands and bringing a smile to my face, my heart squeezes at the simple gesture.

Am I fucked with the feeling towards him? *Absolutely fucking yes.*



Chapter Thirty Three
LIAM

“You fucking Idiot!” She shouts at me with the biggest smile on her face and she runs to me and throws her arms over my shoulders.

I slowly wrap my arms around her waist. I pick her up and spin her in a circle. She lets out a joyful laugh, the same one that keeps playing in my head day and night. He pulls away from the hug, staring at me with her brown eyes, the smile of her reaching up to her eyes, the sight of an angel.

“How- I-” she stutters on her words, not knowing what to say.

I didn’t know what to say myself, but at least I knew what to do.

I press my lips against hers.

Luckily we decided to meet up at a parking lot in the middle of nowhere and it was pretty dark so no one saw us.

I feel a source of energy travel in my body.

She smiles into the kiss.

I kiss her harder.

She pulls away and leans her forehead against mine, completely out of breath. “Turns out you don’t know what to say in every situation.”

I laugh at her comment. “But you know what to do.”

“Of course. I am a wise man.”

“You had to ruin the moment with that big ego of yours?”

“My ego always plays a part in our conversations so, yes.”

She scrunches up her nose and hums at me. “I like what you did to your hair,” I told her as I moved a strand behind her ear and slowly cupped her cheek, which as a result made her blush.

“Just tried out a new hairstyle. Nothing special.”

“Well, I think it’s special. Either way, you look phenomenal.” She smiled at me.

“I like what you did on the track today. Pretty impressive.”

“I was impressed with myself that I made that happen. Didn’t expect it.” She let out a joyful laugh leaning her head against my chest.

We had this bet that if I could make it to the points today, we would spend the summer at her apartment in London. She will be my tour guide for the whole summer.

In more ways than one.

“I am going to keep saying you are crazy because you are. P4 Liam. That’s huge.”

“If you have the right car, everything is possible.”

“Not just the car. The talent. Astor didn’t make it to the points and he started in them. You have what it takes to become a champion.”

I feel my mind shut up with any worry whatsoever going through it. She made my worry go away with just a flash of her smile.

“What do you say about a walk?” I ask her, seeing the light in her eyes shine up at my question.

“And I thought you were never going to ask.” She slightly goes on her tiptoes, pressing a small kiss on my right cheek.

I felt myself blush, feeling my heartbeat increase at her gesture and her presence next to me.

Somehow our annual late-night walk ended with me carrying her on my back because her feet were hurting her from walking all day in her heels.

I don’t mind carrying her.

Hearing her giggles as I tell her some lame jokes right next to my ear is the best thing to end the night with.

Even a long one.

“No, I am telling you. She was face-arse drunk and just wobbled to the hotel. People thought she was crazy and she did look a little crazy.” She explained what happened in Monaco after the after-party with Alex. “Someone needs to cut her down on those margaritas and whatever she is taking all the time.”

“I feel like she would be the ‘cool fun aunt’ when we all are older.”

“Yes!” she shouts, pointing forward, showing me directions to the hotel because I am lost and she has the navigation. “But Alex is also the friend you can have fun with, she always pulls some stupid stuff.”

“And you are saying I am not a fun friend to hang out with.”

“You are! Just sometimes you are serious and she never is, except when she is in her working space.”

“And you are saying that it isn’t the same for me?”

“Well, no.”

I let out an audible gasp, hurt to hear her say that I am a ‘serious’ friend.

“Okay, put me down please.” I look around, seeing the hotel nowhere nearby.

“But we are nowhere near the hotel.”

“I feel like my feet are about to fall asleep. As much as I love being carried, I do not need my legs to fall asleep.”

I nod in understanding and slowly drop her to the floor, making sure she doesn’t hurt herself on her heels.

We finished our walk and I bid her a good night in front of the hotel, sneaking in a kiss that she returned. “Good night.”

“Good night!” she shouted as she made her way into the lobby, up with the lift to her room. We decided to go in separately to not seem too suspicious. Even if most of our friends can already bet their money on us that we are dating.

She asked me this morning what was between us, and the fact that she got insecure that she was maybe just a one-time thing broke my heart hearing her say it.

She never was a one-time thing.

She is the woman I want.

I may not be able to see the whole future but I know that she will be in it.

Only in one way.

As my companion.

My future partner.

Nothing less but *so much more* than just my girlfriend.



Chapter Thirty Four
LAUREN

Two months later...

“Liam Matteo Calvetti, you are about to experience a cultural shock. You are going to take the tube with me for the first time in your life!” I exaggerate, happy to finally show him around the city I was born in.

I love London.

It may be boring seeing the same every day after I lived here for eighteen years, but I still love it more than anything.

And I love touring people around London and telling them all about the buildings and architecture and visiting the Victoria and Albert Museum near Cromwell Road.

It’s an interesting museum, what can I say?

“The tube?”

“Yes, *the* tube.”

Liam and I had a bet that if he could get into the points at the Spanish Grand Prix, he would be allowed to choose what we do over the summer break.

Surprisingly, he chose London. And even asked for a tour guide.

I love being a tour guide.

“I sort of get it now why you Brits are a little sensitive to the sun.”

“Why?”

“You barely have any sun here; how should your skin get used to it?”

I mean, he is right.

Most of the time the weather here in London is cloudy but still warm but the sun never is too bright or too much so we can't tan here. The summer days can get hot, but then in the evening, it cools down fast.

I continue to explain my tour guiding plan and the plans for today to him as we wait at the station for the tube to take us directly into the city since my apartment is a little outside of it.

“Wait, don't you live with Nate? He talked about it once how you two moved in together.” He asks.

“Used to, yes. But the noises from his bedroom were getting on my nerves since he was three rooms away from mine. I do not want to hear the banging on the wall.”

It was a traumatizing one year and four months for me.

My poor innocence.

He lets out a chuckle. “Poor you.”

“Yeah, poor me.” I leaned my head against his shoulder as we were seated at the bench, the tube taking forever to arrive.

“So, Nate used to shag a lot?” I groan in frustration. I knew he would ask some stupid and unthought questions in his head.

“Please don't start. I do not want to relive that trauma.”

“You know I won’t stop asking you about it until I get my answer, right?”

“I know.” I get up from the bench, relieved that the tube finally arrived. I looked down at Liam who looked horrified to take the ride with the tube. I extend my hand, waiting for him to take it. He reaches for me, intertwining our hands.

We had matching clothes on.

I just wore a classy yet flowy white dress with white heels which I will regret by the end of the day that I wore.

Liam is in his white pants and white shirt. Classy but chic, and we match.

We are adorable.

I guide us into the tube, taking a free seat with an old lady next to us. I smile at her and she smiles back at me. The whole ride we sit there holding hands and me trying to take a nap on his shoulder.

He soothes my hand with his thumb, leaving kisses now and then on the crown of my head.

Let’s hope no one took pictures or isn’t planning on posting them if they took any.

I want to be the one to tell my brother about us and Liam Understood when I said that I was not ready to let anyone know just yet.

And he agrees with me.

He is scared Nate will take his wrath out on him on the tracks so he is keeping it low.

Knowing Nate, he would do exactly that.

We know how it was in Austria.

Not pretty.

Ended with both cars totalled.

I would say Nate sometimes overdoes it. Somehow both of them survived 2019 without murdering one another so I guess

that's a win.

But the fun fact about this crash is that they talked about it like it was an accident two minutes later.

No matter how mad Nate is, he could never push away Liam. Surprisingly.

“You okay?” he whispers to me, squeezing my hand lightly.

I nod at him, feeling my eyelids slowly fall heavy.

I have no idea when I fell asleep all I remember is Liam whispering to me to get up because we had to step out or otherwise we would never get to the tour.

Right, the tour.

Wake up, Lauren.

The tour all started with – like always - a walk through Hyde Park and we eventually ended up getting two pieces of Dorset apple cakes from a small bakery nearby. By far the best cake and it goes perfectly with vanilla ice cream.

“I mean it, did Nate shag a lot?”

“Liam!” I shouted to him with a mouthful of cake, laughing as he started irritating me with that question. “Are you in love with Nate or something?”

“Close, but I just want to know.”

Wait, what did he say?

Close?

What does he mean?

Maybe I shouldn't worry about that too much. It could mean everything.

“I am not telling you and I am not going to talk about this any longer.”

“Come on.” He whines. “Just give me a number?”

“A number? Of how many girls he invited in? Why do you want to know?”

“Because I am interested if your brother was worse than Arden.”

“Arden?”

“You don’t want to know.”

“Yeah, I better not know.”

“Are you going to tell me?” he lightly nudges me with his elbow, teasing me to get me to say the number.

“Nope, forget it.”

“Fine.”

“Did you just leave an argument without a big fight?” I sarcastically gasped at him, not believing my eyes.

“I’ll deal with you later.”

“Oh,” I respond in a not-so-enthusiastic tone.

“Yeah, Oh.”

I laugh at his joke, pressing my lips to his. He deepens it, smiling into it.

Oh, how I *love* London.



I love London.

I love the view here in London.

Only the view happens to be Lauren.

The grace she carries walking around, telling me about the statues and paintings that are represented here at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Telling me all about the beauty of them.

“It’s beautiful.” She comments staring at the painting ahead of us.

“It is,” I reply to her, not being able to rip my eyes away from her.

Everything about her is so perfect.

I noticed before summer break she died her hair lighter which makes the beautiful features on her face shine even more.

She started wearing her glasses more often as her contact lenses were irritating her. She looks fabulous.

Like an angel.

She turns her head in my direction, and I am hit with the sudden urge to breathe as her gaze makes me feel like I am suffocating from her beauty.

The butterflies storm around in my lower stomach. There are two reasons I gave her that nickname.

1. My mum told me that butterflies are the most beautiful thing to exist, hence her. She is the most beautiful creature I set my eyes on and couldn't look away since.
2. My stomach storms with butterflies every time I see her, it's weird. But yet so beautiful

My mum always told me, the moment you fall, you have to get up and act like it never happened.

Little did I know she didn't mean falling in love because I didn't ever want to get up.

Falling for Lauren – even if it's at the slowest pace I have ever fallen in love – is like sitting on cloud nine because she is just the ray of sunshine that glows as soon as she is present and blinds you as soon as she smiles.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” She shies away as she realizes I haven't looked away just yet, because how could I?

“You are divine.” I reach to her, cupping her cheek, my cold hands feeling the warmth of her cheek. I take a deep breath. It's confusing what kind of power she has over me, over my body, and my heart and mind.

But I would rather have her be the most confusing thing for me than anyone else. Lucky for me I am a curious person, so I

will take my time and dedication to know more about this feeling for her that I never want to end.

“A new verb every day. I see what you are doing, Calvetti.”

“What?”

“I know what you are doing?”

If you can guess ‘falling in love’ then yes, you know what I am doing.

“What is it?”

“You know...” her smile widens, and I feel my heart squeeze at the sight of her smiling so brightly. “Okay, what are doing? What is that you are doing with the ‘verbs’?”

I smile at her sudden seriousness, turning around so that I am now facing her completely, and cup both of her cheeks with my hands. “I just think I am lucky enough to have such a magnificent girlfriend. I have got to let her know that, right?”

She chuckles, leaning into my touch, I feel her cheeks warm up on my hand, seeing a light red tint appear on her cheeks.

I lean into her, lightly pressing my lips to hers.

“Rain check?”

“It’s two p.m.,” she questions my idea, not sure why I want to leave already.

“So?”

“You don’t want to explore London further?”

“There are other things that I would much rather explore than London, Butterfly.”

“Oh,” she looks at me with wide eyes, surprised by my answer. “Rain check it is.” She intertwined her hand in mine and we stormed out of the museum, laughing as she tripped over her heel, luckily I caught her before she could hurt herself. We ordered

a taxi to drive us back to her apartment which was a little bit outside the city. The whole ride she was snuggled onto me as we made out, throwing a look at the driver, making sure he didn't peek.

That's weird dude.

We made out to the point her red lipstick was no longer red, but pink and my face was full of red lipstick marks that she so dearly loved tattooing on me, the warmth of her lips as she was kissing me sent the blood right to my dick, making my jeans impossible to breathe in them.

She makes it impossible to breathe.



Chapter Thirty Six
LAUREN

Rain check wasn't the worst idea after all. We spend the whole afternoon just in bed, laughing, joking, fucking too.

He rolled us over, making it impossible for me to escape his grip as I wanted to get up and put on some clothes.

We can't stay naked all day; I have things to do.

“Liam!” I screech, laughing as he presses his lips against mine in a passionate kiss, his hands travel to my hips, wrapping his arms around my waist, securing me under him, and making sure to not squeeze me with his weight.

I wrap my arms around his neck, deepening the kiss, it all started with a small peel on them to get him distracted to let me go but quickly turned into something more,

My fingers find his hair, threading them between his hair, Liam bites my lips, and a little whimper escapes me, feeling the instant turn-on and the effect he has on me that I have come to accept.

“Did you hear that?” I pulled away as I heard a knocking on my apartment door, not sure if I hallucinated or not.

“Just ignore it.” He groans, his lips never leaving mine as his tongue enters my mouth, and we fight for dominance.

The knocking became louder.

“I’m sorry I can’t ignore this,” I state as slowly push him away from me. “It’s probably just the postman.”

I pick up his button-up and wrap it around me, the shirt reaching down to my thighs, the smell of his cologne clinging to the shirt.

“What did you order this time?”

“Just...” I start talking, debating with myself if I should tell him or not. “A few books.”

“How many are a few?”

“Just like twelve books.”

“Lauren...”

“I’m sorry. I need the whole series. I can’t just have the first one.”

“What if you don’t like the first one?”

He has a point. But I am not going to listen to him.

I flash him a sarcastic laugh, making him laugh at his statement and our conversation.

Those dimples...

I hate him.

I make my way out of the bedroom into the hallway and look through the peephole, seeing Alex behind the door.

I open the door, staying hidden behind the door and making sure she can't see what I am wearing.

“Hi, Alex. How are you, sweetie?”

“I feel hurt, Lauren.”

“What, what- Why?” I stutter, not sure why but feeling myself grow nervous at her presence.

“Can I come in?”

“My room is kind of messy at the moment.”

“I made your room a mess when I stayed here so please, I can handle a mess.”

“Can we talk later?”

“Nope.” And opens the door wider as she walks in, her heels clicking on the wood floor. “What are you wearing?”

I look down, remembering that I still have Liam's shirt on. “A shirt?” I question her.

She hums. “Why don't you just tell me?”

“What?”

“Lauren.” I grew even more nervous at the tone she said my name. “There are pictures. Everywhere.”

“What? Where?”

“Nowhere, but with your reaction you just proved to me that my gut was right.”

I should have known she would play a mind game and get me to provide her with the information that she needs with just a small reaction.

“You and Liam? When?” she takes her rage away, storming into the bedroom, finding it empty.

Where is he?

“He is gone, good.”

I wouldn't say that.

I was about to stop when she sat down on the bed that we were on minutes ago. “Alex-“ I call her name.

“Why is it wet- oh my God.” She screams out as soon as she realizes. “God, Lauren, what the fuck.”

“I tried to warn you.”

She makes a gagging noise, running to the bathroom to wash her hands.

“Liam, come out of the fucking closet!” she shouts from the bathroom, my eyes avert to my closet, seeing Liam walk out in shame in his pants but no shirt.

I try to hold my laugh, feeling embarrassed and surprised at how she knew he was even there.

“You two are disgusting.”

“What- because you never had sex before.” She throws at him a deadly expression as soon as this sentence leaves his mouth.

“I will murder you.” She points at him. Moved her gaze to me. “And you. Why didn't you tell me?”

“I guess...” I start, my mind blank on finding an excuse for why I kept this from her, even if I told her I would tell her as soon something happened. “We wanted to keep it a secret, okay.”

“I get it, but me.”

“Yes, you especially.” He shoots out, crossing his arms over his chest.

“You don't get to talk.”

“What I can't have an opinion.”

“Not today.”

“Alex, we didn’t tell you because it’s going well...” I reason with her, trying to knock some sense into her and stop them from arguing any longer.

“How long?”

“Two months, okay.”

“Two months.” She starts getting louder. “Lauren, you kept this for two months?”

“I’m sorry, okay.”

“I, originally came here, because I wanted to check on my best friend because she told me she was sick.”

“Lauren,” Liam complains to me as he tells me to come up with a better excuse than being sick since the start of our trip.

“I’m sorry. “ I apologize to him.

“You two are the worst at hiding. Maybe next time, Liam, don’t leave your shoes out there.”

“You idiot. You said you put them away.”

“I forgot.”

It all was chaos in my apartment, one shouting at the other and then the other to the other one and it all was just a whole mess of arguments.

“Okay, let’s just calm down.” I shush down both of them. “Alex, I am sorry I didn’t tell you. I wanted to but I was scared that if one person knew, then the whole world would find out in a matter of seconds. And it still can happen, so please promise me you won’t tell anyone.”

“I am not a snitch.”

“I am not saying you are. I promise.”

I just have a bad memory of past friendships who can’t keep quiet when promised to.

“I won’t tell, I promise.”

“Thank you.”

Quiet swims around the air of the room as none of us was saying another word because the situation was just getting awkward.

“Do I get the details?” she interrupts the silence.

“Alex!” Liam complains to her.

“Later,” I tell her at the same time he complained to her.

“Lauren!”

“We girls have to share the gossip.”

“Unbelievable.”

I flash him an innocent smile.

“Look at you. You guys are adorable. I called it.”

“You just knew.” We say at the same time, completely surprised by our synchronicity.

“I am going now.” She starts making her way out, I grab her by her wrists before she can get out of the picture.

“You knew.”

“I just knew you both were crazy about one another, nothing more.”

“You knew and didn’t say anything.”

“There wasn’t anything I could do; you both were just out of your minds and too scared to admit to one another that you like each other.” She explains I look at her in disbelief.

“You mean to tell me, this,” I point to Liam and me. “Could have happened earlier if you had said something?”

“Most definitely.”

“Alex!”

“Don’t blame me!”

“You knew!”

“Because you two used me for your trauma dumping.”

“Alex...”

“I’m sorry. I would have told you if neither of you had told me not to tell.”

“So, you thought it was a better idea we never knew?”
“it worked out for the best anyway.”

“Alex, I love you and you’re my best friend,”

“Aww.” She interrupts my speech about her irresponsibility.

“Don’t,” I warn her.

“Okay.”

“But just remember, you don’t keep stuff like that a secret.”

“You said it was a secret.” She argues with me and she is right but a smart person like her would know that if two people like each other, they should know.

“Doesn’t matter anymore? This one is a secret now, okay?”

“Okay.”

“I mean it.”

“I mean it too.”

“Good.”

“Yeah.”

We stay in an awkward silence again, not sure what to talk about anymore.

“I am going to leave now.” She mumbles under her breath, making her way out of the door in a swift move.

“Lauren?” he calls out for me as soon as she closes the apartment door.

“We are not going to talk about what just happened.”

“Okay, awesome.” He shows me both of his thumbs up.

That was just one crazy afternoon.



“Box this lap?” I asked my engineer through the radio as the hard tires started to not feel good anymore and needed a fast change.

“Not yet. Harper still has to pit with his hard tires which will probably be in two laps, so finish this one and then box it.”

“Okay, copy.” I drive through the circuit, finishing the lap before I make it to the box and they put me in fresh soft tires. I come out of the pits with Arden pacing by.

“We are now 1.2 seconds behind Fane. We will be swapping the cars soon enough and we will have the

advantage with both cars coming out of the pits with a 2.3-second gap between Harper who is now behind and has pitted on fresh new mediums, but as always if the tire change goes right and we will be able to bring the cars home in P1 and P2.” I drive to the last corner, pressing down on the throttle as I make it through the straight line.

I keep the pace as it is, pushing the car to its limit. I enabled my DRS, swapping places with Arden, and taking the lead in the Dutch Grand Prix.

I drive through the circuit here in Zandvoort, taking the win already to my heart as I see my team hold up the Italian flag by the fence, roaring as I pass by the chequered flag and we bring home the cars in P1 and P2 as we promised and planned to do.

“Awesome job, on the track just now. Just what we hoped to happen after the summer break. Bellissimo, Liam. Bravo!”

“Ahhhh, fuuucckk. Sorry.” I got in trouble once for cursing too much on the radio so I have been keeping it low with the cursing. For now. “What a race. That battle with Nate at the beginning was an awesome one.”

“You had your fun, didn’t you?”

“I always do. I always do.” I chant through the radio, slowly approaching the pits and parking the car in the right position.

As soon as I was finished with my celebrations with the team, weighed myself and made myself look half decent after my head had been pressed in a helmet, making my hair look like a joke - I went straight to the post-race interview.

“What a fantastic battle you had with Harper at the beginning and managed to secure your win at the end after all.” the interviewer sums up everything that happened in two hours on the track. “How was that battle for you at the beginning.”

“Oh, I obviously- I loved it. I love battling Nate on the track, he is one of our best competitors this year since he is

now back to lead in the championships after an unfortunate last three races where I couldn't manage to keep up on the podium. But it feels great to be back on top and hope to get back on the battle."

I finish up the rest of the interview and leave soon enough to make it to the cool-down room. The tension is high since this is the second time that Arden and Nate are on the podium together and everyone knows they don't like each other. – correction they hate each other.

And everybody knows that.

Even Albert's grandmother who is in her nineties has caught up on that fact.

"That was impressive driving from your side at the beginning," Nate explains to me how he tried to overtake me with some weird movements with his hands.

"I tried the trick that you told me about." I point out to him; he looks at me with a confused face before his expression changes into a neutral one.

I laugh out loud at his fast-changing emotions, shocked that he didn't realize what trick I used on him. He shouldn't have taught me that if he didn't want me to use it against him.

"You didn't realize?"

"I didn't teach you that."

"Yeah, you did. I went through the inside, pressing harder on the brakes as a trick, and then went full throttle on the straight which gave me the advantage."

"You know my trick now." He points with his finger at me. "Now he does too." His finger-pointing moves to Arden who was chilling in his second-place seat, enjoying his drink and breathing in the conversation.

"No use for me. I beat you anyways." Arden flashes Nate a smirk of his and then his expression changes back to his poker face, acting unbothered from us and the world.

Nate flips off the American blondie and takes his seat on the third-place seat.

Oh, the feeling of seeing Nate on third must be so humbling for him.

“How is Lauren?” I ask, trying not to sound suspicious that I had her in my driver’s room before the race. In more than one way.

“I don’t know, didn’t see her before the race much.”

“I wonder why,” Arden mumbles under his breath, acting occupied as if he is picking on his fingernails.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Figure it out.” He looks up at me, flashing me the look that says I know what you did but I won’t tell because he is a trustworthy bastard.

He knows.

I think he knows.

I know he knows.

Of course, he knows, I told him.



I pull away from the kiss and lightly press my forehead against hers, feeling the overwhelming feeling of something wrapping around me, making it impossible to look away from the light in her and her beauty.

I never want to leave. The moment where we were just stuck in our universe, not caring for the world or anything.

“Butterfly,” I call out for her as she just looks down, keeping her eyes away from mine.

“Hmm?” She hums at me.

“Can you open your eyes?”

“I can’t.” She whispers.

“Why not?”

“Because if I look at you, then I am going to lose my goddamn mind.”

While she loses her mind when looking at me, I feel like I would go crazy if I don’t look at her.

“I feel like going crazy not being able to see you, so let’s go crazy together.”

A small smile grows on her face as she slowly opens her eyes, flashing me with them.

I don’t think there is a possibility of not getting lost in her eyes.

“Better?”

“Now I am losing my mind even more than before you opened them.” She laughs at my comment. She looked away and glanced up into the sky. I slowly let one hand drop and placed the other on her shoulder. She slowly walks away and sits down on the grass on the hill we drove to have a moment for ourselves.

I take a seat next to her; she places her head on my shoulder as soon as I am seated.

After a short moment of silence and just enjoying the sunset, she points her hand up in the sky, pointing somewhere.

“That cloud looks like a heart.” She points out, the orange sky from the sunsets shining its true color, making the color of her eyes stand out. “It’s beautiful.” She turns her gaze to me, slightly tilting her head and smiling. “Don’t you think so too?”

“Yes. You are beautiful.” I tell her, not being able to pull my eyes away from her. She is like a magnetic field, pulling me to her as I am the magnet.

I slowly reach for her, feeling the heat of her cheek on my palm, my hand prickling in anticipation.

“Why exactly are we here?”

“I want to do something, but I wasn’t sure I could do it myself.”

“I am not helping you hide a body.”

“I didn’t murder anyone. I promise.”

“Then why are we in the middle of a field somewhere, God knows where in Italy? Are we even still in Italy?”

“Of course, we are still in Italy.” I get up from my spot and make my way to my car, reaching for the box that I had with me.

I make my way back to her, sensing her confused face. “It’s just something Sofia and I used to do to honor our mum. Her birthday was last week but Sofia couldn’t make it so she told me to honor her myself and she will do the same from New York.”

“How sweet of you.”

“Can-“ The memory of her still hurts like it used to hurt back then.

I can do this.

“Can you stay with me?”

She smiles softly, sealing our lips with a short kiss. “Always.”

I flash her an innocent smile, placing the box on the grass, and looking up to the sunset, before slowly opening the box, the few butterflies in there, fly out of the box.

“Woah.” I look back to Lauren, who seems mesmerized by the butterflies like they are the most unique thing she ever saw.

She is the most unique person I ever have seen.

She walks towards me, leaning down so that we are at eye level. She reaches for my hand on the box and wraps it around

hers.

“Your mum would be so proud of how far you have come.”

I feel my eyes sting at her words.

I pray that she is.

I crossed the finish line, claiming my first victory in Formula 4 and with so many more to go. This is after all only the second race so far and I am making great progress. I hear my family shout from the distance, their scream being the loudest of all. All the training in the simulator and working out is paying off because seeing my mom smile this big ever since she got diagnosed is the best view. I punch the air as I stand on top of my car and jump back down, storming to them immediately, wrapping my arms around them in one big hug. “Bravo, il mio campione.” She whispers in my ear, feeling the tears sting my eyes at her short words that meant so much.

And then she kept on saying stuff, never-ending her words, making me spill the hot tears in my helmet. We know Mom doesn't have much longer, so try our best to cherish every moment with her as much as possible. I try not to get lost in my training and be home as much as possible.

It's hard to see her not being able to stand for longer than a minute on her feet. And it hurts even more knowing that Sofia is unaware of the fact that Mom isn't getting better. We all agreed to tell her when it's the right time. Sofia isn't the kind of person who handles grief well, and my mom is scared she might end up in her depressive state again.

I release the family hug and shake hands with dad. “Lavoro incredibile, figliolo. Sono fiero di te.” He tells me as he taps my helmet, laughing.

Moments like these don't stay forever, but the memories stay a lifetime and I will remember this moment from now on forward. The last moment before we lost the first puzzle of our family.



Chapter Thirty-Eight
LIAM

“You are kidding me, right?”

“Does it look like it?”

There are always two types of bad people. The ones who keep their evilness hidden and then use it when they most need it to manipulate you and there are the ones who have no remorse and make it their mission to let people know that they are evil. Max is both of them.

He likes for the public to know and think that he is a smartarse and that he cares about his drivers. When in real life, there is little care in him for us.

In a moment like right now all I want to do is rip his throat out. He is threatening me.

I let out a humorless laugh at his answer. “You are threatening my contract about something that is none of your damn business.”

“It is my business if it’s distracting my driver.”

“My love life has nothing to do with how I perform on the track.”

“Maybe it does.”

“Enlighten me.”

“Ever since Miami, your performance skills have gone down by ten percent.”

“*Mmkay.*”

“Don’t okay me. End the relationship or you can go look for another team next year.”

“You can’t do that. In my contract, it says clearly that I either leave willingly or when my contract ends. I don’t see either of them happening.”

“It’s your future Liam.” He gets up from his chair, making his way to the window, acting like he is admiring the sky. “You choose. Your future or her. You can’t have both.”

“And why is that?”

“Because with success comes sacrifices, but with love comes consequences. Both of them together would just create chaos. And I don’t need that in my workspace.”

“Sucks for you I guess. I am quite fond of chaos.”

“It’s your decision. Let me know by the end of the week and we can talk further about your contract with us. What do you say?”

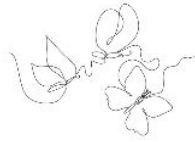
All I can do is say “Rot in hell, Max.” But I can’t.

“We’ll see by Sunday.”

Now I just have to find a way to tell her without actually mentioning Max because as much as I know her she would storm into his office and slam her fist against his jaw for threatening my contract.

Even if she doesn’t admit it or act like it, she would do that.

I storm out of his office, furious about the choices he is giving me. Either I lose my contract and probably will never make it as World Champion or *I lose her*.



Lauren

I press against the keyboard of my phone, spamming his phone with messages as he hasn't been answering my calls or my messages for two days. Not since that morning after we released the butterflies together. Something happened after he went to the office to talk with Max. The last text I got from him was:

Liam: I will be busy the next couple of days. Don't worry about me, Butterfly.

And after that, he went completely silent. No text, no call, no secret visit at my hotel. Nothing. *Nada. Niente.*

Getting ready for media day here in Singapore is just the perfect time to look for him at the paddock and try to get him to talk to me. That wanker can't just give me hope and then disappear out of nowhere with no explanation. "Damn him." I curse under my breath as I wait outside for Nate to pick me up so that we can drive to the tracks. I take a deep breath, trying to control my nerves and not let the waterwork get started.

Why is he doing this to me? Why is he breaking my heart after promising he wouldn't hurt me?

I hear the honk of a car, Nate signaling me to hop into the car and get to the track.

“Everything all right?” He asks me as soon as we hit the road, sensing my bad mood.

“I’m fine.”

“You sure? You don’t seem like it.”

“Can’t a girl just have a bad day?” I shot at him, feeling bad that I lashed out at him even if he was just trying to help. “I’m sorry. I am just not having a good day. Or rather week.” And I got my period today, so that makes it even worse.

“Might you tell me what happened?”

He looks at me before turning his eyes back to the road. I shake my head at him, hiding the pain I feel from Liam with a fake smile. “I’ll be okay. Just need to figure something out. That’s all.”

“You can always tell me everything. You know that right?”

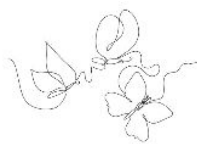
“I know,” I whisper, wishing I had the guts to tell him everything about Liam. Truth is I can’t because I am scared what he would say or do to Liam if he finds out how he broke my heart. “You needn’t worry. All you need to worry about is not crashing. At all this weekend.”

“Don’t worry about me. I am a pro athlete. I know how to drive a freaking car.”

“*Mmkay.*”

We arrived at the track, Nate sprinting to his driver’s room immediately since we got stuck in traffic and arrived a little later than expected. “Bye, love you.” He shouts and then disappears into the McAli motorhome.

Time for a meet-up with the heartbreak prince.



“What the fuck is wrong with you?” I shout at him, seeing him drunk out of his mind. I couldn’t find Liam before practice or after it. It’s like he is ignoring me as if I am a virus and I am sick of it. I will not be ignored without a reasonable excuse, which he hasn’t given me yet. It has been almost a week and I am tired of waiting and need my answer.

He notices my presents and goes back to ignoring me, talking to the DJ. “Liam!” I shout after him, trying to get him to look at me. “Liam!” I keep calling after him as he walks away and I follow him like I am a lost puppy. I am not lost. I just need an answer.

“Liam!” I shout after him one more time before we get to a quiet place at the club, he grips my upper arms, slamming my back against a wall. “What the hell!” I shout at him but he just looks at me and doesn’t continue his action as he gets closer to me, his lips inches from mine.

“Hey there!” he smirks at me, stepping closer to me, his toned legs between mine now.

“Don’t hey me, Liam. Why did you ignore me?”

“I’m not. *I could never ignore you.*”

“You kept running away every time you saw me at the paddock. What kind of fucked up behavior is that?”

“I didn’t run away from you.”

“Sure, didn’t seem like it.”

“I mean it, Lauren.”

“Why are you ignoring me?” I ask him again, desperate for an answer.

“I am not able to ignore you.” Before I can do or say anything more, he corrupts me with his lips.

He was everywhere, his scent, his proximity. Everywhere, leaving me no space to breathe and gather my thoughts. “Liam.” I unintentionally moan.

“Hmm?” he continues the torture with his hands, slowly hiking up my dress that went to my knees up to my hips, his warm hands caressing my arse. “I’ve missed you.” And continues his immense torture on my lips, invading my mouth with his tongue. Her fingers moved along my underwear, teasing, torturing me with his lethal touch without actually doing anything.

I want to stop him and let him explain, but my brain keeps coming up with the assumption “What if this is the last time you will see him before he goes off to ignoring you again?” so, I just enjoy it while I can. But knowing Liam he has a hard time communicating his feelings and maybe something happened. I push away any thoughts in my head.

His wet kisses started to travel down my breasts, my nipples turning into sharp points underneath the fabric of my dress.

I let out a soft moan as he keeps sucking on my flesh, gasping when his fingers find my core under the underwear. A tingling sensation creeps up my spine as he parts me with his fingers, tracing them up and down my wet folds.

“Liam.” I moan out his name, riding his fingers as he has me pinned against the wall, his fingers plunging in and out of my pussy. “What- what if someone co-comes in?”

“Fuck them. You wouldn’t mind putting on a show for them, now would you?” the thought of getting caught while he finger fucks me against the wall made a spice of excitement and horror go up in me. He continues his kisses up my neck, licking my ear lobes, whispering all kinds of unholy phrases to help me get to my high. I arch my back against the wall, needing more friction. Just more of him.

“Are you that desperate for my dick, Butterfly?” There it is.

I nod.

“Please,” I whisper, my voice desperate.

“Please what?” he teases me, he curls his fingers and I feel my eyes roll to the back of my head. “Please fuck me against

this wall because that how desperate you are for my cock and the thought of someone catching us gives you the highs or please stop. It's your choice, Butterfly.”

I don't say anything as I unbuckle his belt, watching him as he flashes me a wicked grin. He hits my hands away and finishes unbuckling his belt and without a second thought I go down on my knees and he looks down at me with lust in his eyes and a hint of mischief sparking in my eyes.

“Remember when you said there are other things you would much rather explore than London?” I ask him, batting my eyelashes at him and slowly pulling down his boxers brief. Not too much but enough to reach inside and take his cock out and I start stroking it.

“I did say that,” he tells me as he sounds out of breath and his chest rises and falls back down dramatically.

“Well, I didn't get to do much of the exploring in London,” I tell him and give his cock a few languid strokes before I trail my tongue from the base to the tip.

He throws his head back as he mumbles a low curse word and moans as I take him in my mouth. He places his hand on my nape and drives his cock all the way to the back of my throat.

“Well, aren't you a pretty one while you have your feisty mouth wrapped around my cock.” He tells me and I bob my head up and down as an answer as my head moves faster, twisting my hand just enough to help him reach his limit.

His head falls back again with a loud groan.

“Eyes on me, Liam,” I tell him. “I want you to see how much I am enjoying my exploring,” I tell him, watching a wicked grin grow on his face and I keep my actions going as he watches me with a pleasurable look on his face.

I want- No, I need more of him.

I twist my hand more on his girth and grip it harder, increasing my actions as I feel him get closer to his spill. “I'm

going to fucking come.” He grunts.

And that is exactly what he did a moment later as he spills at the back of my throat, the salty taste hitting my taste buds as I feel a tear run down my cheek at the same time. He watches me with hungry eyes as he wipes the drop of his cum that dripped down the corner of my mouth and guides it to my mouth and I suck on it as his command. “Every last drop, Lauren. You take every last drop like a good girl.” He praises. I look up to him as I keep sucking the come of his thumb. He chuckles as he watches me as I am still on my knees.

“You are a wicked little one, aren’t you?” He asks me as he pulls his finger out and I stand up back on my feet.

“I try to stay secretive, but if you say so,” I tell him and slam my lips to him, the taste of him and his mouth mixing in our mouths.

He assaults my mouth, taking control of the whole mess, gripping my nape as his tongue explores my mouth. He reaches for my hands that were exploring his toned body and pins them above my head against the wall with one hand.

I’ve never seen Liam so dominant except in the bedroom and on track while on normal occasions he acts like the innocent sunflower that he isn’t and fuck me sideways because I love it. I test his strength, wiggling my hands free from his grasp but he has me locked in place. His hold remains on my wrist as he goes down, kissing my jaw and starting nipping on the center of my neck. He keeps his kisses sensual as he travels slowly down to my breasts and all the way to my stomach he slowly let’s go of my hands at the same time before he speaks up. “Keep your hands to yourself or I’ll stop and make sure to not be too loud. Your brother might hear you.”

“You had to mention him?”

“Just making sure you are listening to me.”

Which I 100% am.

I hum and he goes down on his knees, swinging my left leg over his shoulder. He slowly creeps up my maxi skirt and up to my hips and starts kissing me lightly on my thigh. My head falls back as he keeps teasing me, edging me without actually doing anything. I feel my heart starting to race as he looks up at me, placing hot kisses on my thigh, hunger displaying in his eyes. He lets out a hoarse laugh as I was practically out of my own damn breath and dips his head back, placing a light kiss over my lace underwear. I take a deep breath, trying to resist the urge to run my fingers over his hair. He pulls my underwear down in a fast motion and starts tasting my most intimate place., he glides his tongue upwards, flicking it over my throbbing clit.

“Oh, fuck,” I moan breathlessly, unable to stay quiet at the euphoric feeling of his tongue on my pussy.

“Make a sound and we’ll stop.” He tells me, stopping his motions on me.

“You are unbelievable.”

“Say what you want but I don’t think you want me to stuff your mouth with your panties to keep you quiet, do you Butterfly?”

I shake my head lightly, not being completely against that. Not because it turns me on – also because of that – but also because Liam would do that. Right?

“Good, now be a good girl, keep your hands to yourself, and let me feast on your pussy. Make a sound and I won’t hesitate to stuff you with your panties.” He doesn’t give me a moment to register the words and he darts his tongue inside me, fucking me with his tongue senselessly. I throw my head back, reach for him, and thread my hair through his hair. He stops his actions immediately.

“You touch me and I stop and I can keep doing this all night and edge you for how long I feel like. It’s your choice.” He mumbles under the light fabric of my skirt; I pull my hand

away and feel a light puff of air on my thigh as he looks up at me with a smirk on his face.

Wanker.

A breath catches in my lungs as he reaches with his finger to my pussy, plunging a finger in slowly as he keeps licking my most sensitive spot. I am punching the air and hurting my own thigh by how much pressure I am putting on it, digging my nails into it.

He adds a second finger to the torture of doom and pumps them in and out in a rhythm.

“Mio dio.” He curses in a gravelly tone while pumping his fingers.

“More,” I moan greedily.

“What?” he asks, eyes dancing in amusement.

“I. Need. More,” I pant out.

He takes quick action and gets up on his feet, leaving me frustrated.

“Are you kidding me?” and before I could say another word, he reached for his jacket pocket and stuffed my panties in my mouth. He did not-

The salty flavour of my arousal covers my taste buds and he smirks at me. “Don’t you just look beautiful with your panties in your mouth, ready to be fucked by my cock.”

I wince quietly.

He steps closer, trapping me between his body and the wall as he lifts one of my legs, feeling the bulge of his cock against my pelvis.

I moan against the cloth, holding onto his bicep. He hikes my skirt up to my hips and bundles it up and holds it together with one hand as he reaches for his dick with the other, lining it up to my entrance. He lets the skirt fall back down as he slams into me, leaning his forearm against the wall above my head. I feel my eyes roll at the back of my head at the

sensation of him stretching me to my limits. He pulls out completely before he slams into me again. Can say he is also not just destroying my insides but also my ability to walk. His free hand grips my hips, digging his fingers into my flesh, the pain sending a jolt of pleasure to my pussy, making me wetter than I already am. He reaches down, circling my clit as he fucks me with his cock, and it's overwhelming in the best way.

I mumble with the cloth in my mouth, unable to form sentences with it. I feel my body vibrate, my release closing in.

“Fuck, Lauren. You are making me lose my fucking control.” He whispers hoarsely in my ear, the sounds of his voice making my body react and before I can stop it, I combust on his dick. His thrusts continue as he rides me out of my first orgasm to my next. He grunts.

He takes the panties out of my mouth and slams his lips onto mine, claiming me with his tongue, and kissing me like a madman.

I feel his dick twitch inside me and a hot liquid run down my leg as he started to slow down his rhythm.

He pulls out of me, tracing the sperm that ran down my legs, and slowly pushes it up again. “Let's not waste anything, hm?” I laugh at his small comment, blowing the hair strand that was in front of my face away.

“Well, that was definitely...everything,” I tell him as he finishes pulling his pants up.

He just smiles as he slowly puts my leg down to the ground, my wobbling legs making me stumble. “Woah there.” He laughs as he helps me stand straight. “Have I fucked you too hard, Butterfly?”

“Me? No, pff.” I blow him off and he lets go of my waist and I stumble again; he raises an eyebrow at me. “Okay maybe a little bit,” I admit.

“What's 4+4?”

“Eight, why?”

“Just making sure I didn’t fuck your brain out, Butterfly.”

“That’s not possible,” I tell him. “Right?”

“We can try it out if you want.” He smirks again as he leans closer, leaning his forehead against mine. I feel a throbbing feeling appear between my legs at his words. “But another time.”

I let out a deep breath of frustration. Got me excited for nothing. He laughs at my reaction, leaning in to kiss my forehead, cupping both of my cheeks with his hands, and leaning his forehead against mine.

“I missed you,” I whisper.

“God, I missed you too. You can’t even imagine.”

“What happened?” I ask him, cupping his hands over my cheeks, and staring into his deep blue eyes. And like every time I stare into his eyes, the weird feeling of butterflies erupts in my stomach and his eyes spark up. He has those starry eyes that can spark up the darkest nights.

He gives me a shy smile before he starts speaking. “Max is...”

“An asshole? Been there, heard that.” I finished his sentence as he was hesitating.

“Exactly that. He told me I had to choose between you or my seat and I thought if I just hung out with you less and made sure Max didn’t see us, then he would stop. I’m sorry.”

“Please don’t apologize for having a shitty team principal. I get it. If I were in your situation I would have done the same thing. I guess we both aren’t masters when it comes to communicating with our thoughts.”

He shrugs with a small smile on his face. His eyes softened the longer looked at me until he leaned down and gave me a peek at the lips.

For the next half an hour we just sit on the floor with my head on his shoulder while he tells me everything.

He confessed that since his mom died and since he and Sofia have sort of parted ways to travel for their jobs, he never really found a person to explain his feelings to. He has always had a hard time communicating with them.

“I’m sorry, I- I didn’t tell you.”

“It’s okay,” I reassure him. “I get it. I guess I can say I am just like you.”

“Oh, now you are admitting it?” he teases me.

“Give me a break. I only relate with you when it comes to communication. Which is weird because I have a major in it but that is beside the point.”

I feel his shoulder move as he laughs, he moves his head away from mine and laughs. I move my head away from him, watching him as he leans his head against the wall and laughs. I love his laugh.

“What’s so funny, Calvetti,” I ask him, laughing in between the words.

“You have a major in communication, but can’t communicate on certain things?”

“I took it for a reason. Didn’t help much if you ask me. And stop laughing at me.” I commend him.

“It’s adorable, just saying.”

“Ohh, really?”

“It is. You are adorable, Butterfly.”

I lightly hit his shoulder, crossed my arms, and leaned back against the wall.

He calls out for me, but I ignore him on purpose, moving my head in the opposite direction.

“Don’t tell me you are mad at me?”

“Not talking to you.” I sing the words to him.

He chuckles before he reaches to me, and cups my chin with his index and thumb, forcing me to look at him. He presses his lips to mine, sealing our lips together. The taste of him made me go crazy.

He threads his finger to my hair. Pulling me closer to him.

“Can’t ignore me for longer, huh?” he mumbles against my mouth, smiling.

“Idiot,” I mumble, deepening the kiss.



Chapter Thirty Nine

LIAM

I tried, I really tried to make it possible to stay away from her but she is like a magnetic field that is way too strong to my liking.

Or more like Max's liking because compared to him I love spending time with Lauren.

I love watching her smile as we talk, I love watching her listen to me as I tell him the most random stuff and I love the fact that she likes me.

I don't care anymore that Max won't let me be with her. I get him, he wants the best for me but the best for me happens to be Lauren and I won't let her go just because Max's marriage went down.

I want to make Lauren smile at any given time and I want to wake up next to her every morning because our time at London was the only time I felt like myself and wasn't pining

over the fact that Nate might get the championship again this year.

She makes all my worries go away and I don't want to let go of that freedom.

“What’s on your mind, Liam?” she asks me as she cuddles the pillow as we are lying naked in my hotel bedroom. I turn to her and lean my head against the headboard. I slowly reach out to her, pinning her hair behind her ear and my finger travels down her cheek and I cup her chin, watching her as she gives me a small smile.

“I just can't believe I almost lost you because I listened to Max,” I whisper, guilt hitting me slowly to the fact that I made her feel bad about herself as she thought I was ignoring her for no reason.

“Nah, you wouldn't be able to get rid of me that easily.”

I laugh. “Why is that?” I ask her, curiosity getting the best of me on why she wouldn't let go of me easily.

“Because maybe unlike some other people, I don't give up on the things that I love very easily.” She tells me, whispering the last sentence.

My heart races and my senses heighten at her words and I feel the air from my lungs being cut short.

“You love me?” I ask her, oblivious to the fact that she literally said it.

“Should I not?” she shrugs her shoulders and lets out a shaky breath as I haven't said it back to her. I smile at her, reach over, pull her to me, and turn us so that she is on top. “Liam!” she calls out my name as she giggles her, laugh sounding like music to my ear.

I cup her cheek with my free hand as the other one is wrapped around her waist and stroke her cheek.

“I love you too,” I tell her, feeling my head spin as I say those words to her. I feel it in me – Like I always do when she is present.

The overwhelming feeling in me. The feeling that makes me want to run around in a field of rose thorns and I would still get out with no wounds because it protected me.

The feeling of being on cloud nine and never wanting to come down. The feeling of my heart racing at *300 km/h* like I am in my race car but in that feeling, the track is never-ending, and I don't mind one bit of being in my race car forever. Not when that feeling leads me to her.

I pull her closer to me and give her a small kiss on the lips that feels like a fire igniting.

“I love you and I promise you that I will get this sorted out with Max. It might take some time and during that time we might still have to keep us a secret and I am sorry about that.”

“It's okay.” She assures me as she strokes my cheek slowly, smiling at me.

“And when I do get it all sorted, at Abu Dhabi you will stand there while I climb out of my car and sprint to you and declare to everyone that you are mine and I will not give a fuck about Nate or Max. Or anyone for that matter. All that will matter is that you were with them through the whole journey and will be there for all of the other journeys.” She laughs at my imagination of when I win the championship. “And then one day I will surprise you with that little puppy you once told me about and we will have our apartment in Italy or London, wherever you want. As long as you are by my side. I love you and if it means I have to keep it hidden for longer, I will. Hell, I will keep you hidden from all the guys in the world because of Butterfly. All your smiles belong to me, all your laughs, all your cheesy jokes, they belong to me. I am yours as much as you are mine. I promise you that. You make me want to do unimaginable things. I love you and I will never stop saying that.”

I watch her, trying to get the thoughts in my brain together.

She is smiling. Her eyes are starting to tear up.

“You mean all of that?” she asked me as her voice sounded shaky.

“Everything, Butterfly. You are *it* for me.”

She lowers her voice, a tear slowly traveling down her cheek., she looks away, wiping away the tear that fell, laughing.

“Well, then. I guess I can’t get rid of you either.”

“Nope, you are stuck with me. And I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

She smiles. “Me neither.”



Chapter Forty
LAUREN

Last race of the season

Liam was right when he said we would find a solution. Because we did. We kept our relationship low and made sure we never got caught. Alex kept her mouth shut and didn't let it slip past her lips, even when she was too drunk to control herself.

Liam and Nate are currently fighting for their win in the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. It has been exactly a year since I met him and it has been the best year of my life.

We told Nate about us.

He came to Liam with the 'big brother speech' and threatened to murder him if he ever hurt me. I didn't put it past him to threaten him. I thought it was just an act.

I finished the draft of my first book, which Liam doesn't know about, at least not yet.

I finally found the motivation to write after such a long time and I was thriving in the motivation the last three months.

I have started to get less nervous around the paddock and started hiding less and accepting the cameras and everything around it. I still remember the day Liam told me he loves me and since then he hasn't stopped mentioning it. Every morning I wake up to one of his text messages telling me he loves me.

I will never get over that stuff.

I watch around as I stay near the McAli garage, watching out for Liam. He has not shown up yet and the race starts in an hour. He should be here by now.

"Have you seen Liam?" I stopped Arden, who was on his way to his garage.

"No, why."

"I haven't seen him all day and it's making me worry."

"He is a grown man. He will show up."

"Okay. Please tell him to text me if you find him."

"Will do."

"Thank you, Arden."

He walks away, leaving me worried, and lost in my head. He wouldn't bail a race and not race, right? He has a high chance of winning with pole but I am still worried as fuck for him.

I hear my phone ring in the loud noises happening, Liam's name flashing on it. I look around before I disappear into the garage, making sure to get to a private place, where no one can hear me.

"Liam."

"Hi, Butterfly."

"Where are you, I am worried sick."

"I am in my driver's room. Don't worry about me."

"Thank god you are okay."

“I will always be okay. For you.”

I smile at my phone with a huge grin on my face.

“Why haven’t you gone out of there yet?”

“I can’t.”

“What? Why?”

“What if I fail?”

“Stop saying that. You will make it.”

“What if I won’t? What if I lose it again? Just like last year.”

“Stop. I believe in you. Everyone believes in you. You can do it. Stop saying you won’t because that is just bullshit.”

“I am scared.” I hear him let out a shaky breath.

I feel him. It’s like imagining hitting close to the deadline of your book and you haven’t even thought of your plot. It is the worst feeling.

“You want to know a secret.”

“I thought you said secrets must stay *unrevealed* for the world does not find out about it?”

“Well, this is a secret I can’t hide. And won’t be possible to hide.”

“Then tell me.”

“Have you heard about this girl who had a big story to tell but couldn’t find the right person to tell it to?”

“Tell me about her.”

“She met a guy. It was a pretty slow thing with him, she kept denying that she was falling in love with him because she didn’t want to believe it. He turned her story around and he helped her through her deepest and worst stage in life. He saved her. In return, she helped him get his mind out of the maze he was stuck in. They found love in chaos.”

The other line was dead after I finished.

Please, say something.

“That’s our story, isn’t it?”

“You promised me you would find a way to tell our story. I found my way to tell it. It’s our love story, Liam.”

“I love you, Lauren. Know that and keep it in your heart.”

“I always will. I promise. Go race and win that championship. I know you can do it.”



I run as fast as my legs can take, I run to her, hearing everyone scream at the top of their lungs.

I did it.

I jump to her lifting her by her waist, hearing her yelp as I carry her over the security line, pressing my lips to hers, the feeling of accomplishment washing all over me.

I did it.

I let go of her, tears were streaming down her face as she chuckled and laughed and cried even more.

“You did it, Liam. You made it.”

“I fucking did it because you were here.”

“No, you did it on your own. You made the dream of yours true by yourself. I was just a support nearby.”

“Nope never. You made me fucking win because of you, Butterfly. Were my fucking lucky charm.”

She laughs at my comment, before I give her one last kiss on her lips that tastes like happiness and pride, making sure every fucker who dared to look at her today knows that she is now officially known as mine.

“You do realize this will be in every headline by tonight?”

“Let it be. I am just celebrating.”

This is a moment that will be forever cherished by me. The moment when I felt like I was conquering the world.

I had my girl by my side.

She went through this whole thing with me.

She is my endgame.

And my proudest prize that I won.



I watch Liam as he walks up to the podium, waving the Italian Flag over his shoulder, screaming and shouting.

I knew he would make it.

World. Fucking. Champion.

He did it.

He swings it over his shoulders, wrapping it around himself, looking up to the sky with his hand around his heart as the Italian anthem plays in the background. Pride was written all over his face and most definitely.

Relief.

He fulfilled his dream and made his mum proud by keeping his promise to her.

If someone had told me by this time tomorrow that I would not be hiding in the McAli garage and be okay with cameras following around, I would say that they are crazy.

It is crazy how life can turn its course in such a short amount of time.

And I wouldn't have it any other way.

And if someone told me that Nate would admire the winner whom he lost the championship that he fought all season for, I would have just laughed until I cried because the admiration that Nate is watching Liam at the moment is priceless and so wholesome.

Books weren't lying when they said that happy endings exist.

My happy ending happens to start with an L and ends with an iam.

The love of my life happens to have the same name as my happy ending.

Liam Matteo Calvetti is my happy ending, the love of my life, and everything good combined.



9 months later

Who says you have to choose your destination? I remember still when Liam promised me I could choose where we move to when we move in together.

Surprise, we are moving in together.

In Milan.

I chose it there because it will be closer to him for work and who doesn't want to live in Italy.

It is a beautiful place.

It is currently summer break for this season. Liam is fighting for his second championship with Marco, his karting buddy.

Nate is still racing for his old age.

I am kidding, Nate is not that old.

Only thirty-three.

Still old.

I sometimes like to tease him about his age and call him a grandpa.

Okay, all the time.

We recently finished with the painting on our wall in the living room. The last room.

Which means our house is finished and all is renovated. We went for a white with a cloudy ceiling in our bedroom, a light blue bathroom with the fanciest tiles and it looked like you were in the ocean while in there. And everything else was in plain white.

I know boring as hell, but we were kind of lazy to think of designs so the decorating will make up for the whole thing.

I hope so.

“Lauren.”

“Yeah.” I turn my head to Liam as he calls out for me.

“Close your eyes.”

“Why?”

“I have a surprise.”

“Liam, no funny business. We just got this room freshly painted.”

“Okay, fine. No surprise.”

“No wait. Give me the surprise.”

I hate him. I love presents. And he knows that.

“Are they closed?” he asks me, feeling his presence behind me as he whispers those words to me. I felt the goosebumps rise in my back. Still, get the feels even after a year of dating.

Almost one and a half.

I am not blushing at that fact.

Okay, maybe I am.

“You can open them.” He announces. I peek with my left eye seeing an innocent Liam sitting in front of me, crouching and smiling.

I open my eyes completely, seeing a little back in front of me. I reach out for it, the bag slightly moving. “Is there a human hand in there?”

“No, otherwise it wouldn’t move.”

“Oh, my word. What the hell is in there?”

“Just open it.”

“I don’t trust you.”

“Going to fix that problem later, now open.”

I do trust him, just not at the moment.

I slowly open the bag, and a small puppy peeks his head out. I look up at Liam who has a honey-glazed smile on his face as I just look at him with my mouth hanging open and tears about to spill.

“Oh, my god. Liam.” I take the puppy out of the little back, cuddling it up. I can’t believe he got me the puppy that he promised. I cry and cry.

“You adopted a puppy.”

“We adopted a puppy. She is in our name.”

I love this man.

“My god. You kept your promise.”

“Of course. I always do. Just like I promised you to kiss you when I win, I did that. I will always keep my promises to you, mi amour.”

I can’t believe how my life is with him.

It’s perfect.

He is perfect.

“What’s her name?”

“Look at the collar.”

I do as say, the name Willow flashing on the gold little platter. He named her Willow. “You named her after a Taylor Swift song?” I asked him as I was ready to sob on the spot. He smiles and nods.

Hot tears scalded, sliding slowly down my cheeks in fiery lines. I didn’t even realize that I was starting to cry until Liam reached out for me and wiped away the tears before they fell.

I look deeply into the collar, turning it around, and seeing blurry words on it.

I wipe my eyes harder, trying to read the collar. I read the engraving, realizing what he was about to do.

He sits in front of me, with a little red box in his hands, smiling at me waiting for me to say something.

Will you marry me? With a small butterfly next to it.

“Liam...” I look at him in disbelief, slowly dropping the puppy to my lap, making sure I don’t hurt little Willow.

“Just say the word, Lauren. Even if I know the answer already.”

“You are an idiot.”

“It’s your choice. Spend the rest of your life with me or walk out of this. Spoiler alert, you will end up with me either way.”

I choke out a laugh between the crying. “I would rather spend the rest of my life with you willingly.”

“The better choice because otherwise, I would have dug a hole in this wall...” he points to the floor where the beanbag is. “And never crawled up because I had to ask your father and not surprisingly Nate for their blessings. And your mum of course.”

“You asked my family for their blessings?”

“Of course, I did. I do not want to make Nate mad after it took months to get him to accept me as your boyfriend. And now he accepts me as your fiancée.” I laugh at him, watching him suspiciously as he slides the ring on my finger, tears still slowly falling but slowly decreasing.

He intertwines our hands together, soothing the back of my hand with his thumb as he leans forward to me, pressing a sweet kiss on my lips.

“Fiancée? Sounds so cliché.”

“Tell me about it. But I still like to be more than a girlfriend. And I will love my wife more than anything.”

“Woah, not so fast, buddy. Do not rob me, of my fiancée phase. I want to enjoy it.”

“Whatever you say, Mrs Calvetti.”

“Woah, do not.”

He puts his hands up in defense, calling me Mrs. Calvetti again.

He is being a coward for robbing me of my fiancée phase. I look down at Willow in my lap, who seems to have fallen asleep on my leg.

I pout at her cute little sleeping face; I slowly stroke her brown fur. She is so soft.

“Now serious question. How did you remember that I wanted a Yorkshire Terrier?”

“Well, unlike some other people, I do actually pay attention to what you say.”

“That was one time!” I complain to him. I once didn’t listen properly to what Liam said and thought Liam said little dick instead of little kid to a child at the park.

“Whatever you say, Butterfly.” I stare at him in utter disappointment.

“She is adorable, Liam.” I change the subject as I pet little Willow on my lap. “Thank you.”

“Always, *mi amour*.”

This is probably the part where authors would say they lived happily ever after. And we did.

Oh, and by the way.

My book made it to New York Bestsellers and has been on there for thirty-two Weeks.

Proud of myself.

People seem to love our story.

The End



Life has been great the last few months. I won my second championship; my contract was renewed and Max has finally retired, and my fiancée has been by my side for all of it.

I know Lauren still struggles with her social anxiety; I realized that after I found her hiding in the garage multiple times and didn't want to answer journalists' inane questions. Even if she says she is okay every time we have to attend a gala together, she still struggles with the anxiety that eats her up. But thankfully it has started to get better. She still hides in

the garage, which I am fine with because I would rather not have a creep set eyes on her.

I snake my arm around her waist as she leans against me, placing her head on my shoulder, the warmth of her next to me feeling like home. Lauren is turning twenty-four and as we all know, Alex loves to go crazy on birthdays and arranged a huge birthday party for her. Just like last year. I was honestly against it at first since I had something planned just for the two of us.

But as manipulative as Alex is, I couldn't tell her no to the party she had planned.

And the huge speech she had prepared for Lauren.

I kid you not when I say she rolled the paper up, because that speech has been going on for eight minutes.

"Does this speech ever end?" she whispers to me as she looks up, tears glistening in her eyes.

"Nope, but I can see you are feeling the speech."

"I definitely am." She laughs as she looks at Alex again. I place a kiss on the crown of her head, intertwining my finger with hers that was resting on her waist.

"I am sorry I didn't prepare an insane speech as her for you. This party was after all her idea." I would have prepared one if Alex had told me she was throwing a huge party earlier and not given me a two-week notice while everyone knew about it. Apparently, I can't keep a secret from Lauren and will tell her as soon as I get home to her and I am not reliable to keep this a secret.

Excuse me?

Me?

Yes, I would have definitely told her right away. I tell Lauren all the crazy stuff that happens on the paddock so Alex kind of did the right thing.

“You can whisper poetry tonight. When we are in secret.”
She whispers back to me, batting her eyelashes at me.

I see what she is trying to do.

“Oh yeah?” I smile at her.

She hums in agreement as I try to sneak my hand at the waistband of her pants, trying not to get caught. My finger traveled along the waistband, hearing her breath hitch as my finger grazed along her stomach.

“Stop it.” She tells me with gritted teeth, pushing my hand away from her waistband.

“Stop what?”

“You know damn well.”

I smile down at her, my hand traveling lower in the front of her pants. Good thing she wore a long button-up. Covers up my actions.

“I have no idea what you are talking about, *Butterfly*.” My hand travels deeper into her pants and she grips it, stopping me from going further.

“Maybe later, *sweetheart*.” She tells me, a hint of sarcasm in her voice as she calls me that nickname.

I smile at her, pulling her closer by her waist and placing a soft kiss on her forehead, listening as Alex finally finishes her speech.

Lauren walks away from me, feeling the empty void of her like a stab in the heart.

I am turning into one of those book boyfriends of hers that are so obsessed with their girl and I don't mind one bit because she is the best prize I won and I would be damned if another man looked at her the way I look at her.

Or gets to see the smile that I get to see.

Mah, sucks for them.

She is mine,

My past girlfriend, my present fiancée, and my future wife.

She is the woman I need desperately in my life and will die if she leaves.

Period.

I walked over to her as they started singing Happy Birthday. I wrap my arms around her waist and place my head on top of hers. She places her arms over mine, caressing them and running, fidgeting with my rings as they help her calm down her nerves. One of the reasons I didn't ditch them. First of course they look awesome and second, she loves to fidget with them when she is nervous. I love the feeling of her skin against mine and how her touch still makes me want to run miles around a room because of how nervous she still makes me.

“How about we blow this popsicle stand, *hmm?*” I whisper into her ear – as the people start to scatter around the room and enjoy the party. I left a short kiss on her cheek to get her out of her head as the anxiety started to get to her.

“Where to?”

“Somewhere only we know. *Our place.*”

“We are in London. Our place happens to be in Italy.”

Love how she thinks of Italy where we always let out the butterflies together.

We still do that tradition.

I do it twice.

Once with my fiancée.

Once with my sister.

“Not that place. Our place. Our *home*, Butterfly.” She shies away, smiling at the mention of our home. I like that too.

“Still weird calling it our home and it almost has been a year.” We decided to keep Lauren's apartment because during summer break we stay in London. We call both of the places

our home but somehow she still finds it weird we live together. In Italy and here in London too.

“I know. But you better start believing it soon or I might have to fix that doubt of yours.”

“Oh yeah?” she smirks at me, looking up at me sideways.

I hum at her, twirl her around, and crash my lips to her, gripping the name of her nape as I passionately kiss her, trying not to overdo do. Her father is here. And Nate. He scares me more than their dad.

“You guys are gross, get a room,” Alex complains as she walks past us with a plate of shrimp in her hands.

“And you grow up,” I tell her.

“Pff, as If. I like the way I am. And Lauren I need you for a moment.”

“You are not taking her away from me. You kept her away all day from me because you were scared I was going to blow the surprise.”

“You would’ve.”

“She is not wrong. Liam.” Lauren agrees with her, feeling betrayed by my fiancée.

“Sorry.” She gives me a small kiss on the cheek. “I will sort out with Alex whatever it is and then we can leave.”

“You two are disgusting me and ruining my appetite.”

“I didn’t say anything.”

“Didn’t have to. Your tone sounding all sexy already cleared everything out.”

“My sexy tone?” Lauren questions her best friend.

“Yes, can we talk?”

“Okay fine. See ya soon, *lover*.” She blows me a kiss, trying to get Alex on her nerves.

God, I love this woman.

Thank you!

If you enjoyed reading Unrevealed please consider leaving a review and make sure to follow me on social media for more upcoming project updates!

Tiktok: authorhannahallen

Instragram: authorhannahallen

TRIGGER WARNINGS:

Please be aware that **Unrevealed** contains topics that could be difficult for some readers.

Those include but aren't limited to:

Loss of a parent
Talk of a dead parent
Loss to cancer
Mention of cancer
Anxiety attack/ panic attack
Overthinking
Consumption of alcohol
Mature scenes
Strong language

DICK-tionary

Chapter 32

Chapter 38

SPREAD THE PAGES OR AVOID THE PAGES.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to everyone who gave my debut novel and chance and helped my dream of becoming an author come true, thank you to my beta readers who took their time and helped me with editing the book and everything in the book, you guys were a lifesaver and I can't thank you enough!

A huge thank you goes to my friends for being my biggest supporters, never doubting me, and always listening to me when I made the smallest announcements about my book to them, you have no idea how much that meant to me, even if your harsh opinions sometimes hurt when I gave you a scene to read.

Can't say it was worth it.

But mostly the biggest thank you goes *to Becca* who always pushed me into believing in my dreams and has been my biggest supporter through this whole journey and always made sure that I don't overwork myself.

This one is for you and all the others too.

Especially the next one.

So, thank you for being there for me when I wasn't capable of being my best and for always making me laugh when I wasn't feeling like it. You're comments during the editing process were the highlight of this journey and I can't wait to edit the next one because I just know it will be way more hilarious than this one.

Love

Hannah Allen